Republican Feminism(s): Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist Feminist Writing and Testimonies from the North of Ireland, 1975 – 1986.

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Table of Contents

FIGURES **5**

GLOSSARY OF TERMS **8**

ABSTRACT **5**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS **9**

INTRODUCTION: REPUBLICAN FEMINISM **10**

ANTI-IMPERIALIST FEMINISM 13

GENDER, THE NATION, AND NORTHERN IRELAND. 23

REPUBLICANISM (1975 – 1986) 30

METHODOLOGY 38

THESIS CHAPTER OUTLINES 41

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE 47

SECTION 1: REPUBLICAN WOMEN, HISTORY AND TESTIMONY.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL CENSORSHIP: TOWARDS TESTIMONY, ACTIVISM, RESISTANCE.. 48

SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY AND RESISTANCE 51

COMMEMORATION 55

ERASURE 66

CHAPTER 2: IN THEIR OWN WORDS: LIFE-WRITING OF ARMAGH GAOL AS ACTIVE RESISTANCE **70**

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ANNE (2011) 73

FEBRUARY 1980: THE BEGINNING OF THE DIRTY PROTEST 75

HUNGER STRIKE, 1980 79

STRIP-SEARCHING 83

PRISONS MEMORY ARCHIVE 89

CHAPTER 3: SPEAKING FOR THE INCARCERATED ARMAGH WOMEN: THE JOURNALIST JAIL TEXTS OF MARGARETTA D'ARCY AND NELL MCCAFFERTY **92**

MARGARETTA D'ARCY: TELL THEM EVERYTHING 92

NELL MCCAFFERTY 96

THE IRISH TIMES, 1980. 97

ARMAGH WOMEN 102

SECTION 2: REPUBLICAN FEMINIST PERIODICALS, ACTIVISM AND RESISTANCE.

CHAPTER 4: REPUBLICAN FEMINIST MEDIA: ACTIVISM, INTERACTIONS, AND CONFLICT, 1975 – 1980. 108

PAMPHLET CULTURE 115

REPUBLICAN FEMINIST PAMPHLETS: 1975 – 1980 119

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SOCIALIST WOMEN'S GROUP 121

WOMEN'S ACTION: THE SOCIALIST WOMEN'S GROUP 128

CONFLICT 134

SPLIT IN SOCIALIST WOMEN'S GROUP 136

WOMEN'S ACTION: THE BELFAST WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE. 137

WOMEN AGAINST IMPERIALISM. 141

FREE WOMAN 143

CHAPTER 5: REPUBLICAN FEMINIST MEDIA: HIATUS AND *WOMEN'S NEWS,* 1980 – 1986. 156

1980 – 1983: HIATUS 157

1984 – 1986: WOMEN'S NEWS. 159

SECTION 3: REPUBLICAN FEMINISM(S), SELF-DETERMINATION AND LITERARY ARTS.

CHAPTER 6: POETRY, NATIONALISM AND WOMEN: SEAMUS HEANEY'S *NORTH* (1975) AND MEDBH MCGUCKIAN'S *THE FLOWER MASTER* (1982). 165

SEAMUS HEANEY'S NORTH (1975) 166

MEDBH MCGUCKIAN'S THE FLOWER MASTER (1982) 173

CHAPTER 7: DEIRDRE MADDEN'S *HIDDEN SYMPTOMS* (1986), INTERCONNECTION, AND REFLECTIONS. 181

PARADIGMS OF REPUBLICANISM 182

MEMORY 185

REFLECTIONS 190

CHAPTER 8: MARY BECKETT'S *GIVE THEM STONES* (1987), RESISTANCE, FEMINIST SOCIALISM, AND BAKING. 196

RESISTANCE 197

POLITICS 199

BAKING AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE 204

CHAPTER 9: ANTHOLOGISING THE REPUBLICAN FEMINIST SHORT STORY 213

THE SHORT STORY 214

COMMITTED (1999) 216

THE FEMALE LINE (1986) 220

THE BLACKSTAFF BOOK OF SHORT STORIES (1988) 226

CHAPTER 10: DOCUMENTING THE TROUBLES: FILM, FEMINISM, NATIONALISM IN *A KIND OF SISTERHOOD* (2015) AND *MOTHER IRELAND* (1988) 232

MEMORY, HISTORY, STORY-TELLING 234

A KIND OF SISTERHOOD (2015) 236

DERRY FILM AND VIDEO COLLECTIVE, STRIP SEARCHING AND MOTHER IRELAND (1988). 242

CONCLUSION 246

BIBLIOGRAPHY 253

Abstract

This thesis is an examination of feminist republicanism(s) in the north of Ireland between 1975 – 1986. This era is chosen as republican prison protest was rife, and due to this, fractures between the feminist and republican movements were opened. The aims of both republicanism and feminism overlap in their objective of self-determination. Despite these similarities, the two movements did not come to a natural nor total congruence. While it has been argued that there is a disjuncture between feminism and nationalism, this thesis argues for a new consideration of feminist republicanism(s) in the north. A niche collective of republican feminists developed during this time period and sought bodily, political and economic autonomy. In this thesis I map these aims onto historical narratives, jail-writings, journalism, documentary film and literary arts. The body of the thesis is divided into three sections: the representation of republican women within the history of the republican movement, with a particular focus on the prison protests held within Armagh Gaol; an examination of republican feminism within feminist periodicals such as *Women's News, Socialist Women's Group, Belfast Women's Collective,* and *Women Against Imperialism*; and an interrogation of the representation of republican women in literary arts, including the works of Mary Beckett, Medbh McGuckian, Deirdre Madden, Brenda Murphy, and documentary films, *Mother Ireland* and *A Kind of Sisterhood.* The key aims of my research are: to assess the intersections of republicanism and feminism within cultural history and literature; to examine disparate strands of republican feminism(s) during the period; and how forms of literature can serve to reassess the interactions and intersections between the two movements. This thesis meets the original contribution to knowledge through the study of archival material received from Margaret Ward. This includes letters and ephemera which offers insight into the interactions between republicanism and feminism within activist journalism in Section Two of the thesis. To this end, my PhD explores a movement of women's writing concerned with political crisis, gender and the nation during the 'Troubles' conflict. I use the plural republicanism(s) as a way of encapsulating the variant iterations of nationalist feminism, from militant republicanism in Armagh Gaol to a

passive non-violent literary nationalist feminism. To do this, the thesis has drawn on the works of Theresa O'Keefe, Begoña Aretxaga, Fiona McCann and Claire Hackett. This thesis also has an anti-imperialist feminist approach, which draws upon the work of feminist theorists bell hooks, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Nira Yuval-Davis. The PhD uses testimony as a tool of disruption and resistance against the exclusion from masculine-dominant historical narratives. This thesis draws parallels in literature, print and history between nationalism and feminism, and in drawing these comparisons I argue that women voicing their own history acts as a remedy to dominant patriarchal narratives which silence women. This examination of the interaction between nationalism and gender shows how women's writing offers a paradigm shift in nationalist history as seen through a feminist lens.

Keywords: nationalism; republicanism; gender; feminism; revolution; self-determination; autonomy; activism; subversion; conflict; anti-imperialist.

Figures

Figure 1: Donna-Marie McGillion (nee Keyes) who needed treatment for severe burns after the Omagh bomb. 'Troubles' Exhibit, Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland. 55

Figure 2: Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey. 'Troubles' Exhibit, Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland. 56

Figure 3: Falls Road Mural, Belfast, 1980s. Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland.* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997) 60

Figure 4: Strip Search in Armagh Gaol. Evelyn Brady et al. *In the Footsteps of Anne* (Belfast: Shanway Press, 2011), 246. 86

Figure 5: *Barricades Bulletin*. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland. 117

Figure 6: Irish Republican Army Poster, 1980s, "Examples of Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) Posters," CAIN. 131

Figure 7: R.U.C. arrest women outside Armagh Gaol on International Women's Day, 1979. S*aor Bhean.* Vol. 3. No. 1. Special Issue on Rape 1979. Author's Collection. 144

Figure 8: *Beansaor: Free Woman, Journal of Women Against Imperialism,* 1979. British Library, London, England. 151

Figure 9: Beansaor, Issue 4. September 1979. Author's Collection. 154

Figure 10: Woman tarred and feathered, Londonderry/Derry, 1971. Bernard Weinraub, "Ulster Women Tar 2 Girls for Dating British Soldiers," *The New York Times.* November 11, 1971. 170

Figure 11: Protest at Saoradh Building, Derry. *Derry Daily,* April 22, 2019. 248

Glossary of Terms

Ard Fheis: Irish language for 'High Council'. A term used for official conferences of Irish political parties.

B.W.C.: Belfast Women's Collective. Formed in 1978.

Cumann na mBan: Irish language for 'The Women's Council'. Formed in 1916 as an auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers. During the 'Troubles' conflict acted as an auxiliary to the I.R.A.

Dirty protest: This protest began in response to violence on 8th February 1980. The women were unable to access toilet facilities which meant the prisoners had to throw or 'slop out' their chamber pot. This further escalated to the smearing of faeces on the walls of the cell. The protest ended in February 1981.

I.R.A. 'Green Book': Guidance issued by the I.R.A. which covered topics such as how to resist interrogation techniques, military objectives and strategy for guerrilla warfare.

Good Friday Agreement/Belfast Agreement: Peace Agreement signed in April 1998. Believed by many to be the official end of the conflict.

I.R.A.: Irish Republican Army, which split in 1969 (Official split to form Provisional I.R.A.) and 1986 (Provisional I.R.A. split to form Continuity I.R.A.)

N.I.W.R.M.: Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement formed in 1975.

No Wash Protest: See 'dirty protest' in which the women were denied access to toilet facilities.

Official I.R.A.: Split in 1969 to form Official and Provisional I.R.A. Official I.R.A. also referred to as 'Stickies'.

Official Sinn Féin: Political Wing of the Official I.R.A.

Provisional I.R.A.: Splinter I.R.A. formed following the 1969 split. Also referred to as the 'Provos'.

Provisional Sinn Féin: Political wing of the Provisional I.R.A.

R.U.C.: Royal Ulster Constabulary. State police force.

Screws: Prison colloquialism used to describe Prison Warders.

S.W.G.: Socialist Women's Group. Formed in October 1975.

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Introduction: Republican Feminism

This thesis examines the intersections, interactions and interstices in which republican feminisms existed and developed. The primary focus for this project is an examination of testimonies and political writing relating to ideas, theories and discourses about gender and the nation during the period 1975 – 86. During this period republican prison protest was rife and fractures between the feminist and republican movements were opened. Nationalist feminism in the north of Ireland is an area which has yet to be explored to the same degree as the disparate movements of nationalist republicanism or feminism in Ireland. While both these movements aimed to achieve self-determination and autonomy they did not come to a natural congruence. The republican feminist grouping, Women Against Imperialism was created in 1978 in response to this lack of homogeneity between republicanism and feminism. Their objective was to promote and protest in support of republican feminist issues, such as the gendered violence in Armagh Gaol. The group wrote of the resistance they received in response to these objectives that: 'the women's movement and the anti-imperial movement have eyed each other with suspicion'.[1] However, a niche movement of republican feminism was formed despite these frictions. This thesis builds on feminist academic work which has laid the foundations for this project, particularly that of Theresa O'Keefe on the intersection of republicanism and feminism in her monograph *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements,* Begoña Aretxaga's *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* and Claire Hackett's theorisation of an agenda for republican feminism within "Self-Determination: The Republican Feminist Agenda." My thesis advances the works of these academics to assess whether a tradition of republican feminism can be traced within the broader republican movement, feminist anti-imperial pamphlet media, and the wider literary and film outputs of the period 1975 – 1986. It takes an anti-imperial feminist standpoint with regards to the texts examined due both to these academic influences and also my own personal

[1] *Saor Bhean,* Issue 1: August/September 1978. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

experiences as a nationalist woman in the north. In my approach to this project I also draw upon the work of anti-imperial feminist theorists such as bell hooks, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Nira Yuval-Davis.[2] This thesis draws both conflicts and some congruence in literature, print and history between nationalism and feminism.

Within Northern Irish studies a number of analyses have been carried out in the relationship between forms and behaviours of masculinities within the (post)conflict society. In, for example, the work of Caroline Magennis's monograph *Sons of Ulster: Masculinities in the Contemporary Northern Irish Novel* and the collection co-edited by Magennis and Raymond Mullen *Irish Masculinities: Reflections on Literature and Culture.*[3] This recent research adds to the breadth of work carried out on male authors from the region, with numerous academic examinations of Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Eoin McNamee and Glenn Patterson.[4] This is in addition to the plethora of work that has been dedicated to not only Irish nationalism, but specifically Provisional republicanism, which is invariably androcentric. Instead, this PhD project will add to the work of Eve Patten, Heather Ingman, Margaret Ward and Gerardine Meaney in its exploration of womanhood and nationalism in the north of Ireland.[5] This thesis is situated within a feminist tradition of writing women back into history; in this case the history of women's political agency, particularly through testimony, print media and the literary arts. So, why are these nationalist women's experiences muted in the history of the Northern Irish conflict? Margaret MacCurtain questioned which histories are given

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[2] Please note that there is no capitalisation on the feminist bell hooks name in rejection of patriarchal and imperialist language.

[3] Caroline Magennis, *Sons of Ulster: Masculinities in the Contemporary Northern Irish Novel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Caroline Magennis and Raymond Mullen, ed., *Irish Masculinities: Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011).

[4] For example, see: Liam Harte, *Reading the Contemporary Irish Novel, 1987 – 2007* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014); Michael Parker, *Northern Irish Literature, 1956 – 1975. Vol. 1: The Imprint of History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[5] Eve Patten, "Fiction in Conflict: Northern Ireland's Prodigal Novelists," in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction,* ed. Ian A. Bell. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press,1995), 128 – 148.; Heather Ingman, *Twentieth-century Fiction by Irish Women: Nation and Gender* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London and Connecticut: Pluto Press, 1995 [1989]); Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991).

primacy within dominant narratives and asserts that literature has a key place in the resolution of this:

> How far does the historical imagination deal with the subject of women in Irish history? What stores of memories are allowed to seep through into the upper layers of consciousness either at folk level, or into the accepted version of our past? Making visible hidden elements in the total experience of a country's history is largely a question of perception, a kind of intellectual consciousness-making. It is rare for historical research to accomplish the task of getting a society to contemplate its own identity without the help of literature.[6]

Both historical literature and literary fiction can shift what is accepted as a perceivable (and by extension that which is a believable/acceptable) narrative. I argue that women voicing their own history through these media act as a remedy to dominant patriarchal narratives which silence women.

When women are excluded from the narrative of national history by men, how can they seize control and move beyond national symbolism? The literary texts examined here open this out as a space within which women can tell their own stories in an act of resistance to silencing. This necessitates treating the histories of republicanism and feminism in the north of Ireland not as a singular narrative but as multiplicities and variant 'rhizome'. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari theorised that the rhizomic method of approach to thought allows for a non-hierarchical and continuous form; for example, tree structures are used for family history or business organisation charts to mark a beginning and an end: in other words, a hierarchy. The rhizome, however, allows for a continuous non-linear approach to thought by resisting order and structure. Further, the rhizome rejects singularity and instead celebrates continuous multiplicities: 'The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots'.[7] This is applicable to this project as I will approach the testimonies as equal to the masculinised narratives which have received attention throughout study of the conflict. This thesis does not seek homogeneity of republican feminist experiences, instead it hopes for an 'expansion' which welcomes 'off-shoots' in narratives. To this

[6] Margaret MacCurtain, *Ariadne's Thread: Writing Women into Irish History* (Galway: Arlen House, 2008), 116 - 117
[7] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1987), 21.

end, I contend that this thesis is an examination of the multiplicities inherent in republican feminism(s). This thesis is not to preclude from further examinations of other streams of republican feminism(s) but rather to open the dialogue and set a framework for the consideration of this as a theoretical approach to the national past in the north of Ireland.

Anti-imperialist Feminism

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex,* published in 1949, was a prototype for Second Wave feminism to come later during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. De Beauvoir's feminist text examines women's place within patriarchal society, explicitly situating women's roles within social structures. She writes: 'Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within her own nature'.[8] Likewise, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* further called for a re-evaluation of women's role within society, particularly within the role of housewife.[9] However, these texts, and Second Wave feminism more broadly, have been criticised for offering their white middle class-centric feminism which did not include an intersectional approach to class, race and sexuality.

Building on the groundwork laid by de Beauvoir's theorisation of patriarchal social structures, Sylvia Walby's 'Theorising Patriarchy' (1989) broadens the analysis of the facets of patriarchal oppression by outlining that the oppressive patriarchal system is not a singular amorphous base-structure, but rather an interconnection between numerous structures. She defines patriarchy as 'a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women'.[10] Walby employs the use of the phrase 'social structure' to negate the biological essentialism which totalises gendered experiences. She argues that the substructures of the umbrella 'patriarchy' are: 'a patriarchal mode of production in which women's labour is

[8] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage, 1997 [1949]), 15.
[9] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 2010 [1963]).
[10] Sylvia Walby, "Theorizing Patriachy," *Sociology* 23, No. 2 (May 1989): 214.

expropriated by their husbands; patriarchal relations within waged labour; the patriarchal state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal culture'.[11] These systems of oppression also correspond to the ideological state apparatuses theorised by Louis Althusser.[12] This thesis calls for attention to be paid to the multivalent experiences effected by a range of patriarchal oppressions enacted upon northern nationalist women. Prior to the time period studied within this thesis, northern nationalist women experienced these interconnected networks of oppressive structures, for example through the marginalisation caused by the partition of Ireland in 1921.

The work of the feminist activist and academic Margaret Ward has been instrumental for this thesis. Margaret Ward's *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* fused feminism and nationalism in her critical study of the topic. *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* in particular opened my thinking for the reconsideration and realignment of groupings of women within a new republican feminist paradigm from 1975 – 1986 and for those who then produced artistic representations of the period through documentary film and literature. This is evidenced in the following passage from Ward:

> As women living in a country where the past often appears to be as vivid as the present, many of us have been conscious of the fact that buried somewhere in that abundant chronicles of Irish history was evidence to show that women had also been politically active, and that they too warranted serious consideration by historians. We know about our 'great women' – like Constance Markievicz, dressed for rebellion, proudly brandishing her revolver – but have continued to feel that they were only exceptionally striking instances of a type of woman common to that era. The question is why have all the other women disappeared into obscurity?[13]

This obscurity is where the republican women's experiences during the 'Troubles' are located. Ward argued: 'writing women into history does not mean simply tagging them onto what we already know; rather, it forces us to re-examine what is currently accepted so that a whole people will eventually come into focus'.[14] Ward's pamphlet *The Missing Sex,* alongside her book

[11] Ibid, 220.
[12] Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984. [1970]).
[13] Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London and Connecticut: Pluto Press, 1995 [1989]), 1.
[14] Ibid.

Unmanageable Revolutionaries, offers a framework for approaching the historical meta-narratives in which republican feminist women have been erased from the historical and political record. Ward has written that: 'Women's history clearly reveals the importance of the powerless in contributing to the success of those who became powerful, this contribution has at times been deliberately played down, and not just simply undervalued'.[15] Her work urges us to insert women into the historical narrative. This examination of feminism and nationalism during times of conflict will be extended through my thesis which also argues for a continuation of the lineage of feminist nationalism(s) during the 'Troubles' conflict during the period 1975 – 1986.

The gender theorist Nira Yuval-Davis identified gendered silencing as symptomatic of these processes within the work of anti-imperial theorist Frantz Fanon. Specifically, she wrote of his assertion of the necessity to reclaim 'manhood' as a resistance towards colonial oppressors. She argued: 'In many cultural systems potency and masculinity seem to be synonymous. Such a perspective not only has legitimized the extremely 'macho' style of many anti-imperialist and black power movements. It has also legitimized the secondary position of women in these national collectivities'.[16] While First World Second Wave feminism was concerned with the liberation of women, Third World Feminism was concerned with the freeing of oppressed peoples, of which women were a subgroup. While the 1970s saw the rise of Second Wave feminism in the West, there is an untidy alignment between the women in the north of Ireland and the dominant West. Within post-colonial studies generally the West is taken to mean those countries active in imperialist oppression, such as America, Britain and some European countries, such as France.[17] Yuval-Davis wrote:

> Since the rise of second-wave feminism in the West, during the 1970s and 1980s, there has been a recurrence of non-dialogue between women from the 'First' and 'Third' Worlds at international conferences. One side would call for women's liberation as the primary/only goal of the feminist movement. The other side would respond that as long as their people are not free there is no sense for them

[15] Ibid, 2.
[16] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation.* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 60.
[17] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" In *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986 – 1995*. ed. Ranajit Guha (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 264.

> in speaking about women's liberation: how could they struggle to reach equality with their menfolk while their menfolk themselves were oppressed?[18]

The feminism displayed by republican feminists is within the ranks of third world oppressed peoples' feminism; though they operate in a specific way of writing about the narrow scope of being a subgroup within the oppressed larger grouping. It is in this that Irish nationalist women are again between neat categorisations.

The feminist scholar, bell hooks, argued for a disentanglement of gender essentialist links between women and peace-building. Instead, an examination of the strategies of resistance and disruption, sometimes violent, must be analysed. hooks argued:

> Discussions of feminism and militarism that do not clarify for women the roles we have played and play in all their variety and complexity, make it appear that all women are against war, oppose the use of violence, that men are the problem, the enemy. This is a distortion of women's experience, not a clarification of it or a redefinition. Devaluing the roles women have played necessarily leads to a distorted perspective on women's reality.[19]

Socialist feminist Shulamith Firestone has proposed a similar point: 'Only a feminist revolution can eliminate entirely the sex schism causing these cultural distortions… The incorporation of the neglected half of human experience – the female experience – into the body of culture, to create an all-encompassing culture, is only the first step, a pre-condition; but the schism of reality itself must be overthrown before there can be a true cultural revolution'.[20] Elsewhere, Firestone called for the enactment of real-life everyday change to the lived experiences of women before the void of representation in art should be addressed. She called for a 'cybernetic socialism' whereby the tasks of reproduction and labour are divided equally between the sexes through technology (e.g. childbirth should utilise technology as opposed to women going through the pain of childbirth for the sake of maintaining civilisation). This beyond-the-body socialist feminism relinquishes control of the female process to mere machinery for existence. Instead of this, the texts which I examine

[18] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation,* 117.
[19] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 127.
[20] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Cape, 1971), 191.

will honour bodily pain and sacrifice as specially belonging to women, outlining their differences from men in an ode to the resilience enacted by nationalist women.

By drawing upon historical testimonies of the Irish conflict, and examining writing authored by women, a shift within the cultural meaning of northern nationalist womanhood is made. Yuval-Davis argues:

> Cultural discourses often resemble more a battleground of meaning than a shared point of departure. Cultural homogeneity in this view would be a result of hegemonization, and it would always be limited and more noticeable in the centre rather than in the social margins, being affected by the social positioning of its carriers.[21]

Aretxaga similarly argues that women in the north of Ireland stretch the limits of patriarchal femininity to reflect an increased feminist role: 'The interstitial character of women's political practices, the fact that they were situated in the margins of social and political space, placed dominant gender discourse *out of place* by introducing slippages of meaning and creating new social fields'.[22] Women's personal and collective history of the conflict had been actively silenced from public narratives, such as sites of commemoration in public memorials or through museum exhibitions. This allowed for the understandings of women's status and role to be skewed. In this way, women found themselves in a space of liminality, without adequate representation in the battleground for cultural meaning.

The nationalist feminist woman, Aretxaga contends, exists beyond both movements, thoroughly marginalised by her relation to one from the other: 'In Belfast, I could not escape that forgotten history, full of silences, gaps, gestures, and repressed memories, at once personal and collective'.[23] This assertion is borne out of her time spent during the 1980s in the Falls Road area of Belfast, where she lived and interviewed women about their experiences of political resistance to the conflict. For context, Aretxaga, who hails from the Basque country, had a personal

[21] Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 41.
[22] Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland.* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 78. Emphasis in original.
[23] Ibid, 22.

connection to this feeling of being politically excluded and felt an affinity with the nationalist women she encountered during her research in the Falls Road area. It is these fissures of personal and collective experiences that this thesis seeks to investigate. Aretxaga wrote: 'These [nationalist women], their history, and their complex social practices challenge the assumption that women are the passive bystanders of a war between male factions'.[24] She defines the experience of silenced nationalist women as: 'socially unrecognized, rendered invisible as much by the dominant discourse within feminism as by that of nationalism'.[25] The study shows that the examination of these women as architects of their own intricate political interrelationships is a fruitful area of study. Aretxaga argued that the women who protested against political, imperialist and misogynistic oppression were 'pushing against the limits of cultural meaning'.[26] This shift in the meaning of the gendered symbolism in which nationalist women became entrapped and silenced transformed the narrated experiences of the conflict, and by doing so inserts agency. The texts studied in this thesis, from republican feminist fiction to political writings, act as an important insurgence against this silencing; the texts are cultural interventions into the representational oblivion which these republican feminists had previously inhabited.

Feminist documentary filmmaker and academic Claire Hackett's article 'Narratives of Political Activism from Women in West Belfast' explored women's activism in the nationalist area of Ballymurphy in West Belfast through study of the oral histories held in the local Dúchas archive. The archive was created in 1999 by the Falls Community Council to collect interviews of those in the West Belfast area's experiences of the conflict. One of the key findings from research carried out in the oral history archive is, firstly, that the women's community activism was crystalized around imprisonment initially, which then led to activism on women's oppression more broadly.[27] From this, 'isolation and hardship, friendship and comradeship are themes that emerge strongly.

[24] Ibid, 10.
[25] Ibid, 8.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

The public roles that in most cases women felt were thrust upon them. A constant theme is the juggling of roles and conflicting demands. Running through all the histories are stories of personal transformation of women's inner and outer lives'.[28] Hackett writes of 'the power of activism in opening up public space for women' especially as, she argued, 'the outbreak of the conflict blurred the distinction between public and private domains'.[29] It is in this fissure that women were able to constitute their own form of resistance. However, Hackett cautions that 'the family and the community bonds at once [were] a source of strength and at times also restrictive and limiting'.[30] The women interviewed for Hackett's study occupy a space within the nationalist community, yet they are also liminal through their involvements with republican feminist groups. Anti-imperial feminist resistance aligned these women to a peripheral micro-community in their areas. Further, these groups are alienated beyond the larger society in which Irish nationalism itself is marginalised. Hackett argued: 'One of the strongest impressions from the narratives is the way women negotiated, subverted and challenged the restrictions while at the same time defending and building their communities'.[31] This generation of a new grouping based on an opposition to patriarchy and imperialism allowed for a paradigm shift in the meanings of nationalist womanhood by changing the roles which women publicly and visibly inhabited.

Hackett argues that there is a central tenet between nationalism and feminism in the pursuit of 'self-determination'. While nationalism's link to the term is clear through its objective of a united Ireland, Hackett argues that:

> The concept [self-determinism] is perhaps better known for its nationalist than its feminist connotations. Yet it must be clear that it has meaning for feminist discourse – self-determination as the right and ability to make real choices about our lives: our fertility, our sexuality, childcare, the means to

[28] Ibid.
[29] Claire Hackett, "Narratives of Political Activism from Women in West Belfast," In *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags*, ed. Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 147.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

> be independent and all the areas in which we are currently denied autonomy and dignity in our various identities as women.[32]

This is echoed in anti-imperial feminist theorist, Kumari Jayawardena's book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* in which she details national political struggles in countries from 'the East', such as India, Sri Lanka and Turkey, against a variety of forms of imperialism. She wrote: 'The movement towards women's emancipation […] was acted out against a background of nationalist struggles aimed at achieving political independence, asserting a national identity and modernising society'.[33] It is in this way, that Hackett's assertion of republican feminists can be aligned with Third World feminism's aims of rejecting both imperialism and patriarchy. Feminism and nationalism can be understood as both aiming to attain autonomy, bodily and political respectively. The narratives of motherhood and passivity which constitute the symbolism of nationhood have constructed a detrimental image of what it means to be a nationalist woman. Republican feminism acts as a remedy to this stereotyping by imbedding the nature of women's agency against various oppressive forces, particularly patriarchy and imperialism. Self-determination and autonomy are central to the two movements, although, within the republican movement the notions of national 'freedom' are masculinised, and in this way, the idea of 'self-determination' is gendered.

The sociologist Theresa O'Keefe built on the groundwork laid by Aretxaga and Hackett by exploring the mechanisms by which nationalist women created new networks and cultural meanings for themselves. By turns O'Keefe's scholarship explores the relationship between feminism and republicanism, and the intersections between both. Her work, alongside Aretxaga's, cemented the interest for pursuing this thesis topic. O'Keefe contended that the failure to write the history of women is to the detriment of history more broadly: 'Women as combatants are located in a non-passive position, behaviours associated with men, dictated by hegemonic

[32] Claire Hackett, "Self-Determination: The Republican Feminist Agenda," *Feminist Review*, No. 50 (Summer, 1995): 111.
[33] Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London and New York: Verso, 2016 [1986]), 3.

masculinity in particular… [The] tendency to associate women with nurturing and peace has an impact on how women are depicted in conflict – that they are the victims of violence, and more specifically, the victims of nationalism, which often commands violence'.[34] O'Keefe's work identified and then disentangled these gendered stereotypes which left women 'unseen or perversely distorted' in the meta-narratives of the conflict.[35] Instead, O'Keefe theorised for a republican feminist consciousness which developed when women joined the ranks of the previously all-male I.R.A. in September 1970.

In turn, Niall Gilmartin's study of the 'invisibility' of republican women within the movement, with its retrospective view from post-conflict and post-Good Friday Agreement Provisional Irish Republican Army and Provisional Sinn Féin members, also informed this project greatly. Taking his cue from the work of O'Keefe, Gilmartin situated republican women as agents of their own history by '[moving] beyond exploring the ways in which male-led movements' position women, and instead focus on the ways in which nationalist women *themselves* organise their political struggles'.[36] While Gilmartin's scholarship traced how republican women were left behind following the transition away from conflict towards peace building after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, his work is pertinent to this study as it located women's involvements throughout the 'Troubles' as being lost in a gendered 'fog of peace' as during this time 'all attention and energies were focused on peace negotiations'.[37] The implication is that women were utilised in the conflict as a war time measure. Beginning the interviews with the republican women in 2012, Gilmartin noted that there was a 'palpable flurry of activism among interviewees who were channelling energies into various mechanisms for recognising women's contribution to the

[34] Theresa O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 5
[35] Ibid, 89.
[36] Ibid, 273 – 274.
[37] Niall Gilmartin, "Lost in transition? Republican women and the peace process," *Irish Times*. Accessed on: 07/08/2019. https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/lost-in-transition-republican-women-and-the-peace-process-1.3902086 ; Niall Gilmartin, *Female Combatants After Armed Struggle: Lost in Transition?* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2018).

republican movement. Much of these commemorative actions were born out of a collective frustration with their perpetual invisibility in republican memorialisation'.[38] A specific point of contention for these interviewees focuses on the lack of commemoration around the period of 1976 – 1981, a period of prison protests.

Much of Gilmartin's work explored the creation of Sinn Féin's Women's Department which he argued was launched in 1979 in response to a changing tide in women's issues. This research shows that the department later had a subsequent silent demise. It is also noteworthy that despite Sinn Féin Women's Department being an institution of republican feminism, as Gilmartin suggests, the political party dissolved the department in favour of an Equality Department, which no longer considered oppression through the lens of gender. Further, Gilmartin's inquiries to Sinn Féin have failed to establish precisely when the department ceased to exist. He wrote that when the Women's Department was created it 'was a prominent and potent feminist platform, advocating around issues which at the time were deemed highly controversial such as divorce, access to contraception, domestic violence and Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (L.G.B.T.) equality, among others'.[39] One of Gilmartin's interviewees, quoted under the pseudonym Janette, made the explicit link between feminist groups and nationalism: 'The Sinn Féin Ard Fheis and Ard Comhairle recognised the need for a women's voice and that this was the time to set up a Women's Department so women could develop and come to the fore. Now, the reason this is happening is because some women were linking up with Women Against Imperialism'.[40] The significance of republican feminist activist groups and print media is therefore evident within the broader republican movement. In Chapters Four and Five, I will explore the output of the republican feminist groups who influenced this rise in feminism within republican women.[41]

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Niall Gilmartin, "Feminism, nationalism and the re-ordering of post-war political strategies: the case of the Sinn Féin Women's Department," *Irish Political Studies* 32, no.2, (2017): 275.
[41] Aaron Edwards writes of the socialist unionist political party, the Progressive Unionist Party, and its links with the Ulster Volunteer force during the era studied here that 'historically speaking, loyalist paramilitaries have refused to

Gender, the nation, and Northern Ireland.

The image of women most often evoked in Irish nationalism is that of the fictional woman: Mother Ireland, Deirdre of the Sorrows, Cathleen ni Houlihan, Mater Dolorosa.[42] Margaret Ward and Marie-Thérèse McGivern have foregrounded the importance of the dialogic responses between the gendered societal roles and the individuals in their article 'Images of Women in Northern Ireland'.[43] They argued: 'It is our contention that women come off worse in this role-learning process, due both to the more constricting nature of the female image and the inferiority of this role compared to the male one in terms of access, development and growth'.[44] This approach draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* in which he theorised that works of literature are continually in development and dialogism with one another: 'All literature is caught up in the process of "becoming".'[45] Of the often defined male/female and public/private sphere dichotomy, Ward and McGivern argued that this distinction is not correct as men dominate both spheres because 'they are not autonomous entities: the private services the public, while the public determines the private'.[46] Further, in transgressing these patriarchal boundaries, Ward and McGivern wrote: 'When a woman steps outside the confines of family life by expressing controversial political opinions she is immediately desexed: but not only is she no longer a woman, her transcendence has transformed her into a malevolent presence'.[47] In this way, they contend that 'woman' has become a category dependent on adherence to patriarchal structures. In reassessing the interaction between nationalism and women's roles within it, both practically, politically and symbolically, feminist scholars have sought to redress this. The subversion of these

permit political activism to overshadow military prowess.' So, while there was a link between feminism and militant republicanism under the banner of civil rights, there was not the same extension of this within unionism. It was also much rarer for women to be involved in military operations within loyalist paramilitaries. Aaron Edwards, "The Progressive Unionist Party of Northern Ireland: A Left-Wing Voice in an Ethnically Divided Society," *The British Jounral of Politics and International Relations* (2010), 6.

[42] Bill Rolston. *Drawing Support: Volume One, Murals of Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1992).

[43] Margaret Ward and Marie-Therese McGivern, 'Images of Women in Northern Ireland,' *The Crane Bag* 4 Images of the Irish Woman, No. 1, (1980): 66-72

[44] Ibid, 66.

[45] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 5.

[46] Margaret Ward and Marie-Therese McGivern, 'Images of Women in Northern Ireland'.

[47] Ibid, 69.

gender stereotypes is a key theme within the texts in this thesis, primarily through political agency and engagement through protest and violence. For example, the women prisoners in Armagh Gaol used their bodies as sites of resistance and protest against their imprisonment by a colonial state.

Ward and McGivern's article highlighted a dissonance between public visibility and power. They argued that: 'It is also noteworthy that throughout Irish Republicanism women have always been the most visible presence at demonstrations and rallies. The direction of the movement has never been in their control, (Sinn Féin soon became the guiding force of the R.A.C. [Relative's Action Committee]) yet they [R.A.C.] continue to provide the backbone of the civil resistance'.[48] While Aretxaga argued that the Falls Road Curfew 'Milk Run' women who crossed the exclusion zone line in 1970 shocked many as 'troops at barbed wire barricades were taken by surprise' through the visibility of protest[49], Ward and McGivern contended that this does not equate to acquiring power within structures of Irish nationalism: 'While women are appreciated for their steadfastness, they are not rewarded by being given a commensurate political voice within the movement'.[50] For example, Máire Drumm was a significant public figure in the republican movement; she was the vice-president of Sinn Féin and a prominent member of the Cumann na mBan, a republican women's paramilitary organisation which acted as an auxiliary to the then all-male I.R.A. Due to her speeches in support of republicanism, she was jailed twice in Armagh Gaol for spoken sedition. In 1976 while she recovered in hospital from surgery, Drumm was murdered by the unionist paramilitary grouping, the Red Hand Commando.[51] Her death is significant as it encapsulates the violent containment of republican women in the extreme, through the permanent silencing of death. This silencing of women was a concern for Drumm's daughter, Máire Óg Drumm who at a Provisional Sinn Féin rally in Belfast in 1979 said: 'I will conclude by assuring

[48] Ibid, 71.
[49] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence,* 58.
[50] Ward and McGivern, 'Images of Women in Northern Ireland', 71.
[51] *An Phoblacht/Republican News,* August 18, 1979.; "Belfast honours Máire Drumm," *An Phoblacht.* Last modified: November 8, 2001. Accessed on: April 5, 2020. https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/8068

the leadership of the Republican Movement that in the days to come when the war to eject the British reaches a successful conclusion, women will not be found wanting. Indeed, if you show any signs of weakening we will take over'.[52] In this way, women's rebellion against both imperialism and patriarchy is shown.

Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism* theorised that one of the mechanisms employed during the colonisation of a nation is the derogatory application of the feminisation of colonised peoples, particularly the men, in that the colonised are presented as inhabiting a 'weaker' position with regards to the coloniser, and to resist this dynamic the colonised must strive to become the strong masculine figure. Writing of Rudyard Kipling's derogatory descriptions of India, Nandy argued: 'This was the ultimate meaning of the spirit of colonialism and its civilizing mission mounted on behalf of modernity and progress… Kipling's idea of the effeminate, passive-aggressive, and 'half-savage-half-child' Indian was more than an Anglo-Indian stereotype: it was an aspect of Kipling's authenticity and Europe's other face.'[53] These descriptions of the colonised Other are an amplification of inequality, both between the genders and the coloniser/colonised. This creates a complex and symbolic gendered power dynamic in which the colonised woman is further subjugated in relation to the colonised man.

Gerardine Meaney's pamphlet *Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics* (1991) considered the modes and progression of the feminist movement in Ireland during the 1980s.[54] Within this anti-imperial feminist school of thought, Meaney extended Nandy's argument by contending: 'Women in these conditions become guarantors of their men's status, bearers of national honour and the scapegoats of national identity. They are not merely transformed into symbols of the nation, they become the territory over which power is exercised'.[55] This is evident

[52] *An Phoblacht*, August 18, 1979 quoted in Ward and McGivern, 'Images of Women in Northern Ireland', 71.
[53] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.
[54] Gerardine Meaney, *Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991).
[55] Ibid, 7.

in a number of ways in which republican men impose a surveillance over women's agency and subsequently silence them: through the policing of women's bodies through, for example, the act of 'tarring and feathering' was practiced for perceived transgressions. This type of attack involved tying the accused to a lamppost in full view of the community, and pouring a black liquid to represent tar over their head. They would then have been covered in feathers. This act of violence was used as a public display of humiliation and to intimidate the community into submission. Further, this act was a ritualistic public shaming which often involved the complicity of other women to enact the gendered violence.

Meaney argued for a multivalent approach to feminism in the north, which respects difference: 'A feminism based on exclusion will continue to be itself excluded… Feminism must interrogate nationalism, must maintain its own interests and women's interests against any monolithic national identity which perpetuates patriarchy. In engaging with nationalist women, it must point out how little nationalism and republicanism have promoted or protected women's interests, how much they have done to denigrate and oppress women'.[56] Meaney chastised the feminists in the Republic of Ireland who separated their feminism from the anti-imperial concerns of nationalist women in the north due to political violence of which, Meaney argued: 'violence is the only form of political expression left' to the nationalist community.[57] Explicitly she wrote:

> Perhaps they [the northern nationalist feminists] could teach us to address those women for whom the myth of Mother Ireland is still a powerful enchantment. Perhaps they know better than academics, writers and pamphleteers how to expose and destroy the enchantment.[58]

The enchantment Meaney wrote of was the false belief that patriarchy can accommodate and support anti-feminist women. She argued that the rift between feminists and anti-feminist women who are steeped in Catholic ideological myths of sacred womanhood, could be best tackled with the knowledge of nationalist feminists in the north who were disentangling from these national

[56] Ibid, 12.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

myths. It is with this ethos in mind that this thesis will use the testimony and experiences of nationalist women as the guiding framework for a broader assessment of their representation.

For Meaney, the centrality of authorship and voice was key to her approach to Irish history: 'It may be a shocking thought for some that the Irish woman reading Irish writing finds in it only a profound silence, her own silence'.[59] This silencing denies Irish women a space within the telling of the national past. The Indian post-colonialist theory group, the Subaltern Studies Collective, theorised this relationship between dominant narratives and silencing. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her landmark essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', wrote of the colonised woman being 'doubly silenced'; once by the effects of imperialism, and secondly by patriarchy.[60] Another Subaltern Studies Collective academic, Partha Chatterjee, wrote of women's place within the nationalist framework in colonised countries: 'The nationalist discourse we have heard so far is a discourse about women; women do not speak here'.[61] Chatterjee theorised the significance of women's configurations within the nationalist dichotomy of material/spiritual, world/home, outer/inner.[62] This selectivism allows for the policing of that which is 'inner', the domestic sphere and the women who are encouraged to inhabit it, and a protection against the 'outer', the Other. Chatterjee argues:

> For the colonised people, the world was a distressing constraint, forced upon it by the fact of its material weakness. It was a place of oppression and daily humiliation, a place where the norms of the coloniser had perforce to be accepted. It was also the place… where the battle would be waged for national independence…But in the entire phase of the national struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve, and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence. No encroachments by the coloniser must be allowed in that inner sanctum. In the world, imitation of and adaptation to Western norms was a necessity; at home, they were tantamount to annihilation of one's very identity.[63]

This protection of the 'inner sanctum' had violent consequences for nationalist women. The women became embodiments of the perseverance of national culture, and any sexual and political transgression of this was an affront to the national struggle. It is in this manner that the home and

[59] Ibid, 17.
[60] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 66-111.
[61] Partha Chatterjee, "The Nation and Its Women" in *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986 – 1995*. ed. Ranajit Guha (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 260.
[62] Ibid, 245 – 246.
[63] Ibid, 246.

womanhood were guarded against outsider interference. The inner sanctum of womanhood and the domestic are the symbols of the nation and therefore must be upheld in misogynistic nationalist ideology. The women within this thesis break this mould to unsettle and disrupt the inner/outer, private/public dichotomies which render them powerless. A recent example of this disruption is seen in the Channel 4 comedy *Derry Girls* when a school bus is boarded by armed soldiers in Derry. Two schoolgirls, Erin and Michelle, comment:

> Michelle: 'Do you think if I told him I had an incendiary device down my knickers he'd have a look?'
>
> Erin: 'Michelle! He's a soldier!'
>
> Michelle: 'Awk, some of them are rides!'[64]

This comedy series articulates a disruption of and resistance to the perseverance of the 'inner sanctum', womanhood. The writer of the series, Lisa McGee, re-writes the 'Troubles' narrative in this feminist filmic intervention. The airing of the series by Channel 4 serves to further the feminist narratives of the 'Troubles' conflict. This follows in the lineage of Anne Crilly's feminist documentary *Mother Ireland* in the 1980s, also funded by Channel 4, which too unsettled the relationships between gender and the Irish nation.

This idea of the symbolisms attached to womanhood and the nation is extended by Nira Yuval-Davis through her recognition that a cultural silencing can be reproduced by women themselves. Yuval-Davis argues that women are the 'symbolic border guards' for nations, particularly through the maintenance of the home in line with the symbolism of nationalism, the raising of children and the story-telling of the past to the next generation.[65] As Yuval-Davis has highlighted, the key link between the production of a nationalist culture and the production of nationalist symbolism is always a gendered act. Similarly, Meaney argues: 'Feminism cannot, in attempting to see women outside their traditional role as symbols of the nation, be content to

[64] Hat Trick Productions, *Derry Girls*. Written by Lisa McGee. Series 1, Episode 1. (2018). 9:50 – 10:00.
[65] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 61.

merely impose a revised role on them, a role as victims of the nation or of history'.[66] Both Yuval-Davis and Meaney argue for a reassessment of the interactions between gender and nation to offer a new paradigm of national meanings of womanhood: one in which multivariant identities can be explored and which acknowledge the untidy pasts which do not adhere neatly to feminist or nationalist categorisations. In exploring frictions and interactions between nation and gender, I am guided by the experiences which are extrapolated from women's writing, testimonial and fictional. The scaffolding of this framework is the women's words and experiences, which gives rise to a fresh insight into the history of the 'Troubles'.

[66] Meaney, *Sex and Nation,* 14.

Republicanism (1975 – 1986)

By way of foregrounding the period to be examined in this thesis, it is important to highlight the history of partition in Ireland which occurred in 1921. This division of the country was agreed by the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom; the result of which saw the annexation of the island's six north-eastern counties to form the unionist statelet of Northern Ireland. The euphemistically named 'Troubles' conflict was borne out of this partition of Ireland, British occupation, and a lack of civil rights for the Catholic nationalist community. The Catholic population in the north were denied access to employment, voting rights, and housing by the Protestant unionist governing bodies; from local councils up to the Parliament of Northern Ireland. The practice of gerrymandering in specific areas drew electoral boundaries which skewed the representation in political representatives. For example, the city of Derry, despite having a majority Catholic nationalist populous was controlled by mostly Protestant unionist representatives.[67] It was in this inequality that the resistance and disruption of republicanism, and then republican feminism, was fostered.

The republican movement at the beginning of the conflict in 1968 was organised primarily through republican clubs after the unsuccessful border campaign of 1956 – 1962, which saw a series of incursions around the border regions with the ultimate aim of reunifying Ireland.[68] There was a republican movement split in 1969 with a sect breaking away from the Official I.R.A. to form the Provisional I.R.A. This split was due to ideological differences with regards to usage of violence to remove the British occupation in the north of Ireland.[69] The Provisional republican movement was then involved in, what they term, the 'armed struggle' to remove British forces

[67] See: The Campaign for Social Justice, "Northern Ireland: The Plain Truth," *CAIN*. 1964. Accessed on: April 5, 2020. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/crights/pdfs/csj179.pdf
[68] Brian Hanley, *The Lost Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2010); Tim Pat Coogan, *The I.R.A.* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 329.
[69] James Dingley, *The I.R.A.* (Oxford: Praeger, 2012), 96.

from Ireland.[70] For the purposes of this thesis, the Republican Movement will refer to the Provisional I.R.A. and Provisional Sinn Féin activists, as they came to dominate the direction of republicanism more than the Official I.R.A. The increased nationalist support for Provisional republicanism came after a number of incidents: the introduction of internment without trial between August 1971 and December 1975 which saw 1,981 people arrested with 1,874 of them Catholic nationalists; Bloody Sunday in Derry in January 1972 in which the British Army's Parachute Regiment shot 28 unarmed civilians, killing 14; and the mistreatment of political prisoners, particularly in the wake of prison protests in response to the much publicised removal of Special Category Status in 1976. The influx in the recruitment for the Provisional I.R.A. came after Bloody Sunday in January 1972.[71]

The writer and former Official I.R.A. Chief of Staff Seán Cronin wrote of the designation for the term republican, which he terms as 'the revolutionary expression of Irish nationalism,'[72] as: 'In Ireland a republican has come to mean one who maintains that England will not abdicate her role in Irish affairs unless forced to do so by superior power. From this it is argued that only violence will change the minds of England's rulers on the Irish question'.[73] Here, the issue of violence becomes a central point in the intersection between feminism and republicanism in the texts that will be examined. The nexus of republican nationalism orbits around ideas of power, political disruption and revolution through violence, at least in the Provisional I.R.A. This thesis will explain that these power disruptions can be used in subtle ways to redress the skewed gender balances within nationalism. Further, Cronin contended that: 'In Ireland, a republican is understood to be an intransigent nationalist'.[74] In other words, militancy in their objectives is a defining characteristic of this strand of nationalism which he detailed as falling under the categorisation of 'radical

[70] "Abstracts on Organisations: Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.)." *CAIN*. Accessed January 20, 2020. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/iorgan.htm
[71]Martin Melaugh, "Internment - Summary of Main Events." *CAIN*. Accessed on: 29/06/2019 https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/intern/sum.htm
[72] Seán Cronin, *Irish Nationalism: A History of Its Roots and Ideology* (Dublin: The Academy Press,1980), 39.
[73] Ibid, 1.
[74] Ibid, 24.

republicanism ([in which] there can be no change without social revolution and stresses the values of the secular state'.[75] With this steadfastness in mind, this thesis considers new understandings of this determination through a new gendered lens. The women's writing examined within this thesis argues for a social revolution which reconfigures their roles and status as women within society. On this basis, the literature discussed in Section Three will be examined through the consideration of the intersections between violence and nationalism.

Opposing Cronin, Iseult Honohan argues that from the 20th century the term 'republican' became associated with paramilitary physical force: '"Nationalist" was a more inclusive category that encompassed a range of other approaches to, and flexibility in means of achieving, self-determination, from Home Rule through qualified political independence to (after 1922) accepting partition as an immediate measure. Thus, to be a republican was to be a specific kind of political nationalist, more radical and less open to compromise'.[76] While this definition elides 18th and 19th century republican insurgency, the key theme is that of radical revolution. It is this unrelenting pursuit of a nationalist revolution which defines the political movement.

This thesis concludes with the revolutionary republican/feminist in 1986 for a number of reasons: a shift in public perspective after the I.R.A. declared a broader range of 'legitimate' targets to include civilians working on State, police and military contracts such as British Telecom.[77] The shift towards peace talks began in secret in Derry during the mid 1980s, which as Marissa

[75] Ibid, 3. Cronin details that there are five particular strands of Irish nationalism: 'Strands of Irish nationalism: 'traditionalist (Catholic, Gaelic); constitutional nationalism (opposes violence, influenced by Catholic Church); physical force republicanism (Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen for its justification, but it is often socially conservative); radical republicanism (there can be no change without social revolution and stresses the values of the secular state); cultural nationalism (emphasis on the nation and its language rather than the state)'. This thesis is interested solely in the radical and revolutionary nature of nationalist feminism.

[76] Iseult Honohan, "Introduction: putting Irish republicanism in a wider context" in *Republicanism in Ireland: Confronting Theories and Traditions*. ed. Iseult Honohan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 12.

[77] Coogan, *The I.R.A.,* 526.; See also: The definition of 'legitimate target(s)' is detailed by CAIN as: 'When justifying an attack on an individual or a particular property paramilitary groups often claim that it was carried out on a 'legitimate target'. For Republicans the term was taken to cover those assisting the British presence in Ireland.' 'A Glossary of Terms Related to the Conflict', *CAIN*. Accessed on: 27/02/2020. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/glossary.htm; See also: *Republican News/An Phoblacht,* Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

McGlinchey (2018) argued changed the nature of what was deemed revolutionary within the republican movement.[78] 1986 also saw the split in the republican movement which created the Continuity I.R.A. and its political wing Republican Sinn Féin. Tim Pat Coogan saw the period following this change as the 'nadir' of republicanism and for this reason beyond 1986 should be treated as the beginning of a new distinct period within the conflict.[79]

Despite the complexities, tensions and turbulences within Irish nationalism during this period, there has been little written on the involvement or experiences of nationalist women. Within his study *The I.R.A.,* Tim Pat Coogan acknowledged the women's involvement in the dirty protest in Armagh Gaol, though, he does not explore the ramifications and understood meanings of this significant event.[80] Similarly, Richard English's *Armed Struggle: A History of the I.R.A.* best exemplifies the dearth of investigation into women in the conflict. He mentioned in writing Mairead Farrell only three times; once with regards to her killing in Gibraltar by the British SAS, then briefly, for her involvement in the 1980 Hunger Strike, which is glossed over, and finally for the loss to the movement following her death. The hunger strike carried out by the Armagh women, in which Farrell participated, is mentioned only in passing by English before returning to examine the 'crisis' in Long Kesh, particularly in relation to Sean McKenna's severe illness during the protest.[81] Farrell was, in English's own terms, 'a significant Volunteer' though she received scant examination for her role in the conflict within his study.[82] He briefly extended the work of Begoña Aretxaga when he wrote: 'Farrell – an intelligent and charismatic figure – became something of a feminist icon, held to exemplify a questioning of masculine power, heroism and

[78] Marisa McGlinchey, *Unfinished Business: The Politics of 'Dissident' Republicanism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).
[79] Coogan, *The I.R.A.,* 580.
[80] Ibid, 490 – 491; 578.
[81] Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the I.R.A.* (London: Pan Books, 2004), 194.
[82] Ibid, 257.

orthodoxy'.[83] Aretxaga argued of Farrell that her outright rejection of the images of women in national symbolism made her an emblem for republican feminism. Further she wrote:

> No other woman has become so popular in the pantheon of martyrs of northern nationalist culture. Martyrdom in the North has not only ceased to be a male monopoly – although that can hardly be considered an achievement – but with Mairead Farrell martyrdom has also changed its meaning: she fits the model of neither redemptive sacrifice nor Gaelic hero; indeed, she is remembered and mourned more as lost leader than as martyr. If the imaginings of the Irish nation displaced women to the margins of a subaltern position, women in turn began from the margins to disrupt the national narrative.[84]

This argument for Farrell as a figure for feminist disruption of an androcentric narrative is notable in its omission from English's tome on the republican organisation. It is necessary to query this lack of focus on Farrell within English's work, particularly given the forensic detail in which he examines other I.R.A. volunteers. Instead, his description of Farrell seeks to set her as a bit-part in a masculine narrative. Fiona McCann wrote: 'It is time that the voices of former Irish women political prisoners be heard as loudly as those of their male counterparts, as they provide nuanced and multi-faceted reflections on commitment to the republican movement and also to a wider feminist agenda'.[85] It is in this spirit of amplification of voices of republican feminism that this PhD proceeds.

While Aretxaga argued for Mairead Farrell as a bastion of a new era of feminist nationalism, Monsignor Raymond Murray in an interview shown within Michele Devlin's *A Kind of Sisterhood* (2015), detailed that there are, in his estimation, two distinct groupings of female prisoners within Armagh which are roughly adhered to by generation/time periods:

> So, you could nearly divide the prisoners in two periods when those first prisoners when all that [Special Category Political Status] ended, and then you had a next group of prisoners coming in later on in the later seventies. And, of course Eileen [Hickey] was gone by that stage, and then it was Mairead Farrell who was the one in charge.[86]

[83] Ibid.
[84] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence,* 169.
[85] Fiona McCann, "Commitment and Poetic Justice: Irish Republican Women's Prison Writing," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 1, Vol. 38 (2015): 65.
[86] *A Kind of Sisterhood.* Film. Directed by Michele Devlin and Claire Hackett. Belfast: Indie Movie Company, 2015.

Eileen Hickey was the Officer Commanding of Armagh Gaol prior to Mairead Farrell. Farrell was imprisoned from 1976, which as Monsignor Murray commented, marked a change within the prison due to the removal of political status, which ushered in the era of prison protests in response to this denial. This along with Aretxaga's assertion that Farrell's leadership within the prison had a feminist dimension adds to the reasoning of examining this time period. The shift towards feminism coincided with the prison protests. This change was informed by a number of issues, not least that of the gendered violence experienced by the women in Armagh Gaol and the subsequent media reportage led by Nell McCafferty in the *Irish Times* which exposed tensions. These radical shifts understood together can offer a new framework for approaching the history of the conflict.

Of this republican feminist awakening, Aretxaga's interview with a woman who was a prisoner in Armagh Gaol and referred to only as Theresa illuminated the gendered power dynamics of the time. She stated: 'It was then that we realized we were women…We had a meeting within Armagh and made a list of demands – the most basic of which was having a say in where the struggle was going. We got that'.[87] This followed the I.R.A. truce in 1975, which, Aretxaga's interviews show, the women were not privy to discussions which led to the decision. Aretxaga notes that this feeling of voicelessness evoked feminist consciousness in the prisoners: 'If jail for the interned men was a school of militant nationalism, then for women internees it entailed a reflection on the politics of gender. They were militants and as such had – like men – risked their lives, been arrested, and were organised in the same military structure; but, where it came to decision making, their organisation slipped into a hierarchal system of gender difference within which they were not peers, but simply, women'.[88] The women were relegated to a lower strata within nationalism and were excluded from decision making within their own organisation. Aretxaga wrote of this relegation of women and their lived experiences to the lower spheres within

[87] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence,* 76.
[88] Ibid.

the republican hierarchy: 'The imputations of a feminine identity is performed by the exclusion of women from the realm of the political decision that constitutes the community of militants. It is exclusion, absence, void, rather than presence, that constitutes the space of identity'.[89] This very lack becomes the 'space of identity' in which the women seek to mend and bring themselves into being within the political sphere.

Further, the female body is an entity that has not been thoroughly recognised nor considered in relation to the political sphere. Allen Feldman's *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* theorised the incarceration of republican prisoners alongside testimonies of a number of prisoners. The book, as the title suggests, proposes to offer a 'narrative of the body', although the female body and its use in political violence is nearly completely omitted from the study. The term 'women' remains absent from the lofty index, while the term 'gender' received few page references, all of which pointed to the dominant male gender, as opposed to female. In only one instance is a reference made to the women in Armagh Gaol who took part in the dirty protest in February 1980.[90] Feldman's otherwise excellent analyses of the republican protests in the H-Blocks in H.M.P. Maze/Long Kesh prison can, and should, be extended to consider the women held in similar conditions in Armagh Gaol. One such case argues:

> The H-Blocks teach us that within the ecologies of violence, knowledge, representation, and cultural genesis begin and end with the body. The bodies of the imprisoned become the 'degree zero' for all cultural constitution and demarcated the outer margins of the inner world of the prison. *The margins between prison and body were submerged and erased; the cell became the extended body of the prisoners, and their bodies became their temporary prison.*[91]

The permeable boundaries between the self and the prison allows for a transference of cultural meanings stemming from the body outwards. In this regard, the lack of theorisation of the female body and experience leaves the women beyond silenced, in a state of total non-existence. The internal 'mirror' searches used on the male prisoners held in Long Kesh/H.M.P. Maze invaded the

[89] Ibid.
[90] Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 174.
[91] Ibid, 166. Emphasis added.

men's bodily borders.[92] Likewise, the internal examinations were also reported by the female prisoners, too. The insidious act made the in-mates' innards a territory for policing. The sexual harassment of these searches, as Feldman suggests, blurred the boundaries between the prison and the body. The internal view of the body is an attack on the modesty of the Catholic women, particularly due to the veneration of the Virgin Mary as a symbol of purity and chastity. Theresa O'Keefe argued: 'In the north, as with any militarised zones, women's bodies became the flashpoint over which the battle for control was fought'.[93] In the context of the prison, the women's bodies are policed resulting in the humiliation of the women. The control of the women's bodies is a misogynistic tool to oppress the republican prisoners.

Further, the merging of cell and body allowed the prisoners to territorialise their cells using their excreta. This notion of the body fusing with the prison environment is one that should be extended to analyse the women's experience. Of this, Feldman argued that there is a dialogic power relationship between the body and the prison environment: 'The body as the terminal locus of power also defines the place for the redirection and reversal of power. In revolt, the prisoner also bifurcates and objectifies the body as an instrument of violence'.[94] It is in this bifurcation that the women are unique in using their body as a tool against the State. The women's use of menstrual blood, the pregnant body creating life within incarceration and the hungered female body each exemplify how the women used their corporeality as a 'locus of power'. Through this use of the body, the women subverted the penal power dynamic via their bodily protests.

When considering the narratives of the conflicts, careful consideration should be paid to those which unsettle and disturb dominant narratives. McCann argued for this case in her monograph *A Poetics of Dissensus: Confronting Violence in Contemporary Prose Writing from the North of*

[92] 'Mirror' searches were used in Long Kesh/H.M.P. to ascertain whether a prisoner was storing contraband, such as communications and cigarettes, in his bodily orifices. This search had a particular focus on checking the anus. The prisoner would be asked to squat above a mirror for this check.
[93] Theresa O'Keefe, "Policing Unruly Women: The State and Sexual Violence During the Northern Irish Troubles," *Women's Studies International Forum,* No. 62 (2017): 71.
[94] Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 178.

Ireland; She contends that there is an imperative to discuss unpalatable histories to make progress following the Good Friday Agreement:

> The safeguarding of dissensus relies on the open circulation of even those voices which are regularly silenced and which might be unpalatable. Perhaps all that can be done is acknowledge the possibility of embalming the past in literature not in order to commemorate *ad vitam aeternam* events which perpetuate mistrust and division, but so as to acknowledge how those divisions have morphed into a new and precarious future.[95]

I agree with McCann that the dissonance in voices should be examined for their divisions instead of totalising narratives which emphasise similarities in the pursuit of peace. It is important now to give attention to those voices which were silenced and to consider *who* was speaking, *what* they were writing, and whether they were acting as a medium to convey another person's story and, crucially, what they choose to convey.

Methodology

The framework for this thesis is guided by historical testimonies from nationalist women of the conflict as a guideline to reassess and re-evaluate the intersections between nationalism and gendered oppression. The use of autobiographical memory-texts serves to offer a testimony for experiences of the conflict. The media in which these depictions occur vary from documentary film to fictional novels in which the historical period is reflected. Each of the texts offer a new thinking of the relationship between gender and the nation, and in analysing this, there is a shift in the meaning of the events and understandings of the conflict and nationalist history.

This thesis seeks to alter the perception of incongruence between republicanism and feminism through analysing a variety of feminist nationalist writing from autobiographical texts, to periodicals, to literary fiction. In shifting this myth of feminine weakness as exemplified through static images of 'Mother Ireland', I propose using Aleida Assmann's theories on memory. Assmann

[95] Fiona McCann, *A Poetics of Dissensus: Confronting Violence in Contemporary Prose Writing from the North of Ireland* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), 214.

comments on the necessary interaction between memory and forgetting, arguing that it is human nature to continually reassess what can be afforded to be forgotten to ensure room in the limited neural space of human memory for what is significant and important to remember. She applied this theory to cultural memory, and argues that there are active and passive forms for both forgetting and remembering. She argued that active forgetting happens through intentional acts, such as the destruction of documents or the censorship of 'material or mental products' belonging to a marginal group.[96] Assmann wrote:

> The institutions of active memory preserve the *past as present* while the institutions of passive memory preserve the *past as past*…. I will refer to the actively circulated memory that keeps the past present as the *canon* and the passively stored memory that preserves the past as past the *archive*.[97]

She argued that 'selection [for the canon] presupposes decisions and power struggles; ascription of value endows these objects with an aura and a sacrosanct status'.[98] The power struggles in the case of these testimonial case studies are gendered and adhering to patriarchal codes of femininity. Within cultural memory, canonical memory is evidenced through museums and monuments, while archive memory is literally archived. When we think of the 'archive' in this sense, it is that which has been curated and filed in storage behind closed doors, and that which is not visible to the public, but it is held in the museum. Women's experiences of the 'Troubles' occupy and oscillate between both *active forgetting* and *passive memory* as they are both held in archival storage, in university libraries, and censored in their omission from documentaries (such as Brendan Byrne's documentary film *Bobby Sands: 66 Days*) and denied proportional representation.[99] The censorship of women's active roles in the conflict has rendered their history as silenced, and relegated to the confines of *active forgetting* and *passive remembering*. Assmann contends that university libraries are

[96] See: Dieter Reinisch. "*Cumann na mBan* & Women in Irish Republican Paramilitary Organisations, 1969 – 1986." *Estudios Irlandeses* 11 (2016): 149-162; Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 98.
[97] Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive".
[98] Ibid, 100.
[99] *Bobby Sands: 66 Days*. Directed by Brendan J. Byrne, 2016.

situated between both *active* and *passive remembering.*[100] This thesis aims to shift women's history to *canonical memory* from *archival memory* which has allowed mythological-capital-reliant representation borne out of gendered bias to exist. The traumatic memory theorist Judith Lewis Herman argued that through reconstructing the story of a troubling event there requires a 'systemic review of the meaning of the event'.[101] Therefore it is important to confront difficult or unpalatable pasts so as a new evaluation of the 'meaning of the event' can be made.[102] By drawing attention to the women's testimonies of the 'Troubles' through this thesis chapter and subsequent dissemination of research, there can be a shift in women's history to *canonical memory* from *archival memory* which has allowed mythological-capital-reliant representation borne out of gendered bias to exist. While presenting testimonies, I evaluate the accounts with a 'systemic review of the meaning of the event' in terms of gender dynamics within the republican and feminist movements.[103]

[100] Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive", 99.
[101] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 2001, [1992]), 178.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.

Thesis Chapter Outlines

In the following chapters, I will examine the interactions and interstices of republican/feminism(s). The thesis is divided into three sections, each of which contain a number of chapters. The first of these interrogates the historical narratives of republican feminism. The first chapter is concerned with the representation of republican women, that is to say, the representational oblivion in which republican women found themselves in with regards to commemorative sites. The republican women were left silenced in a representational oblivion. Those few who were celebrated received attention for their mythological capital, specifically as they were deemed as 'valuable women'. Further, some republican women had their histories actively destroyed. Dieter Reinsch wrote of how the destruction of the Cumann na mBan archive leaves the group's members actively forgotten, erased.[104] In this way, the memory-texts in the form of letters and memoirs are assessed in relation to gender and nationalism. I argue the women are excluded from the largely male-authored and dominant texts of the conflict, and to this end, are silenced from the history of the conflict. In response to this, the women developed their own remedy and catalogued their experiences through testimonial writing of nationalist feminism.

The second chapter examines the way republican political prisoners in Armagh Gaol sought to write themselves back into the history of the conflict through testimonial writing and oral history. The women took on the feminist project of voicing their own experiences in an act of resistance to the dominant masculinised narratives of the conflict. This chapter investigates the nature of story-telling, memory studies and historical narratives through Eileen Brady's collection *In the Footsteps of Anne* and the Prisons Memory Archives oral history documentary interviews. Original archival research was conducted on the Prisons Memory Archive in which interview materials were transcribed for use in this thesis. In the former, the women who were incarcerated

[104] See: Dieter Reinisch. "*Cumann na mBan* & Women in Irish Republican Paramilitary Organisations, 1969 – 1986." *Estudios Irlandeses* 11 (2016): 149-162.; Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

in Armagh Gaol during the conflict wrote their own experiences in their own words. The collection fused both retrospective memories of the events and historical letters to and from the prison. The result is that the women explored, in their testimonies, memories of gendered violence, feminist solidarity and the celebration of sisterhood. The ability to narrate national history is a precursor for identity formation, and as such, these collections and oral histories assert female agency.

While the previous chapter explores the experiences of the women *for* themselves, chapter three illuminates the work of republican feminists who acted as proxies to tell the stories of the incarcerated women in Armagh Gaol. Nell McCafferty's journalistic work in particular spoke for the women in prison and exposed their hardships to a broad audience through the publication of the *Irish Times* article, "There is blood on the walls of Armagh Gaol". These proxy jail-writing works, including Nell McCafferty's *Armagh Women* and Margaretta D'Arcy's *Tell Them Everything,* written by and/or on behalf of the republican women in Armagh disrupt the patriarchal narration of the 'Troubles'. With its exploration of these texts, this thesis argues that the republican movement's refusal to commemorate the women's involvement in the prison struggle is tantamount to a rejection of feminine rebellion. In this chapter I posit that a consideration of the women's involvement serves to amplify the republican cause.

The second section examines the intersections of republicanism and feminism in periodicals from 1975 - 1986. I conducted original archival research through examination of a collection of periodicals from this period. This collection belonged to Margaret Ward and following the completion of this thesis will be deposited in Linenhall Library. The content of the archive material has not been written about or studied by academics prior to this thesis. My research shows that the newspapers investigated display an interaction and co-dependence between the two movements which have been previously unacknowledged by either movement. This chapter will argue for the co-existence of the two movements and consider the implications for both. The disjuncture between feminism and republicanism within the Northern Irish political

landscape is evident from the historical and contemporary response of Sinn Féin to women's issues, the lack of support from male I.R.A. volunteers for their female counterparts, and the reluctance to use the 'feminist' label within the republican movement.[105] Nell McCafferty also claimed that the feminist movement north and south of the Irish border was splintered following the discussion of the republican women's bloody protest in Armagh Gaol.[106] The two movements, republican and feminist, on the surface appear to be diametrically opposed to one another. The women's movement umbrella group N.I.W.R.M. refused to get involved in the gendered violence occurring in Armagh Gaol (for example, the issues of denial of menstrual supplies and strip searching). Instead, the N.I.W.R.M. wanted to form a broad non-sectarian movement. This caused ruptures within the feminist movement, and as such the women's protest in Armagh was deemed to have fractured the movement. Out of this turbulence, republican feminist groups were created: Socialist Women's Group, Belfast Women's Collective and Women Against Imperialism. These groups operated and responded to the political protest in varying ways. For example, the Women Against Imperialism group, based in West Belfast, were a single-issue grouping focused on prison conditions. The other two groups were concerned with prison conditions, but took on a broader analysis: that colonialism was to the detriment of the working classes in a variety of ways from healthcare to state violence, which disproportionately affected nationalist women. My research on republican feminist periodicals, such as *Women's Action* (1976 – 1977), *Belfast Women's Collective* (1978 – 1980) and *Women's News* (1984 – 1986) which were aligned with the feminist groups, negates the notion that the feminist movement was incapable of careful examination of the ramifications of the context of British imperialism. I argue that rather than a distinct difference, northern feminism and nationalism can be understood as both aiming to attain autonomy, both bodily and political, with over-laps in objectives evident throughout the magazines. Chapter Four examines the period

[105] Simona Sharoni, "Gendering Resistance within an Irish Republican Prisoner Community: A Conversation with Laurence McKeown," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 2. (2000): 114.; Callie Persic, "The Emergence of a Gender Consciousness: Women and Community work in West Belfast," in *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags,* ed. Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 181.
[106] Nell McCafferty, "I think Armagh is a Feminist Issue," *Irish Times*, August 22nd, 1980.

up to the hunger strike in December 1980, while Chapter Five considers the years 1980 – 1986 when Armagh closed.

Section Three explores the link between the central tenets of nationalism and feminism and their overlap in literary forms. In particular, it will make a case for a reassessment of the nationalist and feminist literature of the 1970s and 1980s, through texts which reflect or were percolated through the events of the two decades. Through this period, as has been demonstrated in Section Two, a new republican feminist ideology emerged. This chapter will make the case for a reconsideration of literary texts (from novels to documentary films) as a body of texts which adhere to feminist nationalisms which disrupt narratives of dominant patriarchy and imperialism. The overlap in central aims is seen in through both movements striving for autonomy and self-determination. This is key to the analysis of these texts to create a new theoretical feminist-nationalist framework. In doing so, I argue that the texts fit this framework through their demands for women's financial autonomy, bodily autonomy, and rejection of patriarchy in the form of violent republicanism. I argue that while the texts fulfil a sense of self-determination, they offer a multivalence which should open further discussions on the multiplicity of feminist nationalism(s) in operation during the period.

In Chapter Six I examine the relationship between gender, nation, and the female body in two literary texts: Seamus Heaney's *North* and Medbh McGuckian's *The Flower Master*. Heaney's collection represented women as having been silenced through colonial depictions of feminine weakness as a land to be conquered. McGuckian's collection acts in response to this depiction through a situating of the body as a site of liberation. It disentangles notions of 'Mother Ireland' and the subsequent silencing of women. Chapter Seven and Eight interrogate the relationship of the central characters to their wider republican community. In the former I consider Deirdre Madden's novel *Hidden Symptoms* and the act of memory, reflection and connections in the dealing with grief of traumatic events of the conflict. Within Chapter Eight I examine Mary Beckett's *Give*

Them Stones and the relationship between baking, political resistance, and the nationalist community. Both Chapters Seven and Eight reflect on the need for community bonds and a stance of non-violence.

Chapter Nine considers the anthologisation of the republican feminist short story in the works of ex-I.R.A. prisoner, Brenda Murphy. These stories reflect on the nature of the events of the conflict in which Murphy was involved and offer a critique of both the feminist and republican movements. Chapter Ten extends this relationship between memory and republican feminism through the works of documentary film through *A Kind of Sisterhood* and *Mother Ireland.* Both of these films interrogate the meanings of femininity in relation to republicanism. The former examines the memories of gendered experiences in Armagh Gaol. While *Mother Ireland* calls into the question the nationalist symbol of Mother Ireland and its meaning for republican feminists. Brenda Murphy's testimony features in these and brings her fiction into sharp focus.

Eve Patten argued of Northern Irish fiction written during the 'Troubles' that: 'the use of the novel [is] as a personal auxiliary to public history'.[107] Patten further argued: 'Novels set in the North have frequently expanded the realist brief into documentary, however; a result on one hand of the desire for legitimate or authentic representation distinguishable from the amass of pulp sensationalism and on the other, of Irish fiction's close proximity to journalism and sociology'.[108] The literary arts examined within this section of the thesis seek to unsettle the totalising narratives of the conflict. These texts, while echoing Patten's assessment of being 'documentary' and a form of 'auxiliary to public history', act as a mirror on a contemporaneous conflict. In light of Patten's argument for Irish fiction as a hybrid between the arts and documentary, this thesis takes on an interdisciplinary approach to assessing fiction, periodicals and testimonies. The literary works and film percolate through the time period and several years after to reflect the immediate past. Due

[107] Eve Patten, "Fiction in Conflict: Northern Ireland's Prodigal Novelists," in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction,* ed. Ian A. Bell. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press,1995), 131.
[108] Ibid.

to this, the time period examined in this third part of the thesis is slightly broadened beyond the scope of the other chapters to allow for the necessary delay in time due to publication procedures.

Each of these chapters is concerned with the voicing of a multitude of republican feminism(s); from the literary, which posits a non-violent approach towards a republican state, to militant republican feminism within Armagh Gaol. The texts each work in concert to amplify the experiences of these women. In analysing the literary texts, the media, and testimony of feminist nationalism of the 'Troubles' conflict, this thesis reconstitutes a new paradigm of nationalist history. It offers a continuation of the lineage of feminist nationalist history offered through Margaret Ward's scholarly interjections. This thesis argues for a new gendered consideration of how the past events of the conflict are to be understood. In doing so, this thesis utilises elements of political, historical, cultural and literary studies to examine the works of anti-imperial feminist writing. In doing so, the central aim of exploring the multiplicities of republican feminism(s) is met.

A Note on Language

As journalist David Beresford remarked in the opening of *Ten Men Dead*: 'There is no neutrality in Northern Ireland, at least in the terminological sense: the use of the term 'Northern Ireland' places a writer on one side of the conflict, because to an Irish Nationalist there is no such entity'.[109] In this respect, and echoing the testimonies of the nationalist women drawn upon throughout this thesis, I will use 'north of Ireland' and other language loaded with political meanings in the context of the 'Troubles' to reflect the nationalist underpinnings of this thesis.

[109] David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* (London: Harpers Collins Publishers, 1994), 7.

Chapter 1: Historical Censorship: Towards Testimony, Activism, Resistance.

As explored in the introduction to this thesis, Irish nationalism and feminism were not wholly congruent movements. Some feminists, including Irish Women's Liberation Movement member Máirin de Burca, argued that the use of violence in pursuit of Irish unity was not in line with their understanding of feminist motives which encompassed only those in favour of an anti-violent stance.[1] This argument held by some was by no means the only understanding of the relationship between feminism and nationalism.[2] This thesis explores the tradition of feminist nationalism which existed in the fissures between the two movements, particularly the Irish republican movement's campaign for independence from British imperial rule which was supported by the efforts of women, both active and passive, during the conflict.

Despite this, women's active involvement in protest(s) remained largely silenced due to patriarchal constraints on the meaning of 'femininity' and also the patriarchal control of the production of meta-narratives. The philosopher Jean-François Lyotard argued that those who have control of the meta-narratives also confer what can be considered as fact:

> If a meta-narrative implying a philosophy of history is used to legitimate knowledge, questions are raised concerning the validity of the institutions governing the social bond: these must be legitimated as well. Thus justice is consigned to the grand narrative in the same way as truth.[3]

This is a central concern for this chapter in that the creation of narratives, through museums and archives, lends credence to the histories told through them. As explored in the introduction, the works of feminist historians, such as Ward and Aretxaga, sit in opposition to these totalising

[1] "Feminist cause - or elitism, manipulation – a new veneer on old politics?" *Irish Times,* 5th September 1980.
[2] This will be explored further within Chapter 3.
[3] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), Xxiv.

presentations of the 'Troubles'. This chapter illuminates the myriad ways in which women have been actively erased from these meta-narratives of the northern conflict.

There is a need for a feminist revision of the Northern Irish 'Troubles' due to the misogynistic trend of omitting women from historical narratives. Carol Coulter argued in *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland* that feminist nationalism is 'a subterranean tradition in this country of women's rebellion and incursion into public life'.[4] To do this effectively, the history of women's involvement needs to be examined and, secondly, it needs to be evaluated on its feminist merit. Claire Hackett argued that the act of writing women's history is a form of feminist activism in itself.[5] Specifically, she contends, the key objectives for this are: 'the redefining and reinterpretation of hegemonic historical record, the importance of continuity of struggle, and the understanding of the historical significance of women's lives'.[6] It is through this feminist cultural historical legacy that I will continue to excavate women's history of the conflict. It is with these central themes in mind that I address the representation of women in the history and cultural memory of the 'Troubles' conflict. The abundance of historical records does not equate to a proportional representation between women and men's roles in history; there is an inherent misogyny in who has the right to an acknowledged authoritative voice when it comes to historical narratives.

The involvement of women in the I.R.A. campaigns during the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland is not a historical anomaly. The work of feminist historian Margaret Ward in *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* has made a significant contribution to the establishment of Irish women's history and, in particular, the radical movements feminist nationalists formed.[7] Ward wrote of a range of women through the decades who have had their history omitted from

[4] Carol Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 3.
[5] Claire Hackett, "Narratives of Political Activism from Women in West Belfast," in *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags,* ed. Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 145.
[6] Ibid, 148.
[7] Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (Dublin: Pluto Press, 1995).

public discourse. She traced the history of Anna Parnell, leader of the Ladies Land League (1881 - 1882), as a prime example of a tradition of radical female leadership marginalised by male counterparts, in this instance by her own brother, Charles Stuart Parnell. Heather Laird challenged Ward's reading of the Ladies Land League. Laird wrote that the lack of prominence of the women within the political/public sphere should raise a query of where the value of the resistance is found: 'Relocating the 'front' of the Land War from the public sphere of organized politics to the civil domain of everyday life reveals the centrality of women to this episode in Irish history'.[8] This understanding of the women's rebellion places an onus on the 'everyday' resistances which are inherent in social insurgencies, both within the 1880s and the 'Troubles' conflict. There are a number of links in 'everyday' resistances between the treatment of Anna Parnell and the women activists during the Northern Irish 'Troubles'. As Leader of the Ladies Land League, Anna Parnell utilised the retention of rent as a form of protest to advance the rights of the lower-classes. There is a clear parallel between this act of resistance and the rent and rates strike in nationalist areas within Northern Ireland during the 'Troubles' in response to the mass internment of Catholic men in 1971. The direct link here is in the mobilisation and rebellion of working-class women against the landlord classes; those who financially and politically held dominance. This tradition of nationalist women and protest is a history which can be traced through from the Land League, the Irish Suffragettes and republican feminist Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, to the feminist republican women in the north resisting imperialism from the women in Armagh Gaol, to those members of Women Against Imperialism who were arrested on International Women's Day in 1979 for protesting the treatment of women during incarceration.

[8] Heather Laird, "Decentring the Irish Land War: Women, Politics and the Private Sphere," In *Land Questions in Modern Ireland.* ed. Fergus Campbell and Tony Varley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 186.

Social Geography and Resistance

Following the onset of the conflict, women moved from the domestic space to a visible and politicised presence in public due to a need to protect their communities. It was during this period that feminist-nationalist solidarity came to the fore. Clara Reilly recalls:

> When you look back, it was the strength of the women that brought a little bit of sanity into it. Because we all supported one another, and we were all in the same boat… It was that sort of a community. I think it was because of all that trouble and trauma we went through in the end that made our communities the strong communities that they are today.[9]

The urgency of internment in 1971 which put women under pressure to protect their homes, communities, children and families is described as a kind of trauma, not least given that the death toll reached 24 in the first 48 hours following internment. The necessity of being propelled to the forefront of violent interactions with the state crystallised a women's network of political solidarity. Tara Keenan-Thomson wrote of the women's response to the upsurge in unrest in Northern Irish society in 1969, particularly with regards to the riots which erupted in Derry and Belfast:

> The women who spoke of arming themselves were responding to their experiences of their own communal vulnerability by articulating a revitalized mode of political engagement not seen since the civil war.[10]

This demonstrates that women were not on the side-line during the violence, instead, they took on an active role in resisting the violent incursions into their communities.

Moreover, activist and politician Bernadette Devlin's *The Price of My Soul* recounts the then-politician's memories of the Battle of the Bogside (August 12, 1969):

> The petrol bombs were made, literally, by pregnant women and children. Kids of seven and eight who couldn't fight made the petrol bombs, and they made them pretty well… The young girls collected stones and built the barricades, and the girls, the boys, and the men fought on the front line against the police.[11]

[9] Claire Hackett, "Narratives of Political Activism from Women in West Belfast" in *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags,* ed. Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 151.
[10] Tara Keenan-Thomson, *Irish Women and Street Politics 1956 – 1973* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 159.
[11] Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul* (London: Pan Books, 1969), 202.

Devlin wrote against the oft mythologised figure of the mother, usually portrayed through 'Mother Ireland' imagery; she subverts this image in writing of a pregnant woman involved in violence. Instead of recreating these stereotypes, Devlin portrays a realistic account of the resistance enacted by women and mothers during the Battle of the Bogside in Derry. This image has the ultimate transgressive agency: breaking beyond the 'woman' and 'mother' boundaries.

Similarly, Nell McCafferty wrote of the same period that, 'the movement liberated Catholic women, albeit unintentionally. They burst out of their homes… and spent their Sundays marching around the city'.[12] The women adopted a new role of collective resistance as an outcome of the conflict. Likewise, republican activist and Sinn Féin member Marie Moore remembers:

> Then, what became known as the hen patrols – women who came out onto the streets when they heard the army and R.U.C. coming rattled their bin lids and blew their whistles to warn people who may be staying in houses, that there were raids going on. That was how they counteracted people being arrested, and local republicans being arrested. It was a very powerful thing to be done, because they got a lot of hassle and they got a lot of beatings.[13]

These women made themselves vulnerable to attack through their publicly visible resistance against the British State. October 1971 in Belfast was one such point when the visibility of resistance had deadly consequences after the British army murdered Cumann na mBan members Dorothy Maguire and Maura Meehan. The two women were killed while sounding the horn in their car as a warning to the local I.R.A. that the Army were in the area. [14] This is understood as a distinct gendered warning to women who transgressed from the domestic sphere towards the masculine public sphere of community protection. Despite these violence warnings, it did not stop the women from remaining active. It is within this climate of political unrest that women took on an active role in protecting themselves and their community.

I.R.A volunteer Dolours Price remembered that the British Army were reluctant to search women. At this stage, in effect, women were not treated as political subjects who were a risk to

[12] Nell McCafferty, *Peggy Deery: A Derry Family at War* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1988), 10.
[13] Claire Hackett, "Narratives of Political Activism from Women in West Belfast," 152.
[14] Ibid.

the army. Keenan-Thomson describes Dolours Price and her mother Chrissie experiencing the stop and searches carried out by British patrols in the Falls Road. Chrissie asked Dolours to pass her the gun that she was concealing as there was no chance the soldiers would search a mother.[15] On this Aretxaga commented: 'Army checks of women's coats increased with the heightened suspicions of the possibility of women as potential threats. Women would open their coats while hiding weapons in a pram so 'the army sees everything and sees nothing'.[16] To Aretxaga, this made 'a woman's body both a symbol of resistance and the very vehicle of political transgression'.[17] Aretxaga wrote of a woman who evaded the detection of soldiers while she concealed weapons hidden in plastic bags on her body. To do this, the woman engaged in direct conversations with the soldiers as a distraction technique. In doing so, the women subvert the mythological images of 'Mother Ireland' bidding her sons to protect her; the women employ the use of their bodies, usually symbols for nationhood, and instead transform their bodies as sites for clandestine rebellion. This interplay between the visible presence of the military in nationalist areas is juxtaposed with the women's bodies as carriers for hidden resistance:

> There is a connection in this story between the invisibility of women's bodies, bodies that can conceal weapons, and the exposed deployment of armed soldiers. The topography that armed soldiers attempt to master through the mounting vigilance of their presence hides behind the materiality of facades a social geography of resistance. Absence rather than presence appears here as the condition of political agency. Precisely because of this condition resistance becomes symbolically condensed in the bodies of women.[18]

Not only were the British Army unable to navigate the labyrinthine geography of the backstreets within nationalist areas, but they were also unable to detect the 'social geography of resistance' too. It was through this invisibility that women were able to traverse the streets, concealing weapons. The irony here is that the treatment of the women as beyond political agency in actuality make the women's bodies a haven for the enactment of political rebellion. Allen Feldman in *Formations of*

[15] Keenan-Thomson, *Irish Women and Street Politics 1956 – 1973,* 214.
[16] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence,* 67.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid, 38 – 39.

Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland wrote of the topology of these gendered resistances: 'Transgression and resistance are thus marked out with visible and invisible gender presences'.[19] It is against this backdrop that the women in the I.R.A. were operating. The women were underestimated due to their gender and, as such, they were valuable to the I.R.A. for their ability to hide in plain sight.

Despite this feminist nationalist tradition, women have received relatively scant recognition in analyses of the 'Troubles' conflict. It should be noted that work on republican women of the early 20th century is more abundant, such as Mary McAuliffe's research on lesbian revolutionary Margaret Skinnider who took part in the 1916 Rising, and also Lauren Arrington's research on Constance Markievicz.[20] To bring this into relief, Margaret Ward's *The Missing Sex: Putting Women into Irish History* called for women to be centre stage in academic studies of Irish History.[21] Ward explicitly criticised academia for equating the study of nationalism with that of a sympathy of terrorist activity:

> The academic community in Ireland failed in its task of engaging with the issue [of partition], so discussion seldom moved on to more fruitful levels… the difficulties involved in understanding the complexities of the North of Ireland were solved by the simple device of erecting an intellectual border, shutting off the troublesome six counties from the rest of Ireland.[22]

Due to this 'intellectual border' a boundary was drawn around northern nationalism and, further, nationalist feminism as a topic deeper still within those excluded zones for enquiry. Northern Ireland, as a conservative, patriarchal society, had actively silenced the involvement of women due to an ingrained shame that women had to go beyond their feminine roles due to societal and political turbulence during the 'Troubles'. This involvement can be understood as a war time

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[19] Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence,* 97.
[20] Lauren Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz* (USA: Princeton Universtiy Press, 2016).; Mary McAuliffe, 'Margaret Skinnider: Radical Feminist, militant nationalist, trade union activist' *The Irish Times.* March 26, 2020. Accessed on: April 26, 2020. https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/margaret-skinnider-radical-feminist-militant-nationalist-trade-union-activist-1.4202266; Margaret McAuliffe, *Margaret Skinnider* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2020).
[21] Margaret Ward, *The Missing Sex: Putting Women into Irish History* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991).
[22] Margaret Ward, "Conflicting Interests: The British and Irish Suffragette Movements," *Feminist Review.* No. 5: The Irish Issue: The British Question. (Summer, 1995): 128.

measure to pool resources by way of numbers to be mobilised. Now that I have foregrounded the impetus for feminist nationalist revision of the conflict narratives, I will assess their current absence from sites of cultural memory.

Commemoration

Ulster Museum's flagship 'The 'Troubles" exhibition in Belfast, which is now in its second iteration, is a prime example of the ongoing marginalisation of nationalist women. Upon entry, visitors are invited by a wall-mounted sign to 'Discover History', which is then followed by images of key figures from the political conflict, of which only one is a woman, Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey. Amongst the plethora of images of the Troubles, in the exhibition only two feature women: one is the aforementioned Bernadette Devlin-Aliskey who is unnamed and her inclusion

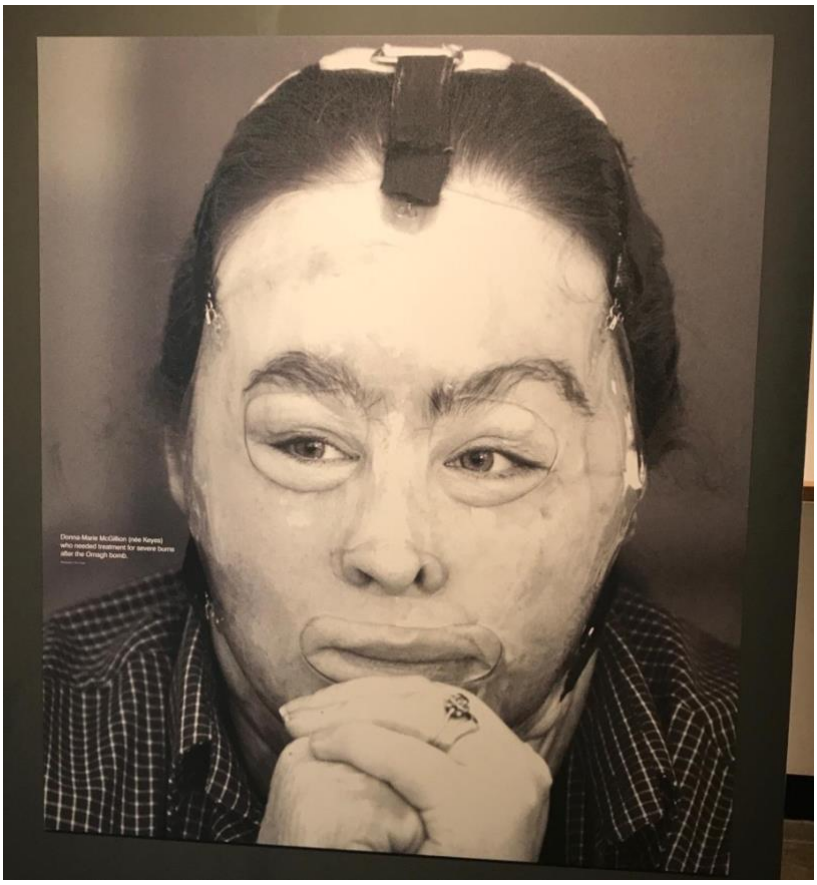

Figure 1: Donna-Marie McGillion (nee Keyes) who needed treatment for severe burns after the Omagh bomb. 'Troubles' Exhibit, Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

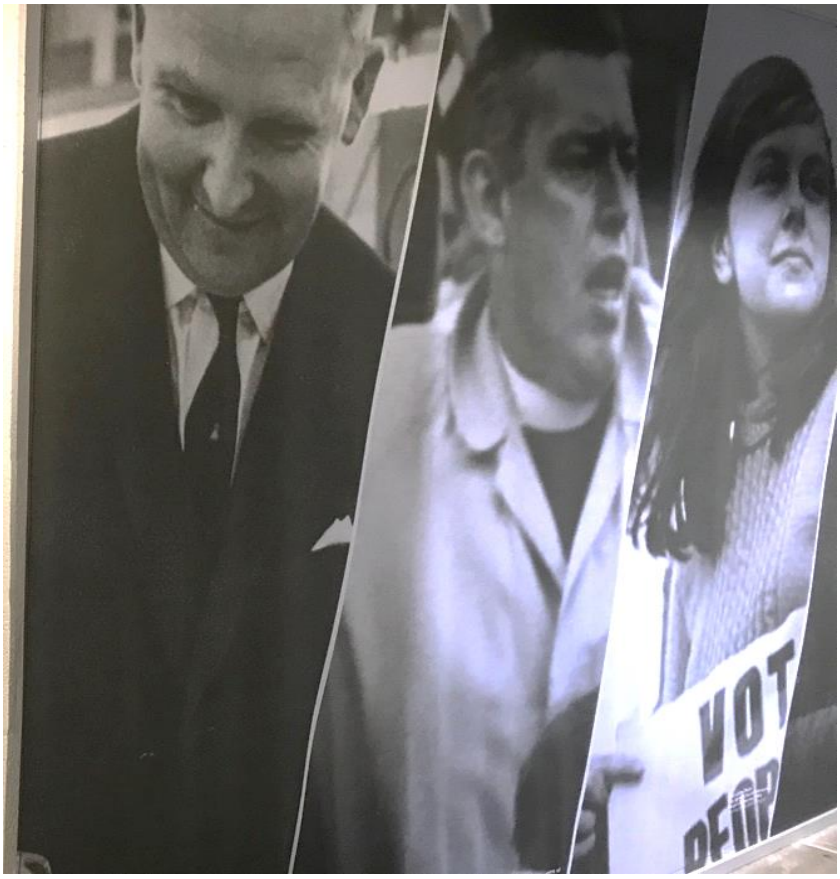

Figure 2: Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey (far right). 'Troubles' Exhibit, Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

left unexplained (see Figure 2); the other is an image of Donna-Marie McGillion (nee Keyes), a disfigured woman who was the victim of the Omagh bombing in 1998 (see Figure 1). These instances are emblematic of how women have been relegated in the history of Northern Ireland: on the one hand nameless and silenced through a lack of acknowledgement; on the other, a victim used for shock value and to illustrate the horrors she has experienced. During the remaining exhibition, republican women are mentioned in writing only once: on a panel acknowledging the existence of the women's prison, Armagh Gaol. None of the women who protested in Armagh are named or pictured in this exhibition nor are any of the myriad ways in which women led resistance through street protests. Instead, an inanimate bin-lid, used for alerting the men in an area of an imminent raid by the British Army is included in lieu. The inertia of this object's inclusion reduces the agency of women and silences them.

Evident in this exhibition there is also the pertinent issue of authorship within the history and memorialisation of the conflict. This is an area of concern raised by the cultural historian Arnold de-Simine:

> The question of whose memories are able to find a forum is rarely explicitly discussed. The assumption is that those whose suffering, moral worthiness and potential to invite empathy is unquestioned are granted a voice. The decision is usually based on a clear-cut binary of victims and perpetrators.[23]

With the inclusion of (male) perpetrators of violence and the inclusion of only passive female victims, gender appears as a clear demarcation in which stories can be told. There is a clear dichotomy between male violence and female victimhood. The exhibition in Belfast's Ulster Museum shows a depiction of the conflict according to this binary of representation that violence was inflicted upon women through their passivity. This mapping of a hegemonic gendered morality on to the experiences of others has left this site of cultural memory vacuous. It deems women's agency in the conflict as being beyond the scope of institutional representation.

In reviewing the updated Ulster Museum exhibit, the historian Olwen Purdue argued that the site offered a space for the healing of division within the post-conflict north. She wrote:

> Objects and images stir long-forgotten memories or startle with unfamiliar perspectives, either way encouraging people to reflect on the lived experience of the Troubles – that of their own and of others. Some of the objects on display are reaffirming in their familiarity; others, which speak of a different experience of the conflict, challenge and disturb creating a sense of discomfort and possibly stronger emotions in the viewer. But it is in this capacity to turn the spotlight on past and ongoing trauma, and to provide the space for people to reflect on their responses as they bring their particular perspectives to the objects on display, that the gallery lies.[24]

Purdue's analysis of the exhibition emphasises the act of viewing the ephemera of the conflict as a stimulant for memories, specifically both the act of sharing memories with other visitors and that of self-reflexivity. The dialogic nature between visitor and exhibit, and, indeed, between visitors

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[23] Arnold De-Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy and Nostalgia* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 18.

[24] Olwen Purdue, "Twenty Years On: Memory, Commemoration, and Exhibiting the Northern Ireland Troubles," *QUB Centre for Public History Blog.* Last modified: April 9, 2018. Accessed on: July 29, 2019. https://qubpublichistory.wordpress.com/2018/04/09/twenty-years-on-memory-commemoration-and-exhibiting-he-northern-ireland-troubles/

themselves, hinges upon the nature of memories being made visible, tangible. By its very nature due to the curation of objects, the practice of exhibiting is a political one. Those who are included, and excluded, are important to consider. With this in mind, the lack of examination, particularly, of women's agency in the conflict itself causes a central issue within the exhibit of what is rendered available for discussion. This compounds the historical amnesia which surrounds women's participation in resistance movements.

To assign women a passive place in the public-facing museum is to do a disservice to the history of the conflict. It is worth evaluating at this stage whose stories of the conflict are given prominence in these forms of public commemoration of the past. The exclusion of women is evident upon examination of the array of museums, documentaries and academic scholarship on the conflict. For example, the 2016 documentary *Bobby Sands: 66 Days* documents the 1981 hunger strike led by Bobby Sands in which he and nine other men died during the prolonged negotiations over the I.R.A'.s five demands with Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government.[25] Not only does this documentary not acknowledge the existence of the female republican prisoners held in Armagh Gaol who were involved in the 1980 hunger strike, but it also does not feature any female historians or political commentators.

This lack of recognition raises the question, 'Who has the right to memorialisation?' The historian, Sara McDowell, argued that 'in Northern Ireland, cultural landscapes reveal both a past and a present shaped and defined overwhelmingly by men … Commemoration served a specific function – to restore the socio-cultural (gender) order that the war disrupted'.[26] The mapping of a gendered form of oppression on to the landscape in these communities reaffirms a misogynistic

[25] 'The main aim of the new strike was to achieve the reintroduction of "political" status for Republican prisoners. Special category, or "political", status would be achieved if five demands were met: the right of prisoners to wear their civilian clothes at all times; the right to free association within a block of cells; the right not to do prison work; the right to educational and recreational facilities; and the restoration of lost remission of sentence'.
"The Hunger Strike of 1981 – Summary," *CAIN*. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/hstrike/summary.htm Accessed on: September 1, 2019; *Bobby Sands: 66 Days.* Directed by Brendan J. Byrne, 2016.
[26] Sara McDowell, "Commemorating Dead 'Men': Gendering the Past and Present in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland," *Gender, Place and Culture* 15, No. 4: 336 – 337.

belief system that kept women silenced. McDowell noted a high percentage of commemoration for each of the 294 male I.R.A. volunteers who died, even due to natural causes. This is in comparison with a very small number of women in public commemorations.[27] Further, the sociologist Bill Rolston's research details that the emergence of republican commemorative murals did not begin in earnest until the second hunger strike in 1981 which saw 'Smash H Blocks' graffiti develop into artistic depictions of militarised resistance.[28] The murals documented in Rolston's book are decidedly androcentric.

As Aretxaga, McDowell, and Rolston note, the exception is seen in the depictions of volunteer Mairead Farrell who was murdered by the SAS alongside two male volunteers in Gibraltar in 1988.[29] The exception in commemorating Farrell in the republican movement highlights a cynical strategical use of women's images in murals. The lack of commemoration for the still-living women who endured hardships in Armagh Gaol and the choice to instead celebrate silent women, in Farrell's case through the permanent mutability of death or through use of the fictional image of 'Mother Ireland', shows a favouring of depicting silenced women. As activist and journalist Nell McCafferty said: 'In the North, now, the dead are symbols through which party politicians, paramilitaries, Church and State mediate their respective and irreconcilable philosophies'.[30] There is a layering of reasons for this 'elevated importance in the Republican hagiography' not least due to Farrell's high-profile death beyond Ireland's borders.[31] The exceptional nature of her death is explored in the controversial documentary *Death on the Rock* (1988). Civilian witnesses in this documentary attested that Farrell and the two men she was with, Daniel McCann and Sean Savage, were unarmed.[32] The witness, Carmen Proetta testified that

[27] McDowell, "Commemorating Dead 'Men'," 345.
[28] "Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland by Bill Rolston," *CAIN*. Accessed on: August 20, 2019 https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/bibdbs/murals/rolston1.htm
[29] "Drawing Support," *CAIN.;* McDowell, "Commemorating Dead 'Men"; Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*.
[30] Nell McCafferty, *Peggy Deery: A Derry Family at War* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1988), 118.
[31] McDowell, "Commemorating Dead 'Men'," 345.
[32] *Death on the Rock*. Directed by James Robert Carson. Thames Television, 1988.

Farrell was murdered while she had her hands raised in a sign of surrender.[33] Proetta's testimony challenges that of the British state which purported that those killed, including Farrell, were in Gibraltar on active service. The crux of the controversy over her killing centres on this: the public execution of an unarmed woman.

The use of Farrell's image based on her death has a misogynistic element to it: it can be understood to signify the underlying horror which is being invoked in her image, firstly through her status as a murdered woman (how could you kill our women?); and, secondly, through her being unarmed (she was unable to defend herself!). In other words, the choice of which women

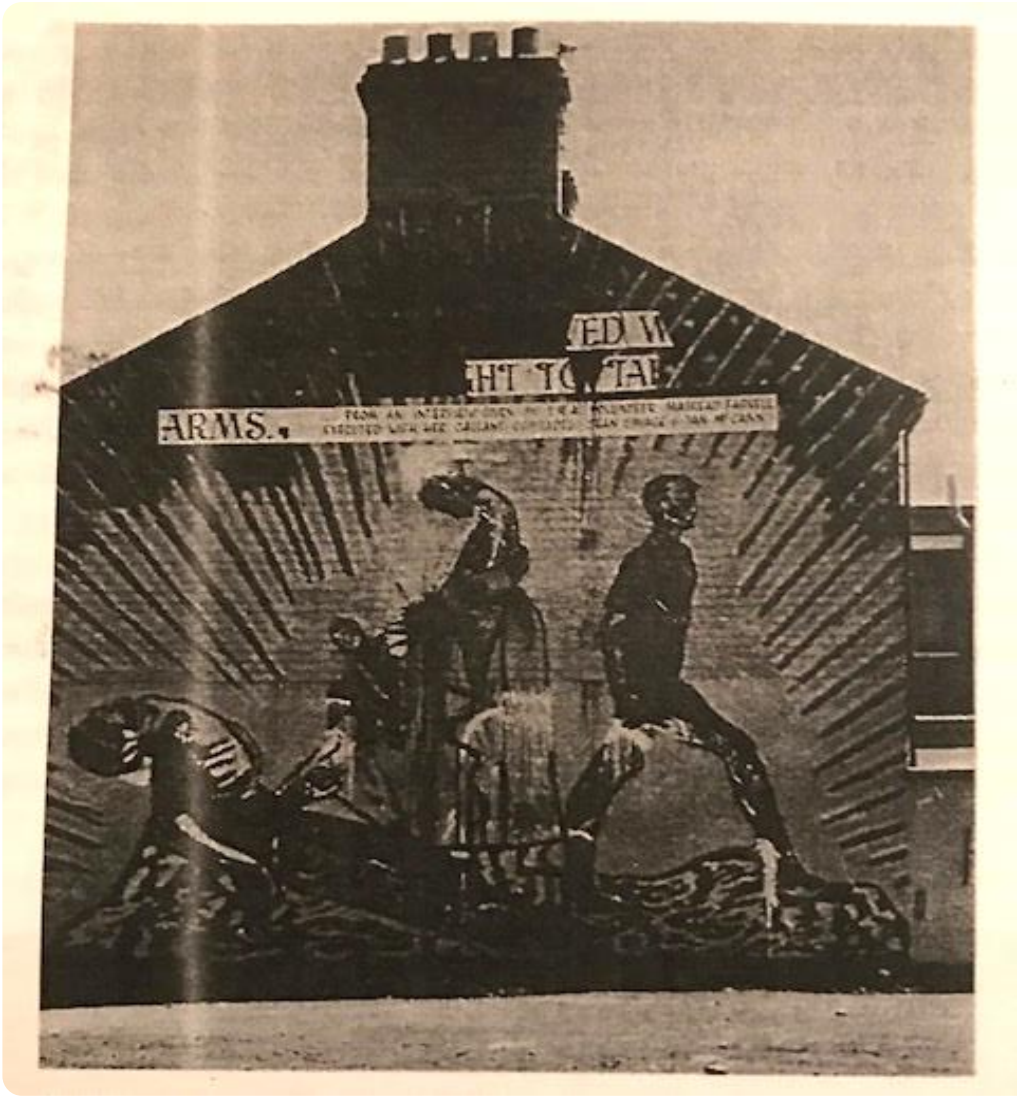

Figure 3: Falls Road Mural, Belfast, 1980s. Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland.* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997)

[33] Ibid, 38:04.

are commemorated in the cultural landscape is due to what I term a 'gendered mythological capital'. The gendered element presupposes an understanding of defencelessness in the female subject which is being depicted. This element, in turn, nods to a passivity, which in the case of Farrell is demonstrated by the fact that she was not holding a weapon and raised her arms in an act of surrender. The mythological element concerns the idea of the event, i.e. what is shown to be the case. The key with the myth of the event is the objective of longevity in public discourse. The use of Farrell's image on artworks, murals, and quotations each forward this element. The mythological capital then is that which can be gained for the republican movement, i.e. the event's political value. The patriarchal grip of both the republican movement and conservative Northern Irish society have silenced these women's experiences while celebrating women, fictional and deceased, who are valued for their mythological capital. In Farrell's case, her symbolic political and cultural value is through her status as a woman murdered by the British SAS forces while she was unarmed.

This mythological capital is further invoked through the political symbolism and cultural purchase of 'Mother Ireland' sentiment conjured by the quotation attributed to Farrell on the Falls Road mural. The words of Farrell read: 'I've always believed we had a legitimate right to take up arms and defend our country and ourselves against British occupation'.[34] In this mural, taken from Begoña Aretxaga's study of West Belfast in the 1980s, Farrell's words appear above a Mother Ireland figure, urging a son to defend Ireland's honour (see Figure 3). Of this, Aretxaga wrote that the woman figure is a 'witness' to the masculine struggle for freedom. However, the woman in the image does not bear witness to the struggle of the female active combatant emblazoned above her. This image of Mother Ireland and the static words of Farrell both conjure thoughts of female deference to male heroics. It is no coincidence that within republican mythology, the suffering mother is the image of women employed most often in murals.[35] Aretxaga wrote of this that: 'The

[34] Quoted in Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence,* 47. The quote is dated from 1986 in an interview Farrell gave to *Magill* magazine. Although the mural itself is not dated, we can deduce that the mural was erected between 1986 and the end of the 1980s, when Aretxaga conducted the study.
[35] Bill Rolston. *Drawing Support: Volume One, Murals of Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1992).

woman stands between the two [the young man stepping forward to follow in his father's footsteps], the witness and, as such, the mediator of historical continuity. Through her, historical memory is inscribed, and historical consciousness is maintained in the next generation'.[36] The woman becomes a vehicle for the transmission of 'historical memory,' a kind of empty vessel for the communication of myths of a national past. The mythological capital of this quotation and image pairing serves to reinforce the gendered power dynamics within the north of Ireland but also within the republican movement. The landscape endows a masculinised historical memory by its promotion of silenced women alongside militarised imagery of male volunteers.

The politicisation of space and place has an important function in the maintenance of gendered power dynamics. McDowell contends that the selection of imagery to appear on murals has 'obvious political and social value' which is 'inherently patriarchal'.[37] She wrote: 'The claiming of space through memorialisation, then, not only constitutes 'war by other means' but serves to reproduce the wartime gender order/regime'.[38] Like McDowell, Brian Graham also notes masculinity as key within examples of republican commemoration. He argued: 'Although republicans may claim that victims of state violence are denied equality with other fatalities, republican ideology itself underlines the cynical point that certain among the dead are politically more valuable than others'.[39] The representation of women on commemorative murals is heightened by the selective forms of femininity which are given primacy, particularly that of the passive or 'politically valuable' victim.[40] One mural in particular that McDowell draws attention to is the commemoration of Norah McCabe, a mother killed by a plastic bullet in December 1984[41], who 'embodies the more traditional gendered stereotype of innocence by being portrayed as a

[36] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 48.
[37] McDowell, "Commemorating Dead 'Men'," 340.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Brian Graham, "The legacies of the Dead: Commemorating the Troubles in Northern Ireland," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* Vol. 25 (2007): 484.
[40] McDowell, "Commemorating Dead 'Men'," 348.
[41] "Malcom Sutton: An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland," *CAIN*. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/alpha/M.html Accessed on: 01/09/2019.

mother and a peacekeeper'.[42] The use of the death of McCabe in this way is a calculated move as the I.R.A. itself was responsible for gendered violence, not least given the murder of Jean McConville, the mother 'disappeared' by the I.R.A. in 1972. On commemoration, landscape and forgetting, memory studies theorists Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone argued that:

> Landscape, in any case, is little touched by human concerns for memory: give or take a few centuries, and the battlefields will be ordinary meadows; the memorials insisting on the reality of the deaths that took place will become illegible and crumble away. In the meantime, though, the urge to put bookmarks all over the physical world attempts to recreate everywhere the palimpsest city, to ensure that nothing is lost— or conversely that only certain things are not; there are desirable amnesias here.[43]

The commemoration via murals, whilst they are not proportional, enact and direct these kinds of 'desirable amnesias'. The violence perpetrated upon women is only 'politically valuable' if it can be used to further the aims of the republican movement's social control within nationalist areas.

As an extension of who is deemed 'politically valuable', Theresa O'Keefe locates the use of the sacrosanct status of those memorialised as a key republican strategy: 'For republicanism, a key strategy in the battle for hearts and minds is the establishment of republican heroes, icons to become the subject of the conflict's iconography. This iconography is key to framing what constitutes significant political contributions and, as a result, has implications for how power is shared and among whom'.[44] O'Keefe argued that the commemorative landscape is a site which propagates and further asserts the power of those who are shown as worthy of remembrance. It is interesting, then, to consider that women often appear emblematised through images of fictional or mythological characters (e.g. Mother Ireland, Cathleen ni Houlihan). Echoing this, Clara Connolly argued that 'one of the things that hinders recognition [of women] is the framing of a discussion about the future in the myths of a national past'.[45] This nationalist fixation with

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[42] McDowell, "Commemorating Dead 'Men'," 348.
[43] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, "Introduction: Contested Pasts." In *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (New York, New York and Abingdon, Oxfordshire, Routledge, 2003), 12.
[44] Theresa O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements* (New York, New York and Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2013), 96.
[45] Clara Connolly, "Ourselves Alone? Clár na mBan Conference Report," *Feminist Review,* No. 50 (Summer, 1995): 121.

depicting mythological images of the past as emblems of the present and future particularly through images of women is evident in Bill Rolston's *Drawing Support* study of murals.[46] Specifically, the image of 'Mother Ireland' calling upon the men of the country to protect her conjures thoughts of meekness and subjugation to male heroics. The myth of the suffering mother is harboured within the conservative Catholic working-class roots of the nationalist community which aligns women's essence with producing children and tending to the home. With regards to republicanism, women are rendered silenced in the symbolism as reproducer of the nation through commemorative murals (as seen in Figure 3). Women in the image of mother, or mother urging her sons to fight for the nation, become guardians and conduits to the future nation state. Padraic Pearse's poem '*Mise Eire*/I am Ireland' which appears on murals in the Bogside, Derry and also the Ulster Museum, further locates women within this role:

> I am Ireland:
>
> I am older than the Old Woman of Beare.
>
> Great my glory:
>
> I that bore Cuchulainn the valiant.[47]

This sentiment of 'Mother Ireland' birthing warriors to defend her, the symbol of the Irish nation, is further given credence through its use by an Irish nationalist leader.

This silencing, however, was rejected by feminist nationalists. The sentiments of Oonagh Marron who spoke at the *Clar na mBan* conference in 1994, encapsulated the state of feminist nationalism:

> As nationalist women and as feminists, we have very often given our support unconditionally to the overthrow of British colonialism in this country. We have buried our demands for the sake of a common purpose – Brits out. In the past, that has been a way of censoring our demands. The danger is that once again we are going to be asked to bury our demands, this time in the common purpose of achieving peace. I think that it is time to send a message to those negotiating on our behalf that this

[46] Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support.*
[47] Padraic Pearse, *The Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse* (Dublin and London: Maunsel and Company Ltd, 1917), 323.

> time around our support will not be unconditional; never again will we collude with the exclusion of people, with the denial of their rights.[48]

Women have been weighed up for their mythological capital in furthering an agenda, yet denied recognition for their contributions to the armed struggle, politics and barred from positions of leadership. A similar anger is felt by Yuval-Davis who criticised Fanon in his androcentric approach to the analyses of oppressed peoples. She wrote that the 'Fanonite ideology of the oppressed, who are called 'to reclaim their manhood' by violence, has been to the detriment of many black and Third World women who have suffered from the misogyny which has been central to the machoist ideologies sustained by most interpretations of this sentiment. As long as the struggle of the powerless is to gain power rather than to transform power relations within the society, so-called 'national liberation' has often just brought further oppression'.[49] hooks also argued for an intersectional approach to the examination of power dynamics in gender, race and class within revolutionary liberation movements. She wrote that: 'Support of sexist oppression in much political writing concerned with revolutionary struggle as well as in the actions of men who advocate revolutionary politics undermines all liberation struggle'.[50] Both Yuval-Davis and hooks' intersectional feminist approach to feminism and anti-imperial theory informs my thesis project. As I approach the feminist nationalist texts, I do not consider them being mutually exclusive ideals but rather incorporated as a hybrid feminist-nationalist state, particularly, through the objective of self-determination.

[48] Clara Connolly, "Ourselves Alone? Clár na mBan Conference Report," *Feminist Review,* No. 50 (Summer, 1995): 120.
[49] Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation,* 113.
[50] hooks, *Feminist Theory,* 40.

Erasure

Criminologist Mary Corcoran's study *Out of Order: The Political Imprisonment of Women in Northern Ireland 1972 – 1998* highlights that one in twenty people incarcerated during the 'Troubles' was a woman.[51] These women, however, have received scant acknowledgment, having had their experiences diminished and largely expunged from republican history. To compound this, republican women at the time of their incarceration were treated with caution even by their comrades held in Long Kesh prison. Laurence McKeown, who was taken off the 1981 hunger strike by his mother, in an interview in 2000, said:

> The idea of women prisoners playing an equal role shocked many though I don't think we looked upon it at the time as anything to do with equal roles. *They were regarded as the weaker sex*. They had to be protected from their own recklessness. It was not expressed in such terms of course.[52]

Another element of gendered difference is seen in the description of Mary Doyle, who was one of three women who took part in the 1980 hunger strike. She said of the response from the republican movement to the women planning to take part on that hunger strike that: 'The leadership did not want the hunger strike and they sent in all this information about what it can do to you, your body and vital organs. They tried to deter us'.[53] This collective 'us' is encompassing both the men and women who were preparing to embark upon a starvation strike. However, the misogynistic element within the republican movement is exemplified when the women sent word to the male prison H.M.P. Maze/Long Kesh that they would not be taking part in the subsequent 1981 hunger strike. Mary Doyle wrote of this:

> We just weren't wee girls, the way some referred to us. I had been writing to Bobby Sands regularly and I remember getting a comm. [communication via smuggled letters] from him. He said that when he

[51] Mary Corcoran, *Out of Order: The Political Imprisonment of Women in Northern Ireland 1972 – 1998* (Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, 2006), xvii.
[52] Simona Sharoni, "Gendering Resistance within an Irish Republican Prisoner Community: A Conversation with Laurence McKeown." *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 2. (2000): 114. Emphasis added.
[53] Evelyn Brady, et al. *In the Footsteps of Anne: Stories of Republican Women Ex-Prisoners,* (Belfast: Shanaway Press, 2011), 222.

> heard there was not going to be a hunger strike in Armagh he was the happiest man in Long Kesh. He did not mean it chauvinistically, but comradely, affectionately.[54]

These discussions negate the assertion by some women volunteers that there was no gendered division in the I.R.A. Similarly, Fiona McCann wrote of Sands's poem 'Flowers, My Friends, Flowers' where he equates the women in Armagh to flowers, amounting to an 'over-idealisation and condescension' of the women prisoners.[55] However, these instances show that there was a division, despite their reluctance to acknowledge it as such.

Further to this, the women of the I.R.A and Cumann na mBan were subjected to active erasure through absence from the historical narrative and also misinformation. Historian Dieter Reinisch's article 'Cumann na mBan & Women in Irish Republican Paramilitary Organisations, 1969 – 1986' details information on the organisation garnered through interviews which took place between 2009 – 2011. Reinisch quotes a member of Cumann na mBan: 'Cumann na mBan never published anything. The men always wanted to explain everything to the media. But the women are different… This is why only few of our members were arrested. Because the women know not to talk'.[56] Men were at the forefront of the movement controlling the narrative that was portrayed to the mainstream media. The interviewee alludes to the women using this silence to maintain their secrecy as a calculated move. In adherence with the 'say nothing' republican maxim, the women's archival material was deliberately destroyed. Reinsch's research details that the Cumann na mBan leadership experienced a change from being based in the south-west of Ireland to the north. The transfer of material pertaining to the old leadership in the south-west was requested by the new leadership in the north in approximately 1972, and, that 'all documents be burned for security reasons'.[57] The destruction of the written histories of the political involvement of the women of the Cumann na mBan was a violent rejection of women as political subjects under the guise of

[54] Eileen Brady, et al. *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 223.
[55] Fiona McCann, "Writing by and about Republican Women Prisoners: Wilful Subjects", *Irish University Review,* 47 (2017): 506.
[56] Dieter Reinisch, "*Cumann na mBan* & Women in Irish Republican Paramilitary Organisations, 1969 – 1986." *Estudios Irlandeses* 11 (2016): 151-152.
[57] Ibid, 152.

security. This lack of public communication from the group coupled with the commitment to destroying these internal communications has left Cumann na mBan absent from the conflict narratives.[58]

Both the lack of records for the Cumann na mBan organisation and their commitment to 'saying nothing' have led to misinterpretation. Reinisch's retrospective interviews with ex-members of the organisation seeks to remedy this erasure. As part of this project he highlights the errors in interchanging 'Cumann na mBan*'* with 'women of the I.R.A'. He wrote: 'Indeed, women were allowed to join the I.R.A. from September 1970 on, though Cumann na mBan has remained a separate organisation up until today [2016]'.[59] In 1970 the organisation receded in numbers due to women in the north being welcomed into the ranks of the I.R.A., however, it continued to operate within the Republic of Ireland. Echoing this confusion, Colin Coulter makes this error in arguing that 'the role that women have played in the political violence of the last three decades has been *strictly secondary*'.[60] Coulter couples the existence of the auxiliary Cumann na mBan with 'the likes of the Price sisters, Mairead Farrell and Evelyn Glenholmes'.[61] Each of these women which Coulter identifies took part in active and prominent roles within the I.R.A. during the conflict: Respectively, the Old Bailey and Whitehall bombings in 1973, planting a bomb in the Conway Hotel in Dunmurry, and a high-profile case for extradition for nine charges, including murder. This contention that the republican women were all 'strictly secondary' in their roles in the conflict is a common misunderstanding about the women of the I.R.A.[62] This error, though, contributes to an erasure through language, which amounts to a mis-designation that pays no heed to the variety of women's roles in the conflict.

[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid, 151.
[60] Colin Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society: An Introduction,* (Dublin: Pluto Press, 1999), 131. Emphasis added.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

Despite these gendered resistances to women in the struggle, both from society as a whole and within the I.R.A. itself, women *did* take part in the conflict; through organisation of marches in support of the hunger strikes and dirty protests, on committees created to oppose internment, but crucially, they were equal in their involvement in most of the same protests the men in Long Kesh did: no-work, no-wash, hunger strike and dirty protest. Begoña Aretxaga argued: 'The dirty protest provoked an inexpressible horror and a rising spiral of violence inside and outside the jails. If the men's dirty protest was incomprehensible, the women's was unthinkable'.[63] Women were not passive in the communities which they inhabited: far from it, women took up arms in the Republican I.R.A. to defend their civil rights; they marched for fairer jobs and housing; they were at the political forefront not only standing up to politicians but to paramilitaries in their own areas, in organisation of marches against internment and against the Official I.R.A'.s murder of a local solider William Best in Derry in 1972.

The next chapter examines the intersection between testimony and literature of jail writings beyond the prison. In addressing this erasure, I present and analyse testimonies from prisoners in Armagh Gaol from 1969 to 1986 and consider the significance in the silencing of this particular element of women's history.

[63] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 129

Chapter 2: In Their Own Words: Life-writing of Armagh Gaol as Active Resistance

There is an abundance of writing on the history of the republican men's protests in Long Kesh, particularly in the form of journalist David Beresford's *Ten Men Dead*, Tim Pat Coogan's many works on the I.R.A. (not least his book length study of the Blanket Protest in *On the Blanket*) and the plethora of works by Richard English to name but a few.[1] The necessary examination of the significance of the women's bodily protests has not received such detailed analysis to date. The work of Theresa O'Keefe, Mary Corcoran and Laura Weinstein have been integral in my approach to this topic, however, their work takes a largely sociological analysis of the women in Armagh Gaol. This chapter explores the written works of nationalist women, particularly republican, who engage in creating memory-texts of prison protests in the form of life story-telling. These texts, I argue, unsettle the masculinised narratives of republican history through their autobiographical descriptions of the feminine protest.

There is a preoccupation in republicanism with a given text's veracity. As such, David Lloyd's *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* locates 'verisimilitude' as a central concern within Irish writing in 'which narrative of 'Irishness' comes to seem self-evident, normative, truthful'.[2] He argued that: 'Control of narratives is a crucial function of the state apparatus since its political and legal frameworks can only gain consent and legitimacy if the tale they tell monopolizes the field of probabilities. The state does not simply legislate and police against particular infringements, it determines the forms within which representation can take place'.[3] This control of whose stories can be told, whose stories are given primacy and who gets to tell the stories is a critical concern for this thesis's approach to these political narratives. Further

[1] Beresford, *Ten Men Dead;* Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket* (Dublin: Ward River, 1980); English, *Armed Struggle.*
[2] David Lloyd. *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), 6.
[3] Ibid.

to this Lachlan Whalen argued: 'Works by incarcerated Republican women in particular have not received the attention that they deserve… For Ireland to move toward what I pray will be a new era, silence must become a thing of the past'.[4] This chapter is an examination of these silenced republican women's writing in a bid to extrapolate these stories out of representational oblivion. These texts serve, in varying ways, to unsettle the dominant narratives and in doing so give a new 'verisimilitude' of 'narratives of Irishness'.[5]

I have identified that the women's stories come in two forms: that which is mediated through another and testimony on their own behalf. The former takes on the act of speaking for the 'subaltern', in Spivak's sense of the term; by this I mean those without any ability to speak for themselves.[6] The republican women by virtue of being incarcerated are rendered unable to speak for themselves and in this way the women are subaltern. This mediation of another's lived experience will be examined in the following chapter on Margaretta D'Arcy's *Tell Them Everything: A Sojourn in the Prison of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in Ard Macha (Armagh)* and Nell McCafferty's *Armagh Women*.

This chapter examines how the women prisoners wrote of their experiences of their time in Armagh Gaol in their own words primarily within the collection *In The Footsteps of Anne*. In this collection, published in 2011, there is a fusion of retrospective memories recounted and also contemporaneous correspondence with the prisoners, in the form of letters, reproduced for the collection. The introduction to the book opens with the objective of the project: 'Our aim is to try and rectify the mistakes of the past by making this book as inclusive as possible'.[7] They state that prior to this intervention republican history had included women on the basis of exceptionalism, for example in celebration of women such as Constance Markiewicz. In response to this, they

[4] Lachlan Whalen, *Contemporary Irish Republican Prison Writing: Writing and Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 14.
[5] Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, 6.
[6] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 66-111.
[7] Evelyn Brady et al., *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 15.

wrote: 'There are many women who have been written out of history and their stories will never be told'.[8] Instead, this collection seeks to voice the experiences of a multitude of women who were imprisoned in the north of Ireland. This chapter argues that these mediations and writings have sought to write women back into the history of nationalism in the north of Ireland, and in doing so, writing itself becomes a mode of feminist resistance. O'Keefe argued that writing and representation is crucial to nationhood and identity: 'To imagine a nation is to narrate its history and determine who the nation collectively honours, grieves for and remembers. Collective hero-worship, both in conflict to bolster morale and as memory work for societies in transition, sustains the nation by reminding its members of their place within it and the assorted roles they are expected to perform'.[9] In this way the women's voices expressed in the following section take ownership of writing their own narrative and in so doing, carve out an undeniable role within the republican history of the northern conflict.

As Lachlan Whalen argued, by virtue of the prisoner being within the prison complex at the time of writing it means that the form in which the story is told, usually via communications smuggled out of prison on cigarette paper, has been seen as unfitting for the archive and/or consideration for inclusion in the 'canon' of Irish literature.[10] He argued that, due to the nature of smuggling texts out of jail via bodily cavities, an uncleanliness is attached to their treatment within literary studies generally.[11] In addressing this, Whalen designates two groupings for jail literature: that which is written within the prison structure which in turn does not lend itself to editing or restructuring, and that which is created beyond the prison.[12] This chapter considers the latter, but proposes a distinction within it between those texts written by the prisoner in self-reflection and that of journalistic texts written as a medium to tell another's story. My focus is on three texts

[8] Ibid.
[9] Theresa O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 100.
[10] Lachlan Whalen, *Contemporary Irish Republican Prison Writing*, 2
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid, 107.

which were written beyond the prison walls about the protests in Armagh Gaol; firstly, retrospective retelling of personal experiences of the prison in *In the Footsteps of Anne* and through the Prisons Memory Archive held in Queen's University Belfast; secondly, Chapter Three will examine Margaretta D'Arcy's voyeuristic jail-text *Tell Them Everything,* in which she retrospectively recorded observations of the protest while she was in prison, alongside Nell McCafferty's journalistic accounts of the protest in *Armagh Women.* These narratives are a form of active resistance against the dominant, masculinised narratives of the conflict, such as *Bobby Sands: 66 Days* and the historical accounts of the 'Troubles' which tend to focus on the men in Long Kesh.

In the Footsteps of Anne (2011)

The autobiographical testimonies of republican women prisoners contained in *In the Footsteps of Anne: Stories of Republican Women Ex-Prisoners*, situated the Armagh women as 'repeating history' within a long line of republican women incarcerated for their political beliefs.[13] The women write of the lack of acknowledged experience, particularly due to gendered biases within the republican movement:

> Even though the women had proven throughout history that they had the courage and stamina to use physical force and fight alongside their male comrades, nevertheless many males still held the view that women were not capable of pursuing an active role in the fight of Irish freedom and should play a more subordinate role.[14]

The collection, created by Eileen Brady, intended to rectify the silencing of women in narrating the recent past. The naming of the collection is significant in this context. It is in reference to Anne Devlin, a prisoner who endured torture while imprisoned in Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin, after what became known as Robert Emmett's rebellion in 1803.[15] Devlin's experiences of prison hardship

[13] Evelyn Brady et al. *In the Footsteps of Anne,* (Belfast: Shanway Press, 2011).
[14] Ibid, 17.
[15] Marianne Elliott, "Robert Emmett: The Making of a Legend" *The British Academy Review.* Issue 8. (2005). Accessed on April 26, 2020. https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/09-elliott.pdf

resonated with the republican women of the 'Troubles' conflict. It is this tradition of resistance that *In the Footsteps of Anne* emulates. The aims of the collection are inherently feminist in that the objective is to achieve equality between the genders; the project sought to unsettle masculine dominance within the republican movements.

The stories collated in the book form a series of memory-texts of the era. These memory-texts sketch a new understanding of the prison conditions through a gendered lens. Lachlan Whalen argued:

> Jail literature reverses the panopticon, fragmenting the state's attempts to appear unassailably unified. The carceral regime gazes into the cell, but in the case of the Republican PoWs whose work this book examines, the cell gazes back, defiant. In effect, when prison writing exits the carceral space and is published outside, the cell becomes the observation tower in which the world outside scrutinizes the disciplinary regime.[16]

This is significant as *In the Footsteps of Anne* offered a new gendered perspective on the prison conditions during the conflict. The Foucauldian understanding of the relationship between dominance, power and gaze is subverted by the women who write their lived experiences. Specifically, the understanding of power is heightened by the act of viewing. Those who hold the ability to watch another also hold power. The women through writing their experiences give visibility to the gendered hardships of prison. By extension they invite scrutiny of the prison institution. This collection broke new ground in its objective of reversing the prison panopticon, not only from the jail out, but also within the movement itself. The women alter the gaze of prison experiences by expanding the narrative to encompass their stories. As I have explored in Chapter 1, the representations of prison experiences largely centres around Long Kesh, particularly the experience of Bobby Sands and the male protestors. In response to this, the women write themselves into the prison narratives through this collection. Fiona McCann noted that there are very few mentions of men beyond the 1981 hunger strikers within the testimony collection *In the*

[16] Lachlan Whalen, *Contemporary Irish Republican Prison Writing,* 6.

Footsteps of Anne; Instead, 'the emphasis [was] clearly placed on the links binding the women'.[17] It is illuminating and damning of the republican movement that this collection of testimonies is not already incorporated into the annals of dominant republican narratives; for example, from Bobby Sands's autobiographical text *One Day in My Life* to the numerous books written about and by the previous long-term leader of Sinn Féin Gerry Adams.[18]

February 1980: The Beginning of the dirty protest

February 8th, 1980 is a significant date within republican women's history as it marks the beginning of the chain of events which led to the so-called dirty protest in Armagh Gaol. Prison guards carried out a search on the prison cells to find black berets and other items of clothing which could be used in prison yard commemorations.[19] The women report that this raid escalated into violence during which many women were hurt physically and humiliated.[20] Subsequently, the women's no work protest intensified into a no wash protest in response to prison warder violence and denial of toilet facilities; this led to the dirty protest which lasted for thirteen months and was carried out by thirty women.[21]

The reason the prison guards raided the cells was in search of contraband, specifically clothing which could be used in commemorative marches in the prison yard. Items of clothing are emblems of political resistance or political markers; the bowler hat and the sash are to unionism what the black beret and wearing of the Easter lily are to republicanism. That is to say, that these items are loaded with symbolic meanings of identity, politics and resistance. One prisoner, Anne

[17] Fiona McCann, "Commitment and Poetic Justice: Irish Republican Women's Prison Writing," in *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 38, No.1 (2015): 59.
[18] See: Bobby Sands, *One Day in My Life* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1983); Gerry Adams, *Cage Eleven: Writings from Prison* (Dingle: Brandon, 1990); Gerry Adams, *Hope and History* (Dingle: Brandon, 2004).
[19] Nell McCafferty, *Armagh Women* (Dublin: Co-Op Books, 1981).
[20] Ibid.
[21] Christina Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," In *British Feminist Thought: A Reader*. Ed. Terry Lovell. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 171.

Marie Quinn, described being attacked by prison guards in February 1980 while she and other prisoners queued for a meal: 'There were a lot of injuries. This was done just to remove any black clothes we had; we wore black clothes for Easter Commemorations and to commemorate our dead comrades'.[22] The women, who were able to wear their own clothes, were in essence attacked for the politicisation of clothing. It is due to this that clothing became a symbolic battleground for republican prisoners within Armagh Gaol. Nell McCafferty wrote: 'The wearing of this makeshift uniform was a symbolic rejection of the criminal status which the authorities had imposed on them, and a palpable projection of the women's own self-image as political prisoners'.[23] The body, to invoke Yuval-Davis' terminology, is a symbolic 'battleground of meaning'.[24] It is important to note that while the women were attacked for wearing clothes deemed by the prison authorities to be illegal, the men in Long Kesh were also embroiled in a battle on the basis of clothing (amongst the other four demands). In *In the Footsteps of Anne,* Mairead Farrell wrote of the situation: 'It's been six weeks now since it all started [since February 1980] from the day the male screws rushed onto the wing… our comrades in the H Blocks lie with only a blanket. At least we have our clothes'.[25] While the women were allowed to wear their own clothes, they were not allowed the freedom to choose any clothing deemed political by the authorities. In this sense there was a decree on what was acceptable to clothe the female body in within the prison site.

The violent nature of the events in February 1980 show explicitly the forms of sexual assault which were committed on the women prisoners. I echo Fiona McCann's argument that the testimonies within *In the Footsteps of Anne* do not explicitly describe what happened as gendered violence or sexual assault, instead as McCann argued, the women were invested in denying gender as a differentiation between them and their male comrades. She argued that the women in Armagh did not consider themselves as victims: 'their frequent reaffirmation of commitment to

[22] Evelyn Brady et al., *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 186.
[23] Nell McCafferty, 'I think Armagh is a Feminist Issue'. *Irish Times*, August 22nd, 1980.
[24] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 41.
[25] Evelyn Brady et al., *In the Footsteps of Anne*, 214.

republicanism, many women prisoners also give expression to the various forms of violence to which they are subjected both at the hands of both prison warders and in their own personal lives'.[26] Instead, McCann suggests that the writing of sexual difference, and in particular gendered violence, are 'recourse to euphemism when [these] difficult subjects are broached'.[27] Moreover, the prisoner Eilís O'Connor wrote:

> One of them jumped on her [Anne Marie Quinn] to hold her down while two of them, along with four female officers, lifted me by the legs and arms and trailed me from the cell and down the stairs… I was lying on the floor [of the cell] where they had thrown me and one of the male officers booted me in the back before he went out. I then got up to see if I had any bruises. I saw that my blouse was torn and the buttons were missing off the front'.[28]

The insinuation is that with the buttons missing, her bra and chest are revealed against her will. The violent attack is an act of bodily violation which removes the woman's autonomy over her body and denying her consent. This ripping of female prisoners clothing during the February 1980 incident is echoed in other prisoners' accounts too. Similarly, O'Connor remembers of the same day witnessing the abuse of another prisoner, named only as Rosie:

> They got Rosie and they deliberately pulled Rosie's jumper up and her whole breasts were exposed and they trailed her out and down stairs. Her head was banging off the stairs. They were just dragging her along so her head would hit the stairs.[29]

The exposing of the women's breasts in an attack amounts to sexual assault. The women's bodies are physically immobilised and exposed; the panopticon is employed and sexualised in that the female body is made totally visible in an act of dominance. Michel Foucault theorised that the incarcerated body can be manipulated and controlled to give a desired outcome for the prison. He wrote:

> A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved…To begin with, there was the scale of the control: it was a question not of treating the body, *en masse*, 'wholesale', as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it 'retail', individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of

[26] Fiona McCann, "Commitment and Poetic Justice: Irish Republican Women's Prison Writing" in *Commonwealth essays and Studies* 1. no. 38. (2015): 58.
[27] Ibid, 59.
[28] Eileen Brady et al., *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 198 – 199.
[29] Ibid, 201.

> obtaining holds upon it as the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body.[30]

The prison guards through immobilising the body render the women as 'docile bodies' which are subdued. The body is manipulated via sexual assault through the invasion and removal of clothing without consent.

Quinn described the subsequent events following this attack as akin to 'petty torture'.[31] Of the attack, she reports that she was then locked in a cell, in which she had no visibility of the attacks on the other women. She was then taken from the cell: 'I shouted, 'Are you alright?' [to the other women] and then I had to keep my mouth shut for the next five minutes while they held me because, if I'd opened my mouth, I would have screamed and that's what they wanted because they kept twisting my wrists until I thought they were broken'.[32] The trauma theorist Elaine Scarry's theory of the link between voice, power and torture is key in my approach to these events. She wrote: 'In torture, it is in part the obsessive display of agency that permits one person's body to be translated into another person's voice, that allows real human pain to be converted into a regime's fiction of power'.[33] In this, the torturer exerts pain onto another person to retrieve a sought outcome; in other words, the objective of their actions is to cause enough pain to garner the tortured person to use their own voice against their will. In these situations of interrogation for information, the torturer seeks to take control of the narrative; while the torturer may not choose the words, they direct the content of the narrative. The torturer's actions seek to destroy the power of the voice by rendering it absent: 'The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice *absent* by destroying it'.[34] Scarry suggests that the torturer aims to remove totally the prisoner's agency in speaking, and instead to make the prisoner speak the words they want to hear. Moreover, Scarry

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[30] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Penguin, 1991), 136 - 137.
[31] Eileen Brady et al., *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 186.
[32] Ibid, 187 – 188.
[33] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 18.
[34] Ibid, 49.

describes 'the body, the locus of pain, and the voice, the locus of power' and that 'a large part of the mime of power emerges out of the opposition of body and voice'.[35] Through the form of resistance writing exemplified in *In the Footsteps of Anne* this narrative is reversed. The tension between who gets to speak, what is said, and whose body is inflicting/feeling pain is key to the power dynamics within torture. The use of voice, particularly, is pertinent as during the police interrogations the republican women who write their stories are proud to assert that they did not confess, or speak in turn against another, during the torture. Instead, the republican women begin to use their voice to construct a new understanding of their experiences, and in turn, subvert the power dynamics. There is a sacredness around the control over their own voice, specifically in 'holding their tongue' when under the pressure of interrogation; the prisoners obtain a sense of power through this choice of when to use their voice.

Hunger Strike, 1980

As explored in Chapter 1, the women's involvement in hunger strikes is often absent from the historical narrative. The first hunger strike protest in 1980 involved both male prisoners in HMP Maze/Long Kesh and the women in Armagh Gaol. This protest saw three Armagh prisoners, Mairead Farrell, Mary Doyle, and Mairead Nugent, join their male comrades on the hunger protest in December 1980. The leadership of the I.R.A. were not supportive of the women going on the 1980 hunger strike. Mary Doyle's account in *In the Footsteps of Anne* details how 'they tried to deter them' by sending information on the bodily ramifications of a prolonged hunger strike into the jail.[36] As has been explored in Chapter 1, Mary Doyle argued that this was a comradely concern. However, the jubilant response of Bobby Sands to the women abstaining from the protest coupled

[35] Ibid, 51; 45.
[36] Brady et al, *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 223.

with the information on the protest's effects on the body amounts to a sexist deterrent which is caused by its basis in misogyny.

The prison guards tested the resilience of the republican women protestors by tempting them with unusually appetising meals which were presented in their cells. During an interview for the Prisons Memory Archive, Mary Doyle remembers: 'Jail food is notorious for being rotten, but the ironic thing was, that when we went on hunger strike the cell was never without food'.[37] Despite this attempt by the guards to disrupt the protest, the three women refused food for 19 days which took place in their cells '24 hours a day' until information was received that a deal meeting the five demands had been agreed.[38] This agreement was reneged upon by the British state shortly after the hunger strike ended. It is worth noting, too, that when the prison officials told the women that the strike had ended in the men's prison the women remained steadfast in their resolve to carry on the protest for a further 24 hours until official word had been received from the republican leadership.

Moreover, a female republican hunger strike was initiated in Brixton, England by the Price sisters. Marian and Dolours Price undertook the hunger strike while they were held in Brixton prison for their involvement in the Old Bailey and Whitehall bombings in 1973. The sisters were sentenced to two life terms in prison and partook in the protest in a bid to be repatriated to prison in the north of Ireland. The prison authorities force-fed the women for six months before eventually returning them to Armagh Gaol in 1975. The Price sisters' hunger strike in Brixton lasted 200 days during 167 of which they were force fed multiple times each day. Marian said that

[37] [The text originally presented here cannot be made freely available via LJMU E-Theses Collection. The text was sourced at Prisons Memory Archive, Belfast.]
[38] The protests in Armagh Gaol and Long Kesh/ HMP Maze were for the British Government to grant five demands. These rights demanded were: not to wear a prison uniform; not to do prison work; free association; one visit, one letter and one parcel per week; and restoration of remission lost through prison protest.

both she and her sister 'had a very false relationship with food and eating' because of their experience in England.[39]

[The text originally presented here cannot be made freely available via LJMU E-Theses Collection. The text was sourced at Prisons Memory Archive, Belfast.]

This experience of hunger strike far exceeds the often mythologised 66 days duration of Bobby Sands's fatal hunger strike fast, which ultimately resulted in his death. The hunger strikes of the women, both the Price sisters and the 1980 hunger strikers, did not enter the republican hagiography in the same way as that of Bobby Sands. This can be understood as a popularised rejection of the feminine rebellion against imperialism.

Further, the critic Edna Longley criticised the women's involvement in the republican movement as she argued they were supporting a cause that was inherently anti-feminist. In her essay 'From Cathleen to Anorexia', she used the Paul Muldoon poem 'Aisling' as an origin from which to theorise the women's roles in the conflict. Muldoon equated the ideological Irish nationalism with a personification of the physically deteriorating disease 'Anorexia', which he presents as a satire of a feminine myth.[40] Further, Muldoon's title, 'Aisling', alludes to the tradition within Irish literature of a dream or vision, which he subverts through the alignment with disease:

> Was she Aurora, or the goddess Flora,
> Artemidora, or Venus bright,
> or Anorexia, who left
> a lemon stain on my flannel sheet?
> It's all much of a muchness.[41]

The mythological women he wrote of correspond to images of regeneration: Aurora linked to the regeneration of new light in the dawn; the goddess Flora in that of the plant kingdom; Venus the

[39] [The text originally presented here cannot be made freely available via LJMU E-Theses Collection. The text was sourced at Prisons Memory Archive, Belfast.]
[40] Edna Longley, "From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands," In *The Living Stream: Literature & Revisionism in Ireland* (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), 173.
[41] "Aisling by Paul Muldoon," *Troubles Archive*. Accessed on: 10/12/2019
http://www.troublesarchive.com/artforms/poetry/piece/aisling

goddess of fertility and love; and lastly, the mummified Artemidora whose casket shows markings from 90 – 100 A.D. which denote rebirth. Muldoon criticised the legitimacy of these images by pairing them with that of Anorexia who has left a bodily fluid (possibly urine or bile) on the bedsheets. Muldoon argued that any imagery steeped in mythology is in vain. He wrote of nationalism not as ideology but as the infected body in a state of deterioration. He chose to portray the rejection of death and the cessation of the protest:

> In Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital
>
> a kidney machine
>
> supports the latest hunger striker
>
> to call off his strike.[42]

From this poem, Longley wrote: 'Anorexia' is thus Cathleen Ni Houlihan in a terminal condition… Perhaps Anorexia should, rather, personify Irish women themselves: starved and repressed by patriarchies like Unionism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Nationalism'.[43] Longley criticised both the ideologies which silence women's voices in Northern Ireland and the women's allegiance to them. Rather than the deteriorating body of the hunger strikers symbolising nationalism, the emaciated female body is symbolic of the woman's role within Northern Ireland. Longley argued that the decomposition of the female body in support of a patriarchal cause instead limits the women to acting as conduits for masculine heroism. However, this denies the women any agency in their own actions. The *In the Footsteps of Anne* collection challenges the understanding that women were not instrumental within the republican movement.

[42] Ibid.
[43] Longley, "From Cathleen to Anorexia," 173.

Strip-searching

A key theme for exploration is the practice of strip-searching the women prisoners in Armagh Gaol. Strip searching as a policy was introduced in 1982 in response to a non-political prisoner being found with guard's keys on them. Reports show that the contraband gleaned from the strip searches were inoffensive (for example, perfume and small amounts of money).[44] The National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) argued in 1986 that there was no security gain in carrying out these searches.[45] In essence, the searches were carried out as a form of bodily control over the women. This control, despite being a violation against the physical body, was also a form of psychological torture. Further criticism of the strip-searching policy came from Father Denis Faul's pamphlet *The Stripping Naked of Women Prisoners in Armagh Prison: 1982 – 1983* which collated the outcries from a variety of people, from Kevin McNamara (the M.P. for Hull, England) to Monsignor Raymond Murray's letter addressed to the Armagh Senate of Priests; all of the voices gathered in the collection were united in outrage at the conditions in which the women in Armagh were subjected and called upon the British state to bring an end to the ill treatment.[46]

The women were subjected to bodily humiliations in the form of weekly strip-searching for remand prisoners who were on their way to court appearances. Humiliation through this act of forced bodily exposure was a tool used to keep the prisoners under the control of the prison regime. Evidence of this is seen through the prison policy which required new prisoners to take a bath in view of the prison warders. Evelyn Gilroy who was a prisoner in Armagh Gaol in 1974 writes of this form of body shaming: 'I was made to take the obligatory shower with carbolic soap, screen for lice and given a full body search by three female screws who probed me for any

[44] National Council for Civil Liberties, *Strip Searching: An Inquiry into the Strip Searching Women Remand Prisoners at Armagh Prison between 1982 – 1985*. British Library, London, England.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Father Denis Faul, *The Stripping Naked of Women Prisoners in Armagh Prison: 1982 – 1983*. Linenhall Library, Belfast. (Easter 1983).

distinguishing marks. Total humiliation!'[47] Angela Smyth, sentenced to Armagh Gaol in 1975, described witnessing the humiliation of other prisoners when she entered prison for the first time:

> I had heard about this bath but to me it was a relief to get a bath and get a change of clothes. I had my menstrual cycle while in Tennant Street and for two days I was not allowed to change. I couldn't wait to get out of my filthy clothes. After I had my bath, I was left standing there with just a towel wrapped around me. There was another young girl there and she was about eight and a half months pregnant. The screws were asking her if she had any birth marks on her body but the poor girl couldn't answer them because she was crying so much… The next thing I knew they just pulled the towel from her and left her standing there naked while they were questioning her… This was so degrading for us.[48]

The woman, who covered herself in a towel in an attempt to conceal her vulnerable body, was exposed to not only the prison warders but also to Smyth who witnessed the abuse. As in all of these instances, the body is used as a means of abasement against the prisoners, however, in Smyth's description the humiliation is compounded through the observed pregnant body. This spectated humiliation is an act of torture, as Elaine Scarry argued when discussing the mechanisms of torture:

> Torture is in its largest outlines the invariable and simultaneous occurrence of three phenomena which, if isolated into separate and sequential steps, would occur in the following order. First, pain is inflicted on a person in ever-intensifying ways. Second, the pain, continually amplified within the person's body, is also amplified in the sense that it is objectified, made visible to those outside the person's body. Third, the objectified pain is denied as pain and read as power, a translation made possible by the obsessive mediation of agency.[49]

The experience of humiliation that Smyth witnesses follows Scarry's theory of the tripartite processes of torture. Particularly that of infliction, amplification and denial which results in the destruction of agency. In this case of Armagh Gaol, the pain is caused through humiliation, amplified through the feeling of shame that is heightened by the fact that the torture is witnessed by a collective. This is exactly what occurs for Smyth when she is witness to the humiliation of another woman. In this way, the act of spectatorship and the visibility of the victim is central to the power dynamics of this act of torture.

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[47] Brady et al, *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 41.
[48] Ibid, 109 – 110.
[49] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 113.

Further, the deliberate removal of sight during the searches is employed as an act of power over the women. The use of prevented vision is a powerful tool to subdue the women prisoners. Former prisoner Jennifer McCann wrote that this was a distressing method of attack: 'During the strip-search they would have put a towel around your head so you could not see who was doing the search and could not identify the screws that were searching you. They literally spread-eagled you and held you down on the floor and ripped the clothes from your back'.[50] She described this as 'humiliating and traumatising'.[51] Through the act of blindfolding the prisoner, the guards demobilise the body by limiting the perceptive sense. It forces a disorientating disconnect between what is felt and what is seen. Foucault argued that visibility is central in enactments of power dominance:

> He [the prisoner] is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject of communication…Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so.[52]

In this way the prison guards use (denied) visibility in an act of dominance. The women's bodies become a site for information, by way of finding out about possible contraband within the prison, and to do so the prisoner's entire body is seen, and in the instance of Jennifer McCann, she cannot see those who search her.

This interplay between the visible and invisible is a gothic trope which the literary critic and theorist Margot Backus argued is an apt prism to consider the Armagh strip searches. Backus wrote:

> Strip searches of women prisoners in Armagh and Brixton Prisons have weighed subliminally or acutely on the minds of many Irish men and women on both sides of the border… The use of gothic conventions by republican cultural producers and their supporters, who surmounted extraordinary

[50] Brady et al, *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 210 – 211,
[51] Ibid, 211.
[52] Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 200 - 201

> obstacles to make these issues visible and comprehensible, may be responsible to some extent for the extensive transformation that these years have wrought in the Irish political landscape.[53]

This brings to mind the image of the woman in Armagh Gaol photographed while two prison guards searched her. This image (see Figure 4) was allegedly taken by another prisoner on a smuggled camera.[54] John Berger wrote: 'Seeing comes before words… We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice'.[55] In other words, there is an immediacy in the conveyance of a

Figure 4: Strip Search in Armagh Gaol. Evelyn Brady et al. *In the Footsteps of Anne* (Belfast: Shanway Press, 2011), 246.

[53] Margot Gayle Backus, *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* (Durham and London: Duke University, 1999), 245.
[54] Brady et al., *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 246.
[55] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008 [1972]), 7.

message through image. Similarly, Roland Barthes argued: 'the photograph is a certain but fugitive testimony… The age of revolutions, contestations, assassinations, explosions, in short of impatiences'.[56] It is in this way that the image of the naked woman being searched by three prison warders in Armagh Gaol immediately unsettles. The women prisoners through the released image subvert the visibility power dynamic. Rather than submitting to the intended humiliation by the guards of exposing the naked body, the women show their naked body to expose the cruelty of the prison guards.

The issue of prison guards strip searching the women prisoners arose after the policy of strip searching came into force on November 1982. Remand prisoners were strip-searched on their exit and entry to the prison on their weekly trips to the court. One remand prisoner, Maureen O'Neill, was strip searched 82 times before being acquitted of the charges.[57] This became a long-standing issue within both the republican and feminist movement through to the 1990s. The focus on female bodily invasion is extended through the details of the arrest of then 18-year-old Patricia Moore from Dunmurry. During her interrogation, Moore was forcibly strip searched.[58] This involved the tying of her hands and ankles with handcuffs. The woman described being stripped by women soldiers who were directed by a male soldier:

> I struggled and kicked like mad but eventually they managed to get me up onto the table… the black soldier was holding my arms and he asked one of the women to hold them so he could search me. He said he could not get at me so he took the handcuffs off my ankles and he put his finger inside me; I was crying with the pain; they turned me over and did it again; during this they were shouting and yelling at me.[59]

[56] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 1993 [1980]), 93 – 94.
[57] "Security or Subjugation?" *Women's News*, December 1984, 4. Author's Collection.
[58] 'Women Against Strip-searching in Armagh' was formed in 1985 in opposition to the gendered harassment in the prison. Reminiscent of the W.A.I. campaign, the group argue that the act of a woman stripping or being forcibly stripped to reveal the naked female body is a feminist issue. This encompasses: the use of force by prison warders; prostitution for financial gain; and women stripping themselves naked to criticise their own bodies while aiming for an unattainable body like those portrayed through the media. 'Stripping in Armagh Jail: A Feminist Issue', Women Against Strip-searching in Armagh. n. d. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[59] Women Against Imperialism. British Library, London, England.

This testimony depicts graphic sexualised violence against a prisoner; the woman's body was forcibly restrained and invaded causing her great pain. It is notable that despite the harrowing accounts of violence against women, such as Moore's, the N.I.W.R.M. remain uncommitted until 1985 to publicly stand in opposition. The *Women's News* publication collated some of the testimonies of women repeatedly stripped naked while on remand:

> I was stripped naked to confront me with their control, to enforce on me my own vulnerability, to degrade me. But they were not going to succeed. I saw my nakedness as an indictment against them. They thought my womanhood would serve to defeat me. They didn't understand that the strength of ideals cannot be stripped from one's mind.[60]

Republican politician and hunger striker, Terence MacSwiney, who died as a result of his protest in Brixton Prison in 1920, stated that: 'It is not those who inflict the most but those who endure the most will conquer'.[61] It is in this tradition of endurance in the face of overwhelming power that the women's protests in Armagh Gaol drew strength from. However, the use of the female body as an 'indictment' against the state opens a gendered element; the naked female body became a weapon against the colonial British State. The invasion element of strip searching is evident when an ex-prisoner writes: **'**They weren't content to jibe at my naked state, they had to 'search' me. A skin search.'[62] The use of the term skin search here creates a greater intensity of violation; it is not only the removal of clothes, but an examination of the surface of the body itself. It implies the invasion through being felt, touched. The violation is escalated from the visible to the tangible. There is a shift from the Benthamite panoptical form of control towards a pan-tangible form of coercive control;[63] the body is an element which can be searched inside and out in this paradigm of control. The visibility of the naked body and the associated vulnerability is a mechanism of control; however, the women refused to submit to this. This is extended as the prison guards were nearly always from the Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist (PUL) demographic, so the element of

[60] *Women's News,* May/June 1984. Author's Collection.
[61] Terence MacSwiney, *Principles of Freedom* (Cork: Cork City Libraries, 2005 [1921]), vii.
[62] *Women's News,* May/June 1984. Author's Collection.
[63] Jeremy Bentham, "Panopticon, or, the Inspection House" in *Jeremy Bentham: Selected Writings*. ed. Stephen G. Engelmann (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011 [1791]), 283 – 290.

sectarianism, based on the climate of imperialist suppression of the nationalist community, is evident here.

Prisons Memory Archive

A key archive used during my research documents the retrospective memories of ex-prisoners revisiting the prison sites they were held in during the 'Troubles' conflict. The Prisons Memory Archive, created by academics at Queen's University Belfast, uses physical space as a catalyst for memory to aid the story-telling experience. In doing this, the archived material follows the interviewees around the H.M.P. Maze/Long Kesh and Armagh Gaol sites as they are interviewed by a camera person. The interviewee walks freely around the prison site, revisiting communal areas and entering prison cells which they previously occupied. The tapes document a variety of interviewees from prisoners, prison warders and visitors to the prison. It is notable that the content of this archive differs considerably from Nell McCafferty's *Armagh Women*. McCafferty's account of the events in Armagh takes on a journalistic approach. The information is gleaned through interviews and synthesised for the 'headline' approach, and in doing this, portrays the inhumanity of conditions contemporaneously. The task of the Prisons Memory Archive, instead, is that of an oral history project. On the archive's website, the mode of recording is detailed as: 'Drawing on the oral-history tradition of life-storytelling, with its open ended approach as opposed to leading questions, the PMA attempts to minimise the levels of mediation between participant and filmmaker and viewer.'[64] The retrospective recall conjured by visits to the sites in the Prisons Memory Archive tapes lends to a range of memories, from the mundane to the extraordinary historical events of the conflict. The former mundanity is seen in numerous accounts of chores, showering and usage of the television room, all of which are discussed often throughout the tapes.

[64] "The Ethical Framework", Prisons Memory Archive. Accessed on April 26, 2020. https://prisonsmemoryarchive.com/aboutpma/

The acts of every-day 'normality' associated with the outside world appear incongruous in the prison setting.

The prisoners' sense of displacement is intensified when the subject of the pregnant in-mate and then the captive mother are broached in the interviews. If the 'criminal woman' is one that crosses boundaries within the normal social codes for the Northern Irish woman, then the pregnant woman incarcerated is extreme in its societal impropriety. The maternal body constitutes a life-giving entity and is often associated with an instinct for protection; the stereotypically opposing categories of 'mother' and 'violence' are not compatible with the patriarchal views of women's passive roles within society. This image of the presence of the maternal incarcerated body within an oppressive prison regime is missing from the broader historical narrative of the 'Troubles'. Within the Prisons Memory Archive, an interviewee tells of being only a couple of weeks pregnant when she was sentenced at 19-years-old to imprisonment in Armagh Gaol. On the subject of going into labour in the prison, she said:

> [The text originally presented here cannot be made freely available via LJMU E-Theses Collection. The text was sourced at Prisons Memory Archive, Belfast.]

The post-birthing prisoner being forced to walk the lengthy journey back to her cell with vaginal stitches is tantamount to abuse. Similar information was also reported through Sinn Féin's PoW Department pamphlet *'This Baby Is Being Body Searched at Armagh'*.[65] The booklet details the account of the experiences of Jacqueline Moore and her baby in Armagh, including body searches carried out on both. Taken from a letter written from prison, Moore's testimony claims that the prison authorities were 'deliberately trying to harass myself and the baby, hoping to persuade me to send her out to be totally reared by my family'.[66] This pamphlet focuses on the strip searching of mother and baby to the end of separating them. The woman and child in question became the focus of

[65] Sinn Féin PoW Department, *This Baby Is Being Body Searched at Armagh,* 1984. British Library, London, England.
[66] Ibid, 12.

republican propaganda. I have previously argued in Chapter One that the republican movement uses 'politically valuable women' in their imagery; the case of this pamphlet is another example of this. This woman's inclusion, while horrific, is an extension of the gendered capital criteria in the representation of republican women.

These acts of life story telling, from *In the Footsteps of Anne* to the Prisons Memory Archive interviews, serve to illuminate the republican women's experiences as acts of resistance against representational oblivion. However, the *In the Footsteps of Anne* collection of testimonies is out of print thus rendering it as an archival artefact. Likewise, the interviews for the Prisons Memory Archive are kept in a private archive for confidentiality reasons. At the time of writing this thesis, the archive was only available with explicit permission to view the material. So, while the function of these testimonials is to shift the silence, they are in fact hidden.

Chapter 3: Speaking for the Incarcerated Armagh Women: The Journalist Jail Texts of Margaretta D'Arcy and Nell McCafferty

While the previous chapter addressed how the Armagh women represented their experiences in their own words, this chapter will extend the analysis to consider how they were represented by those who elected to speak on their behalf. In doing this, I focus on Margaretta D'Arcy's *Tell Them Everything: A Sojourn in the Prison of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in Ard Macha (Armagh)* and Nell McCafferty's *Armagh Women*.[1] The former is a memoir of D'Arcy's time in prison for an unpaid fine, while the latter is a journalistic account of the political prisoners drawn from interviews with the protestors. This section focuses on the thematic content presented by these two authors in comparison with the depictions of oppression in Chapter 2. I argue that the two texts examined in this chapter offer two opposing types of writing: D'Arcy's text further isolates the republican women from their own story while Nell McCafferty's text acts as a medium for the voicing of their stories.

Margaretta D'Arcy: Tell Them Everything

Margaretta D'Arcy is a playwright from Galway, Republic of Ireland, and a former member of the now defunct republican feminist group, Women Against Imperialism which is discussed in Chapter 4. She is decidedly anti-imperialist and feminist in her political beliefs and philosophy. Her involvement in protests in support of the republican prisoners began when she was doing a literary reading event with northern poet Paul Muldoon in Belfast's Ulster Museum in 1978. During Muldoon's poetry reading, D'Arcy scrawled 'Smash H Block' on a nearby artwork in protest of the lack of engagement in the poet's work with the immediate political unrest.[2] In essence, she was

[1] Nell McCafferty, *Armagh Women* (Dublin: Co-Op Books, 1981).; Margaretta D'Arcy, *Tell Them Everything: A Sojourn in the Prison of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in Ard Macha (Armagh)* (London: Pluto Press, 1981).
[2] Margaretta D'Arcy, *Tell Them Everything* (London: Pluto, 1981), 15.

accusing Muldoon of evading the political situation through his use of obscure historical allegories. This resulted in her arrest by the R.U.C. though she was subsequently released without charge. Her 'sojourn' into Armagh began on Women's Day 3rd March 1979 during a protest held outside Armagh Gaol in support of the women prisoners. The peaceful protestors were attacked and held in custody by the R.U.C. in a police station. Amongst the women arrested – who were nicknamed the 'Armagh Eleven' – were the Women Against Imperialism group, of which, both D'Arcy and Nell McCafferty were members. The group was eventually released, but it transpired after court proceedings that they would have to pay a fine for their involvement in the protest outside the prison site.[3] Two members of the group, Liz LaGrue and D'Arcy, refused to pay the fine and instead opted for imprisonment in Armagh Gaol in support of the republican women held there. D'Arcy lobbied to be transferred to A-Wing where the republican prisoners were held. *Tell Them Everything* aims to report the experiences of the republican prisoners' experience.

During D'Arcy's time in the jail, she fought for a transfer to the political prisoners' wing to go on protest with the republican protestors. The centrality of authorship and authenticity is key in republican literature and, with this in mind, I approach D'Arcy's text with the query as to whom she is speaking *for*. In the opening of her memoir, the account is prefaced with a statement which discloses that 'telling them everything' is a luxury not legally available to those speaking from a republican political standpoint:

> It is not in fact possible to 'tell them everything' because in Britain the intimidating and expensive laws of libel and criminal libel are used by the vested interest of the state as a means of covert censorship. Any truthful book about the oppressive intransigence of the British government's jail policy in the North of Ireland is likely to imperil its publishers and authors. I have regretfully had to accept this.[4]

This cultivates the sense that there has been a great deal which is not able to be said within D'Arcy's text. She wrote of the 'covert censorship' which her writing of the experience was subjected to by British libel laws, though her work omits even the most non-libellous of inferences of the Armagh

[3] D'Arcy, *Tell Them Everything,* 31.
[4] Ibid, Author's Note.

women. Amy Washburn argued that D'Arcy's work synthesises her own experience of the prison with that of the republican women as a stylistic choice: 'D'Arcy is able to include their lives in her work; it brings them the visibility they [the republican women] wanted and deserved, but were unable to achieve themselves while in prison. She uses "we" for this reason'.[5] However, critic Mercedes del Campo del Pozo counters:

> Despite the republican prisoners' request to 'tell everything' when she [D'Arcy] was released, D'Arcy failed to put them on centre stage. Her account is self-centred and extremely subjective as she talks about her own experience rather than the experiences of the prisoners. Her deliberate efforts to enter Armagh and be moved to A Wing as well as her determination to fit in and participate in the protest make us have reservations about her neutrality.[6]

D'Arcy's text aims to 'tell them [the public] everything' about the conditions which are forced upon the women prisoners, though does so unsuccessfully. I agree with del Campo del Pozo's assertion that D'Arcy's 'self-centred' writing of the prison protests effaces the experiences of the republican women. The text encompasses a voyeuristic account of the harrowing experiences of the republican women. The narrative is unsettling in its focus on the author who was (self-admittedly) unaffected by the conflict.

This gaze is that of an outsider gazing in, a spectator. D'Arcy writes a memoir of the dirty protest which lacks the pain evident in the other accounts by the republican political prisoners. It is notable that the playwright's experience omits the humiliations that are commonplace in all other accounts of the prison experience mentioned within this thesis. The republican women through their testimonies report that they were subjected to humiliation, intimidation and hardship due to the prison regime.[7] These themes are completely absent from D'Arcy's memoir. Despite this, she views her own role as situated both within the passive and active form: 'I was not only observer, I was also a participant and I had to retain my own individuality as a civilian. Mairead [Farrell]'s task

[5] Amy Washburn, "Bloody Writing: Troubling History, Rewriting Herstory in Margaretta D'Arcy's *Tell Them Everything*," *Women's Studies* 44, No. 7 (2015): 989.
[6] Mercedes del Campo del Pozo, "'Mother Ireland, get off our backs': Gender, Republicanism and State Politics in Prison Short Stories by Northern Irish Women Writers." *Estudios Irlandes*, No. 9 (2014): 14.
[7] This is explored fully in Chapter Two.

was infinitely more intricate – to ride the ever-changing currents and winds affecting life in jail from society outside'.[8] D'Arcy situated herself as occupying a space on the threshold between 'participant' and 'observer', at once both but never solely one or the other. D'Arcy's assertion that she was part of the collective republican women protesting and privy to their inner circle is a contention which is not congruent with the I.R.A.'s policy to maintain secrecy.

While she claims to write from the side-lines of the republican movement, D'Arcy focuses on her own situated experience. This differs from Nell McCafferty's account, as McCafferty was never incarcerated in the prison but rather visited the prison to interview the women. Given this access to the intricacies of the republican women, if we consider Foucault's theory of power, visibility and the panopticon, D'Arcy's ability to occupy and witness the republican women's social situations and conversations gives her a unique and privileged insight into the movement. Yet, she does not explore this fully. Foucault wrote of the relationship between viewership and power:

> The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions – to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide – it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap.[9]

Panoptic visibility is, Foucault argued, a tool of control. To the republican movement, to be seen and observed by an outsider was a risk of high concern, in Foucault's words, 'visibility is a trap'. Given how pertinent secrecy was for the republican movement, it is extraordinary that D'Arcy claims to occupy a space of spectatorship, which she claims is granted the permission to 'tell them [the public] everything'.

Moreover, the focus on the female body as a vehicle for resistance against the oppressive prison regime is commonplace in the memory-text writing of the prison, however, D'Arcy's

[8] D'Arcy, *Tell Them Everything,* 68.
[9] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

approach to this is jarring in comparison with the testimonies within Chapter Two. Instead of the dread of bowel movements during the dirty protest, D'Arcy waits expectantly, almost jubilantly:

> I am not shaking and I am not sweating; but I am tired. I cannot think: I am numb. My concentration is on my bowels, on my stomach. Move, I think, move. I am passive, like in a hospital waiting for childbirth, waiting for deeper contractions, the birth of my shit.[10]

D'Arcy bids her body to action which will mark the advent of the protest for her. Further, she continues: 'I pick it [the faeces] up again, pressing it more lightly, as though I was touching a glass for a table-rapping session at a séance; let it take itself over the wall; it moves in thin lines. I am proud. The next time I shit I am going to draw pictures. My drawing is lousy. I will practise'.[11] The author eliminates from the act of protest any context and instead she focusses on the creativity of the act. She invokes both senses of the word, to create as in to make, locating the act in the bodily functions which precede the second understanding of creativity, as in to fabricate. Amy Washburn argued that D'Arcy aimed to fuse art and reality in her work. However, D'Arcy's use of creative license with her historical text raises an ethical concern as to the veracity of the story told. The text becomes a façade for the events most critically in her descriptions of the protest being devoid of all violence.

D'Arcy's memoir *Tell Them Everything* offers a voyeuristic look into the republican women's dirty protest in Armagh Gaol. Ultimately, D'Arcy's choice of melding artistic descriptions with reality skews the representation to the extent of rendering the republican women silent.

Nell McCafferty

As an activist and prolific journalist, Nell McCafferty's work as chronicler of the oppression of northern women is key in the resistance to patriarchal narratives of the 'Troubles' conflict.

[10] Ibid, 51.
[11] Ibid.

McCafferty's writings unsettle dominant narratives by detailing the many ways in which women asserted their agency to challenge and resist the status quo. Her work, I argue, is a republican feminist historiography of the conflict. McCafferty herself was the medium through which the voices of imprisoned republican women were primarily heard during the era as evidenced in her book, *Armagh Women*. McCafferty's role was as an interviewer who reported the experiences of women incarcerated within the prison. Specifically, this text details the accounts of women imprisoned in Armagh Gaol who carried out bodily protests. The primary focus for her investigation was the involvement of women on the dirty protest and then bloody protest, in which the women smeared their faeces and menstrual blood on the walls of the prison cells in acts of protest. McCafferty's work focused on the gendered violence which stemmed from these forms of protest.

The Irish Times, 1980.

In popular culture, for example from Steve McQueen's film *Hunger* (2008) to Richard Hamilton's painting *The Citizen* (1981-83), it is nearly always the male dirty protest that is depicted. It appears that the female protest remains too intense in its abjection for the public to engage with. The lack of recognition of the women's protest in Armagh Gaol is a popular rejection of women beyond the borders of feminine societal mores. This is seen explicitly in the furore which erupted on the pages of *The Irish Times* newspaper in response to Nell McCafferty's article entitled 'It is my belief that Armagh is a feminist issue' on August 22, 1980.[12] McCafferty opened her article on the dirty protest in Armagh with the words: 'There is menstrual blood on the walls of Armagh Prison in Northern Ireland'.[13] Upon publication of the article it had been 200 days of the protest in which the women had not washed nor changed their clothes.

[12] Nell McCafferty, "It is my belief that Armagh is a feminist issue," *Irish Times*. Friday August 22nd, 1980. No capitalisation of the title in the original.
[13] Ibid.

She asserts that a key concern for feminists is the republican incarcerated women's is that of 'one of the fundamental rights of women, the right to bodily integrity'.[14] In so doing, she argued that this issue is firmly a feminist issue:

> Bodily integrity was denied to them as they were refused access to toilets or washing facilities during this time [when they were locked in their cells for 24 hours] … The chamber pots overflowed. The outrageous humiliation was complete. The rest is a matter of smelly and filthy history, one chapter of which testifies to a calculated sexual assault upon them – in the early months of the protest insufficient numbers of sanitary towels were provided and the women were forced to wear bloody, saturated cloth.[15]

This quotation sets the events in the prison as a distinct era within Irish republican history; a gendered 'chapter' within the history of the conflict. As argued in Chapter Two, the issue of clothing was a symbolic battleground for the republican prisoners. In this reportage of the prison protest the women were wearing clothes repeatedly soiled with their own menstrual blood. McCafferty argued that the relation between prison warders and prisoners was a gendered power dynamic, specifically a kind of sexual assault, in which the male prison guards denied the female prisoners their rights:

> The choice facing feminists on the matter of Armagh jail are clear cut. We ignore these women or we can express concern about them. Since the suffering of women anywhere, whether self-inflicted or not, cannot be ignored by feminists, then we have a clear responsibility to respond.[16]

This call for feminist support for the republican prisoners caused an uproar amongst some feminists in the Republic of Ireland. The feminist movement in the Republic of Ireland generally refused to sympathise with the women in Armagh due to their politics – particularly because of the violence that was associated with them.

McCafferty's article was met with a response piece from numerous southern feminists in the *Irish Times* on September 5, 1980. 'What has killing to do with Feminism?' Senator Gemma Hussey asked in response to McCafferty. Another feminist, Margaret O'Leary wrote:

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

> How can we identify with women who have themselves terrorised, maimed and killed women? How can we feel compassion for women who are living in self-inflicted filth, living amid their own excreta and blood smeared walls, when the blood of their victims can still be seen on the streets of Northern Ireland? What kind of insane code do these women follow – what kind of sick, demented cause are they serving by degrading themselves in this manner?[17]

This reasoning is tantamount to applying a moral code to who can and should be served by the feminist movement. Most illuminating is the inclusion of Máirin de Burca, who alongside McCafferty founded the Irish Women's Liberation Movement in 1970 in the Republic of Ireland.[18] She wrote in *The Irish Times* article: 'Our male masters have told us that we can only be freed by death and destruction – our own and other peoples' – so we obediently shoot and bomb and helped them shoot and bomb'.[19] This reading of the situation negates women as agents of their own will and capable of political thought. De Burca concluded her piece with the assertion that: 'Feminism should provide no shelter for elitism'.[20] The irony, here, is that exclusion of the republican women from the auspices of feminism amounts to an exclusionary elitism in itself.

On October 22, 1980, Margaretta D'Arcy wrote to *The Irish Times* newspaper requesting for a letter from the political prisoners to be printed which was subsequently printed in the 'Letters to the Editor' page. It is notable that the voices of the women prisoners speaking for themselves, albeit facilitated by D'Arcy's forwarding of the letter, is printed on the less prominent final pages of the newspaper. Due to this placement, the voices of the women central to this debate were effectively marginalised. In the letter published on the back pages, the women in Armagh wrote of the 'callous' backlash against McCafferty's reportage of them: 'We, the women political protest PoWs, submit that the feminists and other individuals concerned in the attack on this article are blinding themselves to the true issue by substituting it with our politics'.[21] The women argue due to their anti-imperial politics they are excluded from feminism. The political prisoners' statement continued: 'It is a feminist issue in so far as we are women, even although we are treated like

[17] "Feminist cause - or elitism, manipulation – a new veneer on old politics?" *Irish Times,* 5th September 1980.
[18] Linda Connolly and Tina O'Toole. *Documenting Feminisms: The Second Wave* (Dublin: The Woodfield Press, 2005), 31.
[19] "Feminist cause - or elitism, manipulation – a new veneer on old politics?" *Irish Times,* 5th September 1980.
[20] Ibid.
[21] "Letters to the Editor," *Irish Times,* 22nd October 1980.

criminals. It is a feminist issue when the network of this jail is completely geared towards male domination'.[22] The prisoners adopt the language of feminist critiques of the patriarchy here and as such cement their views as republican feminists.

It was during this year that a feminist awakening was occurring within the ranks of the republican prisoners in Armagh Gaol. This is echoed in the poem 'The Armagh Song' written by Mairead Farrell in February 1980 of her time in the jail:

> The comradeship never falters
>
> And the confidence never wanes,
>
> We know the torture will never alter
>
> Yet our sisterhood numbs the pain.
>
> They locked us up in Armagh Jail
>
> Intent to throw away the key
>
> For we challenged their stereotype female
>
> Since we fought for our liberty.[23]

It is notable that 'comradeship' is paired with 'sisterhood' which exemplifies a switch of republican vernacular for feminist terminology. The last two lines ('For we challenged their stereotype female / Since we fought for our liberty') takes on an explicitly feminist standpoint. What can be seen here is a call for a dialogue around the expansion of feminism to include republicanism. In the Letter to the Editor in *The Irish Times* in response to the backlash against McCafferty's article, the political prisoners wrote: 'If this is not a 'feminist' issue then we feel the word 'feminist' needs to be redefined to suit those people who feel that 'feminist' applies to a certain section of women

[22] Ibid.
[23] Brady et al., *In the Footsteps of Anne,* 218.

rather than encompassing women everywhere regardless of politically held views'.[24] Due to the reaction of this group of feminists who rejected violent rebellion, there was a discomfort with the label 'feminist'. In agreement, Mia Bloom et al. argue: 'Most P.I.R.A. women did not consider themselves feminists, and resented the formal Irish feminist movement that argued that women's rights came first, before revolution'.[25] There was a space which the women occupied as republican feminists which incorporated both their struggles as women and as Irish nationalists in the north of Ireland. Explicitly, Mairead Farrell argued for this republican feminist intersectionality: 'I am oppressed as a woman, and I'm also oppressed as an Irish person. We can only end our oppression as women if we end the oppression of our nation as a whole. I hope I am still alive when the British are driven out. Then, the struggle begins anew'.[26] Farrell acknowledged the opening of a fusion of republican feminism within the ranks of the I.R.A. women. However, in this instance the National Question takes precedent before Women's Rights. Likewise, an unnamed woman I.R.A. volunteer said in an interview with Eileen Fairweather in the collection of essays on Northern Irish women, *Only the Rivers Run Free:*

> I am very conscious of being a woman volunteer. With the [Irish Republican] Army, you have to assert your position to be treated equally. You are constantly fighting this battle for equal status, and it's a very persistent one at that, particularly with the newer members… It still shocks me that I have two battles to fight – one against the Brits and secondly with the men of my own organisation.[27]

It is notable that both this unnamed volunteer and Farrell wrote of the continuation of the struggle after an Irish reunification. This is commensurate with an acknowledgement of feminist objectives needing to be achieved within a (misogynistic) republican movement. The 'equal status' that the woman volunteer in *Only the Rivers Run Free* demands is that of bodily and political autonomy. The

[24] "Letters to the Editor," *Irish Times,* 22nd October 1980.
[25] Mia Bloom, Paul Gill and John Horgan, "Tiocfaidh ár Mná: Women in the Provisional Irish Republican Army," in *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 4, No.1, (2012): 72.
[26] *Radikal,* 1992 quoted in Mia Bloom et al., 'Tiocfaidh ár Mná': 72.
[27] Eileen Fairweather et al. *Only the Rivers Run Free: Northern Ireland: the Women's War* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 241.

label republican feminist encompasses both of these aims to gain self-determination on the grounds of gender and nationalism.

Armagh Women

Nell McCafferty's book *Armagh Women* gave voice to the silenced republican women, and in doing so, it can best be understood through the lens of Elaine Scarry's theories on voice, torture and the body in pain. Scarry wrote:

> As torture consists of acts that magnify the way in which pain destroys a person's world, self, and voice, so these other acts that restore the voice become not only a denunciation of the pain but almost a diminution of the pain, a partial reversal of the process of torture itself. An act of human contact and concern, whether occurring here or in private contexts of sympathy, provides the hurt person with worldly self-extension: in acknowledging and expressing another person's pain, or in articulating one of his nonbodily concerns while he is unable to, one human being who is well and free willingly turns himself into an image of the other's psychic or sentient claims, an image existing in the space outside the sufferer's body, projected out into the world and held there intact by that person's powers until the sufferer himself regains his own powers of self-extension. By holding that world in place, or by giving the pain a place in the world, sympathy lessens the power of sickness and pain, counteracts the force with which a person in great pain or sickness can be swallowed alive by the body.[28]

This dismantling of 'world, self, and voice' in an act of torture is similar to the experience of the women in Armagh. These tripartite elements of torture coalesce in the judicial system which sees the women condemned to Armagh Gaol which was explored in Chapter 2. This was compounded by the republican mode of rejecting the court system as an arm of the British political apparatus. From 1973, Diplock non-jury trials were used to sentence terrorist offence in Northern Ireland, and as such republicans were rendered voiceless: 'The Crown may tell the judge that the police believe, for example, the accused to be a member of the I.R.A. No reasons need to be given to a judge on the basis of this belief and this has given rise to instances where a person, against whom there is no case at all, is held in custody for nine months, a year or two years, before charges have to be dropped. When an accused person does eventually get trial – her or his legal rights are even

[28] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 50.

further limited'.[29] The prisoners in this way are rendered voiceless against the State, though this is by force through the Diplock courts and also in an act of rebellion in their denial of the court proceedings as legitimate. It is in this way, that the women of Armagh Gaol chose McCafferty as a vehicle to tell their stories. *Armagh Women* voiced their experiences and in doing so created a self through the written word. McCafferty's interviews with and conveyance of the stories of the women who are physically unable to tell their stories acts as a 'worldly self-extension' of the pain incurred within the prison walls. Further, Scarry wrote:

> When one hears about another person's physical pain, the events happening within the interior of that person's body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an invisible geography that, however portentous, has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth.[30]

McCafferty's text makes the pain of the women prisoners visible through writing. She documents the conditions which the women were forced to live in; from boarded up spyholes and windows which removed natural light from the cells, to being locked in the cells without access to toilet facilities. She brings these experiences to the 'visible surface of the earth' through her journalistic accounts. The unknown experiences of the women are made visible through this kind of reportage. This echoes Carol Coulter's description of the women's involvement in Irish historical events being akin to a 'subterranean tradition'.[31] With regards to both Scarry's and Coulter's use of the term, McCafferty's book is an illumination of the 'invisible geography' of the body in pain and the silence of northern woman respectively. In this way, McCafferty writing the pain of the republican women is a resistance to their representational oblivion.

Scarry wrote that in the expression of pain words dissolve into an 'unsharability' due to its 'resistance to language'.[32] McCafferty's translation of this 'unsharability' gives her a status as a

[29] McCafferty, *Armagh Women,* 32.
[30] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 3.
[31] Carol Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 3.
[32] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* 4.

medium for voicing the experiences of others. As an extension of documenting the lives of others, this journalist/prison writing hybrid mode is, as theorist Lachlan Whalen argued, typical of the republican prison writing itself:

> There is a long tradition of Republican prison writing appearing in newspapers; in many ways this is fitting, as jail literature at times shares common ground with journalism. Often, both are more concerned with the immediate, with the here-and-now, than traditional literature generally is, not just in terms of the events that surround the prison writers themselves. Jail literature frequently is a lifeline cast outward from the depths rather than into them, or a warning beacon to readers outside jail walls.[33]

McCafferty's work occupies a space which facilitates the 'lifeline cast outward from the depths' with the aim of acting as a written medium for the pain of others. In so doing, *Armagh Women* is an expansion of the republican jail writing literature genre that Whalen argued for.

Moreover, McCafferty's *Armagh Women* is pertinent to the study of republican feminism as it is notably the first book in which the topic of menstrual blood protest is approached. *Armagh Women* records a number of accounts of women who feared avoidable infections during their periods. The prison administration through its retention of basic sanitary products caused the women's bodies to become cyclical health hazards during the dirty protest. The prison doctors limited the number of dispensable sanitary towels, which proved insufficient, especially given the conditions of dirty protests.[34] The I.R.A. Officer Commanding in the prison in 1980, Mairead Farrell wrote, '…sanitary towels are thrown into us without wrapping. We are not permitted paper bags or such like, so they lie in the dirt until used'.[35] A number of prisoners at the time recount similar memories of the unhygienic conditions being a hazard to health, especially during their menstrual cycle, and the disregard of this by the prison. One prisoner, Shirley Devlin, remembers:

> A few extra towels a month would help to combat the risk of infection. But no. Criminalisation and sanitary towels go together. Criminal means clean. Political means dirt, they try to tell us.[36]

[33] Whalen, *Contemporary Irish Republican Prison Writing,* 12.
[34] McCafferty, *Armagh Women*, 13.
[35] Ibid, 29.
[36] Ibid, 13.

The denial of healthcare facilities in this way is an act of brutality which crystalizes the female body as a site of visceral violence in the conflict. The state's use of the women's biology as a medium for attack, and the willingness to do so despite the risk posed by the possibility of infection, amounted to a form of biological warfare. The women prisoners subverted these attempts at biological subjugation through their reclamation of their bodies; the Armagh women used their bodies' biological excretions, menstrual and faecal, in an act of defiance against the state.

Due to this defiance, women who took part in the dirty protest broke moral codes of perceived womanhood, that is to be clean, proper, and nurturing. It is in this way, Mary Corcoran argued that 'political prisoners *as women* are framed by a double jeopardy' through their breaking of laws and their breaking of social codes of femininity.[37] Extending this Lachlan Whalen wrote: 'Female activists – and especially female paramilitaries – doubly challenge the norms that both the state and its carceral system attempt to enforce: in the North of Ireland dissent is threatening, *female* dissent even more so because of its transgressive repudiation of an expected passive domesticity'.[38] The troubling nature of viewing this act of bodily protest conjures a new paradigm of the blood sacrifice associated with Pearse and the 1916 Rising. The Pearsian understanding of the necessity for blood to be shed for the freedom of Ireland can be mapped onto the women's protest. The women took part in a form of dirty protest, akin to that which the men in Long Kesh carried out. Crucially, it differed as the women used their menstrual blood in this protest, an act which became referred to as the Bloody Protest. The shift from blood attached to death to blood coming from the life-giving womb serves as an act of subversion of republican patriarchy. The women here are using their own bodies – through their menstrual blood sacrifice – as a tool of resistance against the oppressive prison regime. The menstrual blood sacrifice can be read as symbolising hope for the regeneration of a United Ireland. This image of the menstrual blood

[37] Mary Corcoran, *Out of Order: The Political Imprisonment of Women in Northern Ireland, 1972-1999* (Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, 2006), xix.
[38] Whalen, *Contemporary Irish Republican Prison Writing,* 109.

sacrifice is powerful in its symbolism. Allen Feldman argues of the male Dirty Protest that: 'The actual violence of the prison regime and the redistribution and political inversion of that violence by the prisoners created a composite body whose liminality became the precondition of its symbolic fecundity'.[39] The body in its 'symbolic fecundity'[40] is most potent through the cyclical menstruating female body. Although, this symbol is lost through the resulting 'unthinkable' abjection that the female protest posed.

Mary Corcoran contends that the republican women's power was shown through their 'testing of the boundaries' of the prison regime. She wrote of the women prisoners in Armagh using 'sustained practices of disruption and resistance against their designation as 'criminals', and by extension, against conforming to the criminal penal disciplinary code'.[41] She argued:

> They [the women political prisoners] established the pattern of continuous testing of the boundaries of the [prison] regime, which is still a fundamental expression of territorial and political differentiation deployed by prisoners. But their political organisation was also self-protective, with self-discipline and group-consensus being considered necessary against the dangers of being isolated as an identifiable dissident group in the prison.[42]

Further, feminist theorist Nira Yuval-Davis writes of the female body as a symbol for nationhood**:**

> Women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity's 'honour' and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture. Specific codes and regulations are usually developed, defining who/what is a 'proper man' and a 'proper woman', which are central to the identities of collectivity members. Feelings of disempowerment which result from processes of colonization and subjugation have often been interpreted by the colonized men as processes of emasculation and/or feminization. The (re)construction of men's - and often even more importantly women's - roles in the processes of resistance and liberation has been central in most such struggles.[43]

Julia Kristeva's theory of the 'abject' can be used here in conjunction with Aretxaga's theory of the 'unthinkable' nature of the women's protest.[44] Kristeva argued: 'It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system or order. What does not respect

[39] Feldman, *Formations of Violence,* 179.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Mary Corcoran, *Out of Order*, 157.
[42] Ibid, 160.
[43] Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 67.
[44] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence,* 129.

borders, positions, rules'.[45] If this is considered in conjunction with Kristeva's theories of disruption and the abject, the republican women are pushing the boundaries of the role prescribed for them as a by-product of masculine rejection of colonialism. In this sense, the women's protest created a disruption beyond the bodily. The protest unsettled the political landscape as republican resistance enters a new gendered epoch.

It is this transgression of social boundaries that causes a reaction from the public. Laura Weinstein wrote on this:

> In an atmosphere steeped in conservative views of women's 'proper' role, the dirty protest was often seen as a step too far for female volunteers, because the women were not acting in the mould of the traditional republican woman. It was permissible for women to run the RACs because they were supporting their husbands and sons. It was even acceptable for republican women to plant bombs and shoot guns. But forms of activism that revealed women's sexuality were not acceptable… It necessarily made the women's sexuality visible through the presence of their menstrual blood. In a statement in the 10 May 1980 issue of the *Andersontown News,* parents of the women expressed concern that 'the dignity, spiritual rights, and self-respect of the girls had been violated to a serious degree in Armagh prison'.[46]

Echoing this, Laurence McKeown, quoted earlier, said that the republican movement's reluctance to let the women be involved in the first hunger strike in 1980 was countered with the idea that it would 'horrify the public, outrage them so much, or garner sympathy that people would respond to our demands for support'.[47] Given these various views of how the women's protest was viewed as a multitude of dissent, we can deduce that the silencing of this era of republican women's history is a rejection of feminine rebellion.

[45] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5.
[46] Laura Weinstein, "The Significance of the Armagh Dirty Protest." in *Éire-Ireland* 41, No. 3 (2006): 21.
[47] Simona Sharoni, "Gendering Resistance within an Irish Republican Prisoner Community: A Conversation with Laurence McKeown," in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 2. (2000): 114.

Chapter 4: Republican Feminist Media: Activism, Interactions, and Conflict, 1975 – 1980.

During the period 1975 – 1980 a surge of feminist activity occurred in the north of Ireland. During this time, feminist groupings were created and split again in a changing frontier of women's activism. In 1975, the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (N.I.W.R.M.) was set up as a co-ordinating body which would act as an umbrella organisation for other feminist groups, such as Women's Aid, which sought to assist and advocate for women who had experienced domestic violence.[1] To form a cohesive women's movement, the N.I.W.R.M. argued that a feminist movement should primarily focus on women's equality rather than political feminism. The N.I.W.R.M. was the seed for the genesis of the offshoot Socialist Women's Group (S.W.G.), which in turn led to the Belfast Women's Collective (B.W.C.) and in turn, to the Women Against Imperialism group.[2] Some women left N.I.W.R.M. to start the S.W.G. and although 'it was intended that the two groups would cooperate with each other, they became more rather than less distant as time passed'.[3] It was in this way that the groups, although having shared lineage, were distinct and separate in their focus: S.W.G. centralised around issues of socialism; B.W.C. around issues affecting working class women; and W.A.I. was a single-issue grouping which focused on the issue of the Armagh women political prisoners. Each of these disparate groups produced routinely published individual pamphlets which engaged with the contentious feminist issue of the Armagh women's protest. Anonymity of role and authorship in these periodicals was used throughout the publications for each of the groups S.W.G., B.W.C., and W.A.I. There was a secrecy around the identity of contributors where some gave an initial or a forename as a

[1] Eileen Evason, *Against the Grain: Contemporary Women's Movement in Northern Ireland* (London: Attic Press, 1994), 21.
[2] Another group was borne from the split in the Socialist Women's Group 'Women's Law and Research', however, for the purposes of this chapter this will not be explored as it falls outside of the remit of exploration of republican feminism. It is also worth noting that Women's Aid separated from the umbrella organisation N.I.W.R.M. prior to S.W.G. leaving. Women's Aid left as the N.I.W.R.M. had a hierarchical structure and allowed men to be members of the women's organisation (Evason, *Against the Grain.* 21).
[3] Evason, *Against the Grain*, 47.

pseudonym in the publications, and in this regard, it is clear that a body of women were involved in the output of this republican feminist material. Despite this there are a few instances in which members of groups publicised their involvement. For example, Nell McCafferty was a member of Women Against Imperialism and Margaret Ward a member of Socialist Women's Group.

While the papers vary in output and circulation it is hard to access and assess the copies which were available. Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin wrote of the earlier period of republican journalism in the 1920s and 1930s that publications' print runs and circulation figures were 'difficult to obtain and, where available, are not always representative of interest or support'.[4] The subversive nature of these texts, specifically that of challenging the political status quo, meant that republican journalism inhabited a space of anonymity. Likewise, this extended into the republican feminist periodicals discussed later in the chapter. So, while readership is unknown, this chapter explores the content in periodicals archived, and what this content represents about republican journalism of the era. This chapter will examine, and make the case for, republican feminism(s) which are located on the peripheries of the feminist movement.

Eilish Rooney wrote of there being three distinct areas within the feminist movement in the north; the 'rights' feminists who campaigned on the basis that women's rights took precedence over the national question; the 'community activist' feminists who worked on campaigns to do with childcare, women's centres, etc.; and the 'republican' feminists who, she argued, prioritised the national question.[5] Rooney argued that when the 'rights' feminists, who were usually middle-class, supported republican causes like Armagh the group would have 'bitter disputes' which are evident throughout the splits in the feminist groups detailed in the rest of the chapter. Of this specific breakdown in the feminist movement Rooney wrote: 'Feminists in the rights camp may refuse to adopt a stand on republican women's campaigns in recognition of the alienation of

[4] Caoilfhionn Ní Bheacháin, "'The Mosquito Press': Anti-Imperialist Rhetoric in Republican Journalism, 1926 – 1939" *Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*, 42, No. 1 (2007): 260.
[5] Eilish Rooney, "Women, Community and Politics in Northern Ireland: - isms in Action," *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1, No. 4 (November 1992): 483.

unionist women and in opposition to republican strategies'.[6] Throughout this chapter, I explore the designation of 'republican feminist' and argue that the label encompasses more intersectionality than Rooney suggests. The republican feminists in the north sit apart from both the republican movement, and as an entity apart from the feminist movement in the six counties, as well as the republic, and had a complicated relationship with British feminism.[7] They were hybrid in their form, particularly in response to state violence, in which they fused anti-imperialist and feminist critiques.

Monica McWilliams and Avila Kilmurray were prominent members of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (N.I.W.C.) and also active members of its predecessor N.I.W.R.M. They wrote that women living in communities which experienced violence, both loyalist and nationalist, were 'inevitably politicised'.[8] They argued that International Women's Day – March 8th – became a focus for tension within the feminist movement in the north of Ireland:

> For the majority of women, involvement in community action was about politics with a small 'p', rather than the capital 'P' of the constitutional question. The latter continued to be characterized by the bowler hat and the combat beret, which left little room for participation by women.[9]

Carmel Roulston wrote that this denial of the political as personal is 'an unusual reversal of radical feminism' which N.I.W.R.M. typically stood for.[10] The implied stasis within the Political feminist movement seems to be at odds with feminism's *modus operandi* within the 'personal is political'. As Eilish Rooney argued, the dictum opens up the questioning, 'whose personal is more political – yours or mine?'[11] In this Rooney asserts that there is a disjuncture within the feminist movement

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Details of the relationship between S.W.G. and *Spare Rib* are discussed later within the chapter. The feminist movement, particularly the Women Against Imperialism group, welcomed support from, amongst others, London Armagh Group; Manchester Armagh Group, etc. and the Labour Women for Ireland group.
[8] Monica McWilliams and Avila Kilmurray, "Athene on the Loose: The Origins of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition," *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies*, 2, No. 1 (July 1997): 2; The N.I.W.R.M. had between 6 – 12 active core members and 30 – 38 official members. "N.I.W.R.M. Membership List," 1981 /1982; 1982/1983. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Carmel Roulston, "Northern Ireland: Women on the Margin: The Women's Movements in Northern Ireland, 1973 – 1995" in *Feminist Nationalism*, ed. Lois A. West. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 48.
[11] Eilish Rooney, "Women, Community and Politics in Northern Ireland," 479.

with regards to viewpoints on the union with the United Kingdom, specifically, along unionist and nationalist binary lines. However, McWilliams and Kilmurray's rejection of the political, from either camp, leaves the personal lacking in the ability to tackle differences in the political standpoints of the movement in favour of avoidance. This leaves women 'inevitably politicized' by the conflict in a bind; either to deny that experience a feminist hearing or to be seen as 'characterized by the bowler hat and the combat beret'.[12] This dichotomy between the masculinist hierarchical organisations of the Orange Order and the Irish Republican Army as characterising political women is misguided and a rejection of the personal experience of republican and unionist women as worthy of a space within the feminist movement.

The aim for N.I.W.R.M. to foster an alignment of feminist organisations under an non-sectarian banner denies the space for exploration and analysis of difference.[13] While the N.I.W.R.M. wrote that they were opposed to paramilitary activity, on either side of the sectarian divide, when it has a detrimental effect on the lives of women, the group also argued that**:**

> We are not afraid to admit that we have refused to adopt a position on general issues of N. Ireland politics. We have decided to work for a women's movement independent of existing parties and political positions.[14]

In this way, the N.I.W.R.M. rejected the inclusion of republicanism within the feminist ranks of their organisation. What this demonstrates is the marginalisation of republican feminists in

[12] Monica McWilliams and Avila Kilmurray, "Athene on the Loose," 2.

[13] The 'Submission From Executive on Women's Rights Movement' reports that 'we believe that we made special efforts not to set up a Women's Liberation Movement only because we felt this would be counter-productive in the struggle for equal rights and women's liberation, counter-productive in that it would exclude affiliation from the [trade unions] and political parties' (n. d. estimated around 1977). This directly contradicts the functions of the N.I.W.R.M. in their campaigns for women's liberation: abortion healthcare, equality in the workplace and fair-pay campaigns. Explicitly this is expressed in: 'We are a coalition which has forged a unity on the question of how to fight effectively for women's liberation while, in many cases, disagreeing strongly on the general question of how to remove British troops from N. Ireland and resolve the political crisis here'. Statement by N.I.W.R.M., "Problems of Women in Northern Ireland," n. d. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
This view was also shared by localised women's groups that the over-all umbrella N.I.W.R.M. represents. Ballymena Women's Group argue the group 'should not associate with controversial groups (e.g. nationalist, unionist, militant) in case it excluded women in the community'. Meeting Minutes, Ballymena Women's Group, N.I.W.R.M., n. d. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[14] Statement by N.I.W.R.M., "Problems of Women in Northern Ireland," n. d. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland. While republican feminists were contentious in the north of Ireland within the broader feminist movement, they were also treated as outsiders by feminists in Republic of Ireland. The Irish feminist academic and activist, Ailbhe Smyth, wrote of a need to include a diversity of voices within the feminist movement:

> I know, more than anything else maybe, that no one perspective (however seasoned) is long enough, wide enough or deep enough to embrace (far less account for) the 'state of feminism' or 'the situation of women' – and never has been. That kind of knowledge can silence you, which indeed, and in the interests of truth-telling, it sometimes should. Other kinds of silence and silencing are about disallowing (someone else's) truth – their analysis, politics, experiences – they are about continuing to occupy the place of power and control.[15]

Smyth offers an extension of the Foucauldian critique of power, in that those who have power also control knowledge production. Further, she argued of those in the Republic of Ireland that 'ex-colonized girls know more' due to their experience and historical passage through colonialism; she clarified, in other words, that they know more of the imperialist's agenda than the still-colonized feminists. Despite this, she argued:

> If you are powerful (and the sources are material, multiple and cumulative), you can get away with knowing so little, because you don't have to know anything/anyone by yourself in order to survive and flourish. You don't even have to recognise the limits of your knowledge, because you define what constitutes knowledge itself, and control the territory on which it might be tested and challenged.[16]

However, this line of argument is complicated when applied to the women in the north of Ireland. Of the women in the north, Smyth wrote that she 'closed [her] mind to the North, the war, and denied the hard realities between North and South'.[17] Smyth was, in effect, privy to the knowledge-privilege position she attributed to colonial oppressors who 'get away with knowing so little' and in effect was perpetrating a kind of silencing through disengagement with the north.[18] As explored in Chapter 3, this was not a position held only by Smyth; the response to Nell McCafferty's *Irish Times* article on the political violence in the prisons was met with backlash from some feminists in

[15] Ailbhe Smyth, "Feminism: Personal, Political, Unqualified (or Ex-Colonized Girls Know More)," *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies*, 2, No. 1 (July 1997): 39.
[16] Ibid, 40.
[17] Linda Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2003), 136.
[18] Ailbhe Smyth, "Feminism: Personal, Political, Unqualified," 39.

the Republic of Ireland. This begs the question, as to where this leaves republican women's experiences in the north in comparison with their formerly colonised sisters in the south?[19] Unlike N.I.W.R.M., Smyth argued:

> Identifying persistent inequalities and power differentials between feminists, between women, does not – or should not – signify the collapse of feminism. Rather the contrary. For as long as you continue to honestly name and rigorously debate the issues, to confront and work to solve the conflicts, omissions and failures, you are affirming your commitment to feminism as a vital … political practice. And if feminism is not life-changing and life-enhancing *for all women*, then it is not feminism.[20]

> There is a *reality* of hegemony within feminism, despite the discourses of difference and multiplicity.[21]

This call to confront 'conflict, omissions and failures' became the *raison d'être* for the republican feminist groupings in their aim to write themselves back into the political narrative of the 'Troubles' conflict. These experiences of difference which were evident in the accounts in the republican feminist periodicals were shared through cross-border conference orientated discussions, but these talks usually descended into heated debates around the national question and the republican armed campaign.[22]

While a contentious addition to the feminist movement due to their political alignment, republican feminists were also maligned within the republican movement as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. In the same year as the United Nations International Women's Year held in 1975, the Official Sinn Féin imprint, Repsol, published the republican movement's views on women in its pamphlet *The Rights of Women in Ireland*.[23] The contents note that 'the position of women in Irish society is changing' and that this very change would be 'slow and painful'.[24] This recognition that

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[19] Smyth argued against the N.I.W.R.M.: 'The 'high feminist norm' is in grave danger of failing to see beyond its own terrain and its own preoccupations. Located in post-industrial regions/countries ('the North'), it mistakes itself for the whole, and in so doing – ironically, given the divisiveness of debates on difference – homogenizes 'the North' and patronizes or ignores 'the South'. Smyth, "Feminism: Personal, Political, Unqualified," 50.
[20] Ibid, 48.
[21] Ibid, 50.
[22] Evason, *Against the Grain*, 47.; For an example of heated debates see: Dublin Women's Conference, 1984. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[23] *The Rights of Women in Ireland*, Repsol Pamphlet, No. 20, (1975). Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[24] Ibid.

women were 'still very definitely second-class citizens' is contradicted as the pamphlet argued, instead, for the subjugation of women's issues in favour of the party's pursuit of the dismantlement of the capitalist, and by extension imperialist, system. The pamphlet contended that it is not patriarchal structures that keep women contained as 'very definitely second-class citizens' but, rather, the system which controls all in society:

> Down through the ages society has always functioned on the theory that the two groups [men and women] each had their own totally irreconcilable roles to play. Modern Capitalism has adapted this sexual role of men and women to suit itself. It is in the interests of Capitalism to keep men and women apart, to keep them from forming a group of persons demanding their rights on the basis of needs and wants.[25]

This false determinism deflects responsibility away from challenging patriarchal hierarchical structures within both the republican movement and also society at large. While Official Sinn Féin recognised that women were treated as second-class citizens, they argued that, '(n)ature is often used as a blanket reason to describe all differences between the sexes. For instance, women are generally defined as maternal, peaceful, non-competitive, gentle, submissive, instinctive and emotional, weaker than men in thought, mind and body', which in turn echoes how the women are discussed by men within the Provisional I.R.A., the political wing of Sinn Féin. While the aim of the pamphlet acknowledged the multitude of women's hardships, it reads in parts like a case for absolving republican men of their responsibility to consider women as their equals. This would serve to avoid any backlash from the pamphlet's target audience of male republicans. Explicitly:

> It is obvious that to liberate themselves women must help to liberate their own countries. Their own development in a cultural and economic sense is inseparable from the achievement of deep-rooted social, political and economic transformations of concern to the people as a whole… It is quite obvious that without achieving the basic conditions of social justice and equality for all members of society, we cannot discuss women's equality.[26]

The Official republican movement's agreement with the women's movement for equality only pays lip service to the emerging feminist global trends of intersectionality between anti-imperialism

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

and feminism as exemplified through the works of bell hooks and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; this was advocated for their own gain by creating a semblance of concern for the rights of women.

In this way, the republican feminists writing within feminist periodicals were ostracized within both the feminist movements north and south of the border and the republican movement alike. The S.W.G. argued that there was an undiscussed division between men and women's issues within 'the anti-imperialist struggle' and how this set Northern Irish women's rights falling behind the rest of Europe.[27] The opportunity for a political feminist group was taken up by the Socialist Women's Group which aimed to fuse socialism, feminism and the anti-imperialist struggle to fill the void created.

Pamphlet Culture

Beyond traditional news media, which is often accused (with reason) of political bias, the publication of pamphlets served as an effective way to distribute news locally. [28] The production of these news sources varied from semi-professional printing on a news printing press to informal letters typed to be circulated or, in some cases, written by hand. The latter appears with a sense of urgency in regard to the need to spread news, particularly with regards to the security of the areas out of which they originated. While the appearance varied from publication to publication, the content in these was steadfast in its support of androcentric republicanism.

One example of this androcentric republicanism came in the form of *Saoirse*, a pamphlet printed by Provisional Sinn Féin, Dublin, in 1977. The publication sought to celebrate the 1916 Easter Rising and in doing so the cover of the issue depicts artistic drawings of each of the men who took part in the rising whilst excluding women such as Constance Markievicz.[29] Also, within

[27] Socialist Women's Group, *Manifesto,* n. d. Author's Collection, donated via Margaret Ward.
[28] For example, *Belfast Telegraph* and *Irish News* had a unionist and nationalist leaning respectfully.
[29] *Saoirse* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, April 1977). Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

this pamphlet, there were calls for support for republican hunger strikers in Portlaoise and to extend that support for the 'Political prisoner in the British Occupied Prisons' by helping a local Relatives Action Committee.[30] The magazine further engaged with the north by publishing reports of British Army brutality against residents of the nationalist Falls Road area of Belfast, while also offering advice to 'future revolutionaries'.[31] The magazine is avowedly pro-republican north and south in its output, but completely eludes discussing women's contributions to republican history, or to ongoing issues and campaigns.

Likewise the pamphlet, *Barbed Wire Bulletin*, published in Dublin in 1972, in its Editorial Letter proposed that its editorial team offered support from the twenty-six counties that 'contribute[s] to the magnificent political struggle in the north' by promoting revolutionary activities in the Republic of Ireland: 'The political picture as seen from behind barbed wire and gun towers tends to take on clarity; the purpose for our [republicans'] detention can, at times, be over looked'.[32] On the back page, there is the list of demands that the republican movement stands for: an independent socialist state; overthrowing British colonial rule; the rights of common man over those of property.[33] The second of these echoes that of the I.R.A.'s *Green Book* and Official Sinn Féin's *The Rights of Women*, which relegates women as inferior to the cause of liberating republican men.[34] The *Barbed Wire Bulletin* publication fails to acknowledge the existence of women north or south of the border.

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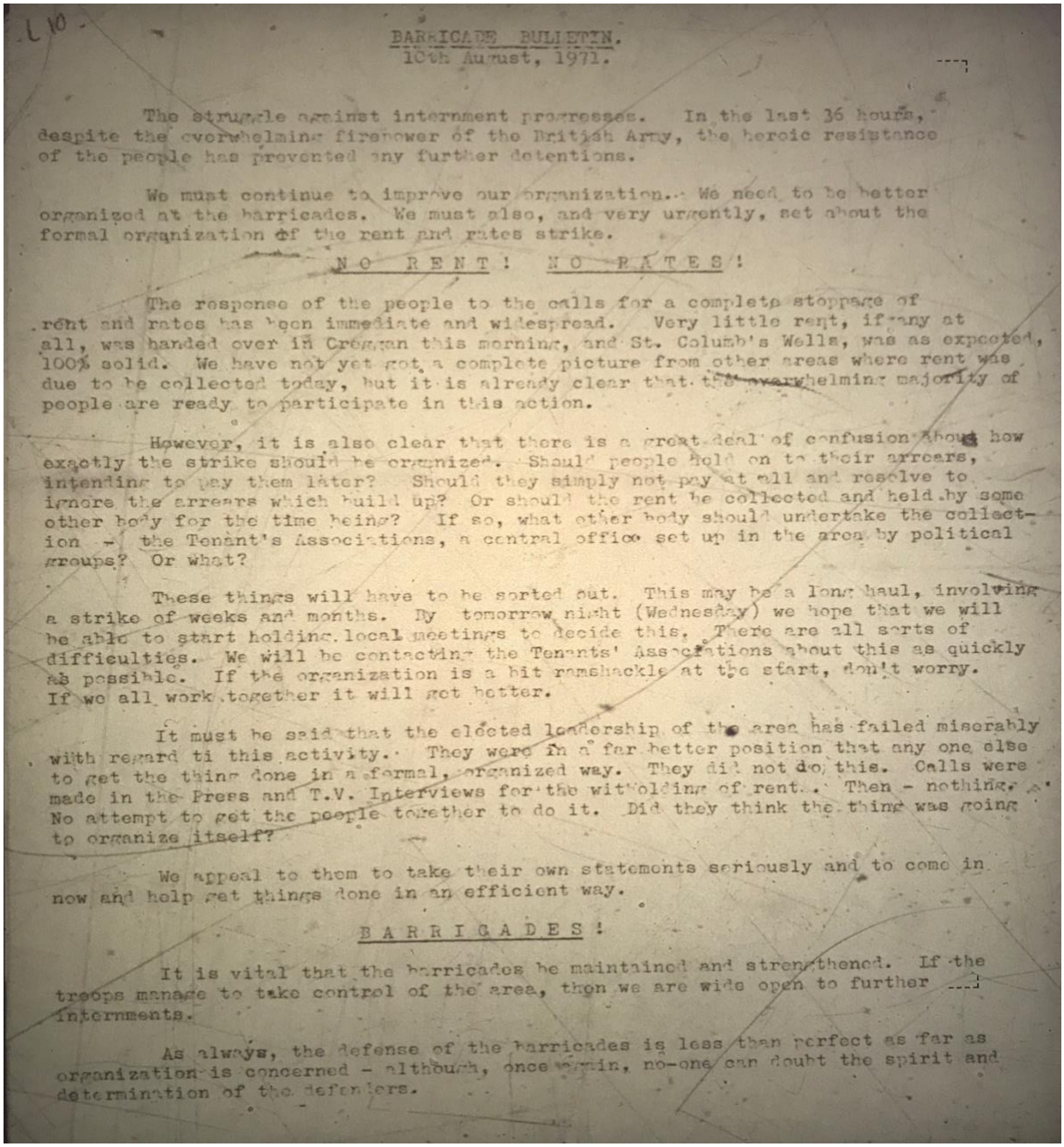
[30] "Reviews: Portlaoise Hunger Strike 1977," 13 October 2005 Edition, *An Phoblacht*, Accessed on: March 2, 2019 https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/14279.; *Saoirse*, (Dublin: Sinn Féin, April 1977). Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[31] Ibid.

[32] *Barbed Wire Bulletin* (Dublin, 1972). Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[33] Ibid.

[34] *The Rights of Women in Ireland*, Repsol Pamphlet, No. 20, (1975). Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.; "I.R.A. Green Book" reproduced within Coogan, Tim Pat. *The I.R.A.* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006).; "Text of Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) 'Green Book' (Book I and II)," *CAIN*. Accessed on: January 1, 2020 https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/I.R.A./I.R.A._green_book.htm



BARRICADE BULLETIN.
10th August, 1971.

The struggle against internment progresses. In the last 36 hours, despite the overwhelming firepower of the British Army, the heroic resistance of the people has prevented any further detentions.

We must continue to improve our organization. We need to be better organized at the barricades. We must also, and very urgently, set about the formal organization of the rent and rates strike.

NO RENT! NO RATES!

The response of the people to the calls for a complete stoppage of rent and rates has been immediate and widespread. Very little rent, if any at all, was handed over in Creggan this morning, and St. Columb's Wells, was as expected, 100% solid. We have not yet got a complete picture from other areas where rent was due to be collected today, but it is already clear that the overwhelming majority of people are ready to participate in this action.

However, it is also clear that there is a great deal of confusion about how exactly the strike should be organized. Should people hold on to their arrears, intending to pay them later? Should they simply not pay at all and resolve to ignore the arrears which build up? Or should the rent be collected and held by some other body for the time being? If so, what other body should undertake the collection - the Tenant's Associations, a central office set up in the area by political groups? Or what?

These things will have to be sorted out. This may be a long haul, involving a strike of weeks and months. By tomorrow night (Wednesday) we hope that we will be able to start holding local meetings to decide this. There are all sorts of difficulties. We will be contacting the Tenants' Associations about this as quickly as possible. If the organization is a bit ramshackle at the start, don't worry. If we all work together it will get better.

It must be said that the elected leadership of the area has failed miserably with regard ti this activity. They were in a far better position that any one else to get the thing done in a formal, organized way. They did not do this. Calls were made in the Press and T.V. Interviews for the withholding of rent. Then - nothing. No attempt to get the people together to do it. Did they think the thing was going to organize itself?

We appeal to them to take their own statements seriously and to come in now and help get things done in an efficient way.

BARRICADES!

It is vital that the barricades be maintained and strengthened. If the troops manage to take control of the area, then we are wide open to further internments.

As always, the defense of the barricades is less than perfect as far as organization is concerned - although, once again, no-one can doubt the spirit and determination of the defenders.

Figure 5: Barricades Bulletin. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

While the above appear professional in their printing, through use of images, type-set and printing press features, the pamphlets circulated within the north of Ireland had an air of immediacy and amateurism in their appearance. The sense of urgency is felt most keenly in the *Barricades Bulletin* circulated in Derry City by the Young Derry Socialists and the Socialist Resistance Group following the Battle of the Bogside in 1969 until 1971.[35] They often appeared in typed letter

[35] *Barricades Bulletin,* Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

form or on rare occasions written by hand (see Figure 5). This style of publishing is part of a rich history of grass-roots media circulation within nationalist areas in the north of Ireland which was circulated primarily for security, proliferation of hyper-local news and solidarity. Akin to the *Barricades Bulletin* in Derry, publications of a similar nature which serve to deliver news to a micro-locality is seen, amongst others, in *The Banner* borne out of the Ballymurphy area of West Belfast and the *Bawnmore Newsletter*, from the North Belfast area of the city. It is notable that these publications do not include women's involvement in the conflict.

In a rare occurrence for this type of micro-local news media, the *West Belfast Bulletin* reported on a pregnant woman who was arrested by the R.U.C. under a headline which declares her and her unborn child as 'The Innocents'.[36] Margaret Fennell is framed in this piece as a meek woman, who could not stop 'armed men as they made their escape through her house' and in the process of the men doing so, they, allegedly, left their weapons in the outside toilet. [37] The news-sheet frames the crime that Fennell committed as that of not using the toilet after a bomb exploded outside: 'From this the only thing she could have been guilty of was not being a heroine which hardly warranted the two-year sentence'.[38] While the piece criticises the British State's judiciary system in arresting and detaining a pregnant woman, it focuses primarily on her unborn child: 'No doubt she is one of many, but a child must not be born in Armagh Prison'.[39] The focus of this news story is on the horror of the child who will be born in prison, and in so doing, the news piece effectively writes the pregnant woman out of her own story.

The republican news pamphlets negate the experiences of women or homogenise them with those of men. As will be explored further in this chapter, the balance between the national question and the women's question is one that is rarely treated on an equal footing. In fact, within

[36] *West Belfast Bulletin* (1970). Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

the republican news pamphlets and news media, including the large-scale *An Phoblacht* newspaper[40], women's experiences are written into the narrative with care not to upset patriarchal norms. Women's liberation is not discussed alongside the liberation of the six counties.

Republican Feminist Pamphlets: 1975 – 1980

While there were already feminist publications in the Republic of Ireland, they were not steeped in republicanism. A useful example of the tentative engagement with republican women as feminists can be seen within *Banshee: Journal of Irishwomen United*, a feminist periodical founded in Dublin in April 1975. Despite the foundation of the magazine on feminist principles, it is hesitant to engage fully with feminist issues in the north of Ireland, such as female-led protests against oppressive state structures. Instead, the publication focused on issues within and relating to the family and challenged the authority and ideology of the Catholic Church, the two patriarchal institutions invested in the hindrance of progressing women's rights in the Irish Republic.[41] In the Irish Women United Charter, printed in Issue Two, the group wrote that 'the women of Ireland are beginning to see the need for, and are fighting for liberation'.[42] This liberation, however, is not inclusive of imperialist oppression faced by women in the north, for example through the lack of voting equality in the north. Further, there is a full-page article discussing feminist issues from across the island of Ireland. In this piece, Bernadette Devlin's April 1969 inaugural speech in parliament is featured.[43] Devlin herself said in her parliamentary speech that she was continuing the legacy of Constance Markievicz, a republican woman who was the first woman elected as an MP to the Westminster Houses of Parliament.[44]

[40] *An Phoblacht* was the official newspaper of Provisional Republicanism.
[41] *Banshee: Journal of Irishwomen United,* 1, No. 2, 1975. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Hansard, April 22, 1969. Accessed on April 26, 2020.

Another Dublin based feminist publication, *Wicca*: *Wise Woman Irish Feminist Magazine*, established in 1978, lent its support to the republican women in the north of Ireland. The magazine featured a series of articles on 'Women in Prison,' one of which focused on the treatment of the women prisoners in Armagh.[45] In stating their position, the article quoted a feminist and political activist Marie-Louise Berneri: 'When a government puts people in jail for their political opinions, we do not ask the nationality of that government, we are always on the side of the victim of state tyranny'.[46] This invocation of anarchist activist Berneri is a rejection of governmental order, and in this instance, of the British state. It situates the women political prisoners within a framework of politically-motivated feminist rebellion. The inclusion of the experiences of the republican women in this magazine identifies the cause to readers as a feminist issue. This occurred two years prior to *The Irish Times* article by Nell McCafferty which caused controversy within Irish feminism.[47] The text of the article is a double of a printed statement from those incarcerated within Armagh Gaol printed in an issue of the Women Against Imperialism pamphlet, a group of which McCafferty was a member. It is apparent that there was an interaction between northern and southern feminism, however, the verbatim reprint of a W.A.I. article suggests a superficial involvement, not least as it implies that McCafferty or another member of W.A.I. was potentially at the helm of this article. The publication of the report within a magazine with a feminist readership signals a testing of the waters of republican feminism prior to McCafferty's article in national newspaper *The Irish Times* as discussed in Chapter 3.

Despite this new public dialogue on the intersections between gender and nationalism, the authors and editors of republican feminist periodicals examined in the following thesis section

https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1969/apr/22/northern-ireland#S5CV0782P0_19690422_HOC_271

[45] The support shown by *Wicca* here links the Armagh protests with the women held at the other women's prison on the island of Ireland, Mountjoy prison.

[46] Please note that this surname was written in cursive handwriting, so every effort has been taken to decipher correctly.

[47] "Women in Prison," *Wicca: Wise Woman,* n.d. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.; Nell McCafferty, 'It is my belief that Armagh is a feminist issue' *Irish Times*. Friday August 22nd, 1980.; "Nell McCafferty Interview," Prisons Memory Archive, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Accessed: September 20, 2016.

remain largely anonymous. In the following section, I explore the response to republicanism that was articulated by feminist magazines in the north of Ireland. Allegations that the republican women's bodily protest fractured and weakened the feminist movement in the north are evident throughout these periodicals. These feminist groupings began to publish from 1975, which coincides with the I.R.A. ceasefire in 1975 and also the United Nations International Year of Women. These two events mark a brief pause in the I.R.A.'s armed campaign and also a celebration of the role of women in society and as such these two moments taken together offer a space for republican feminist debate. Due to this international trend of feminism coinciding with the cease fire, the republican feminist groupings developed. Through the launch of N.I.W.R.M. and the splinter group S.W.G., the year 1975 marked the genesis of feminist periodicals in the north which carried on through to 1986, when Armagh Gaol was officially closed.[48] This period is of importance as fervent debate surrounded the influence of the republican prison protests on the feminist movement. As such, I focus on the period from when the feminist periodicals began through to the prison's closure date for the purposes of my research.

The Philosophy of the Socialist Women's Group

Unlike the body of material surrounding the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (N.IW.R.M.), the ephemeral publications of the Socialist Women's Group (S.W.G.) have yet to be examined by any scholarship beyond cursory mention of its existence.[49] At the time, the former declared itself to be an anti-sectarian movement and, therefore, disengaged from the issues surrounding imperialist oppression faced by nationalist women across the north of Ireland.[50] The

[48] Mary Corcoran, *Out of Order: The Political Imprisonment of Women in Northern Ireland, 1972-1999* (Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, 2006.)

[49] Jan Canavan, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland. For example, Monica McWilliams has published extensively on the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement.

[50] It is not until 1987 at the N.I.W.R.M. AGM that the motion is made for a move for active inclusion regardless of political background. 'Motion 3: The Northern Ireland Women Rights Movement is committed to strengthening its links with the community and will actively involve itself in campaigning on issues of common concern on both sides

Socialist Women's Group was established in October 1975 in response to a perceived lack of engagement within the wider feminist movement (namely, the N.I.W.R.M.). The S.W.G.'s main area of contention was that geographical areas typically under the greatest threat from British imperialism (i.e. nationalist areas) were being ignored. In response, the S.W.G. argued for women's place within the political situation in the north of Ireland: 'since the immediate and direct cause of women's oppression in [Northern Ireland] *is* British imperialism, any attempt to separate the two issues would be fatuous in the extreme and would alienate the most militant women'; in other words, to separate the imperialist oppression and the oppression of women is to misunderstand the cause and effect of both.[51] This particular argument is made in reference to the N.I.W.R.M.'s charter calling for an non-sectarian feminist movement.[52] At the genesis of the N.I.W.R.M. the 1975 Charter aimed to 'promote progressive changes in the position of women in society,'[53] although, paradoxically, the N.I.W.R.M. declined to support the violently oppressed. This refusal, and the overwhelming effect the political crisis had on working class women, therefore was an opportunity for the S.W.G. to develop a politically informed feminist group. In setting up this new group, the women aimed to fuse socialism, feminism and anti-imperialism.[54]

The S.W.G. claimed that the 'indignant assumption that the S.W.G. has chosen to put itself 'outside' the women's movement' was due to its disagreement with N.I.W.R.M., The idea that the fall out with N.I.W.R.M. amounted to S.W.G. placing themselves outside the feminist movement suggests that the N.I.W.R.M. was the fulcrum of the movement. If this were indeed the case, this by proxy would reduce the feminist movement to being an non-sectarian entity prior to S.W.G.:

> The S.W.G. was not conceived of as being the nucleus of a mass women's organisation which would recruit all and sundry and therefore grow and grow. The predominance of British imperialist oppression meant that conditions were not suitable for such a movement to develop … To suggest that the S.W.G. is 'outside' the women's movement is clearly nonsense. All women consciously working to advance the

of the sectarian divide'. N.I.W.R.M. AGM Minutes, 1987. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[51] Socialist Women's Group, Letter, n. d. Author's Collection donated via Margaret Ward.

[52] "Charter," N.I.W.R.M., 1975. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Evason, *Against the Grain*, 25.

> liberation of women are part of the women's movement; whether one agrees with their methods of achieving it or not.[55]

S.W.G. adopted a non-hierarchal approach to feminism which adhered to a multiplicity of experiences. There is again a preference for the micro-local within the S.W.G. understanding of the feminist movement. It was not until 1985 that the N.I.W.R.M. signalled a move towards a multiplicity of experiences when the group 'open[ed] up the movement more' to increase the membership of the umbrella group.[56]

In the words of the feminist republican group, Women Against Imperialism: 'traditionally, the women's movement and the anti-imperialist movement have eyed each other with suspicion'.[57] However, the archive material from the Socialist Women's Group shows clearly that the feminist group was actively interested in the plight of republican women. Whereas Eilish Rooney has argued that republican feminists give prominence to the national question over the fight for women's rights, the S.W.G. position shows an intersection and interaction between the two rather than a hierarchy. Instead, the S.W.G. claim that the republican movement was suspicious of feminism and not vice versa:

> The position of women in Irish society cannot be radically changed unless imperialism is defeated, but neither will progressive change automatically follow the defeat of imperialism in the absence of a women's movement prepared to fight for those changes. We reject the suggestion by some Republicans that the Women's Question is a diversion from the anti-imperialist struggle as is continually implied by Sinn Féin (Republican News).[58]

S.W.G. here argue that the Provisional republican movement deny the intersection between gender and the national question. This compounds Official Sinn Féin's *The Rights of Women in Ireland* which laid out a manifesto of sorts that the national struggle should subsume any idea of republican

[55] Ibid, 4 – 5.
[56] N.I.W.R.M. AGM Minutes, 1985. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[57] *Saor Bhean,* Issue 1: August/September 1978. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[58] *Women's Action,* March 1977. Author's Collection

feminism.[59] In this way, the cause of republican feminism is rejected by the broader republican movement. The S.W.G. wrote that 'too often their own demands have been ignored by their male comrades and suppressed by the women themselves, out of a desire to preserve a supposed unity of forces'.[60] The S.W.G. were critical of the republican movement's lack of involvement with regards to women's issues:

> It has been correctly stated that revolutionary organisations in Northern Ireland – Nationalist and Socialist – are extremely backward in their understanding and support of women's struggles. In the case of Sinn Féin, they are also reactionary. In effect this has meant that no serious attempt has been made to help women to organise in political organisations. But it has also meant that there was veiled and at times open hostility to the attempts by women to organise themselves … In this respect the formation of the S.W.G. was of singular importance, in breaking down the barriers, towards clarifying the problems women faced and in beginning to tackle them.[61]

The S.W.G. argued for a collective movement made up of smaller groupings united in pursuit of its objective of the removal of imperialist forces. Akin to the splits which define the republican movement, the S.W.G. promoted a decentralised, non-hierarchical approach rather than a fractured collective. The S.W.G. contended to be the only feminist group engaging with the struggle of republican women. During this period this link was viewed as support for violent republicanism by the N.I.W.R.M. However, there is a paradox here as the republican movement viewed the S.W.G. with suspicion for coupling the women and national questions, while the S.W.G. sits apart from the N.I.W.R.M. for its denial of treating the women's question within its colonial context.

In 1975 only two other feminist organisations were operating at a scale which involved associated publications: Irish Women United based in Dublin and N.I.W.R.M. in Belfast.[62] While both of those organisations were engaged in homogenizing women's experiences to create a

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[59] Further, the Socialist Women's Group claim in the letter that a feminist was physically beaten off a platform by people from the republican movement during a May Day march in 1975. Socialist Women's Group, Letter, 2. Author's Collection.

[60] "Manifesto: Socialist Women's Group," *Socialist Women's Group.* N.d. Author's Collection.

[61] Socialist Women's Group, Letter, 4. Author's Collection.

[62] Irish Women United published the *Banshee* journal (1976 – 1977) and N.I.W.R.M. published the anthology of women's writing *The Female Line* (1988). N.I.W.R.M. "Resolutions for the N.I.W.R.M. Conference 6th March 1977," Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

sizeable feminist movement, S.W.G. sought to develop support for niche political thought within feminism.[63] The S.W.G. decidedly moved away from the exclusionary feminism of the N.I.W.R.M., which sought for a unifying understanding of womanhood, in favour of creating a forum where socialist feminist thought would unite the working classes against imperialism. As a rebuttal of claims that the spilt within the feminist movement emerged from disputes concerning the women's protest in Armagh Gaol, the S.W.G. argued: 'The success of imperialism in Ireland has meant an unresolved 'National Question' and hence a divided and weakened working class movement, unable to win social reforms let alone social revolution … Neither do we agree with those feminists who suggest that the anti-imperialist struggle is a diversion from the fight against women's oppression'.[64] They stake their claim that the two issues are intersectional and cannot be untangled from one another; socialist feminism will tackle the imperialist, capitalist British state to unite the working classes, they claim, regardless of which side of the sectarian divide women fall on.

The S.W.G., it is argued by Carmel Roulston, focused on gaining support within Catholic areas due to their 'tradition of rebellion and resistance to unionism and imperialism'.[65] This resistance encompassed public protests in the form of Rent and Rates strikes and marches in response to internment. Eileen Evason wrote that the N.I.W.R.M. criticised republican socialist feminism's inability to gain socialist solidarity due to its links with the armed struggle: 'The N.I.W.R.M. argued that the bombing campaign [of the I.R.A.] was a major obstacle in the way of uniting a deeply divided working class'.[66] However, the S.W.G. did not support the bombing campaign.[67] Further, friction is evident within a report given by a prominent N.I.W.R.M. member on their venture into republican women's issues:

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[63] In the N.I.W.R.M. "Resolutions for the N.I.W.R.M. Conference 6th March 1977," the movement noted that 'Since the AGM in December 1976 however this position has begun to change in three fundamental respects. 1. There has been a growth of women's groups in N. I., e.g. 3 Women's Aid groups, the Derry and Belfast Socialist Women's Group, a group in Andersontown etc'. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[64] Socialist Women's Group, Letter, 2. n.d. Author's Collection.

[65] Ibid.

66 Evason, *Against the Grain.* 22.

[67] Roulston, "Northern Ireland: Women on the Margin," 48.

> A brief example of this would have been when a march was organised by Sinn Féin Women's Centre against the rapes in West Belfast. Instinctively myself [Una Campbell] and Geraldine [Brady] knew that our [N.I.W.R.M.] banner should be on the march given the nature of the attacks. Afterwards there was a rally at which Sinn Féin propaganda was broadcast and we found ourselves wondering 'my God should we be associated with this?[68]

The protests were arranged in response to a series of sexual assaults in West Belfast, a predominantly nationalist area. The organisation of this rally by Sinn Féin's Women's Centre against sexual assaults perpetrated by men in the area is worth considering as it shows a gendered fracture within nationalism. The women protested against sexual violence carried out by those within their own communities. The N.I.W.R.M. felt compelled to attend the march due to the nature of gendered violence occurring on women within West Belfast. However, the shock expressed that the event was politicized despite its organisation by republican political party Sinn Féin Women's Centre is somewhat naïve. The fusion of anti-imperialism and feminism was a mainstay of the republican feminist mode, and it is unsurprising that the two causes were linked by Sinn Féin's Women's Centre.

The S.W.G. criticise the N.I.W.R.M. in their inability to face up to the inherently political every-day life experienced by women during the conflict in the north: 'Attempts in the past to form such a women's movement have failed, precisely because of the under-lying political antagonisms raised by the inherent contradictions in the state which permeates all political activity'.[69] This is exemplified in the R.U.C.'s response to the S.W.G. which Margaret Ward and Marie-There McGivern wrote about: 'At a Trade Union May Day march in 1978 the right of women's groups to march was denied and a group had their banner 'Women's Action' (the name of the [S.W.G.] group's paper) removed by the R.U.C. because they were regarded as a peripheral republican group – who else could be calling for women's action? Feminists in the north are in a problematic situation because they are under attack from all sides'.[70] This account conveys the

[68] Report from Una Campbell, N.I.W.R.M., n.d. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[69] Socialist Women's Group, Letter, 3 – 4. n.d. Author's Collection.
[70] Margaret Ward and Marie-Therese McGivern. "Images of Women in Northern Ireland," *The Crane Bag: Images of the Irish Woman.* Vol. 4, No. 1 (1980): 70.

friction between the state, and the feminist and republican movements. This antagonism in feminist theory continued to pervade Northern Irish feminists from all backgrounds.[71] The anonymous members of S.W.G. wrote:

> Women in Northern Ireland do not work in a political vacuum. The question of support or opposition to British imperialism and the Loyalist state is a political 'touchstone' in approaching problems faced by working class movements – whether in the trade unions or the women's movements. For socialists to 'submerge' their politics in the myth of building a 'non-sectarian' women's movement such as North Ireland Women's Rights Movement (N.I.W.R.M.) would clearly be opportunist. Sectarianism is a feature of the northern state and will exist as long as that state exists, just as male chauvinism and patriarchy is a feature of class society which will only disappear finally when that system is destroyed.[72]

The S.W.G.'s experience of sectarianism by the R.U.C. is just one example of the processes of state violence. Due to this, the S.W.G. argue that these experiences cannot be disentangled from the feminist movement's objectives for liberation. Further, both the anti-imperialist and socialist feminist movements share a number of key features: to engage the working-class; dismantle capitalist structures; dismantle imperialist structures. A defining link between socialist feminism and anti-imperialist movements is the need for self-determination; bodily, economically and nationally:

> We must learn from history; we must learn not to repeat the same mistakes. When we campaign on behalf of, for example, the political prisoners, we must recognise also that we are asserting our own right to be politically active, and our right to self-determination… We are fighting for a free Ireland, but an Ireland where the means of production will be controlled by those who labour – the working class. In other words, a socialist Ireland. And one aspect of control is that women must also be in a position to control their own lives – to decide whether or not to marry, whether or not to have children etc. We cannot simply isolate one aspect of the struggle, they are all inter-linked.[73]

This connection of struggles, from the material to the bodily, is linked to the oppression of women in Armagh Gaol as the prison campaign was in direct pursuit of autonomy, liberation, and independence. While the S.W.G. argued for a revolution originating out of the working class, the links they made between themselves and the anti-imperialist (in other words republican) struggle

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[71] This kind of antagonism is also reported in *Women's News* June 1986. Author's Collection.

[72] The Socialist Women's Group write that they were created in response to the N.I.W.R.M.'s abstraction of the women's question outside of the context of imperial oppression (letter, Page 3). The S.W.G. accuse the N.I.W.R.M. of being an 'objectively pro-imperialist women's movement in the guise of 'non-sectarianism". Socialist Women's Group, Letter, 3. n.d. Author's Collection.

[73] "Which Way Forward?" *Women's Action: Socialist Women's Group,* Issue 1, 1976. Author's Collection.

isolated the unionist working class. However, this appears to be solely paying lip service to appeal to unionists, a kind of masquerading for unity of the working class, though in reality they targeted primarily the nationalist working class.[74] Although it is not apparent within the groups' work, the S.W.G. aimed to unite and raise awareness within unionist working-class areas. As a consequence of this will to unite the working classes, a publication, *Women's Action,* was borne out of the group's incongruence with other republican or feminist publications.

Women's Action: The Socialist Women's Group

The Socialist Women's Group set up a bi-monthly paper, *Women's Action,* which they distributed outside factories and on estates to reach their target audience, the working-classes, particularly within nationalist areas.[75]

> Over the past ten years as women throughout the world have begun to recognise their oppressed condition and organise for change, most political organisations have given at least a token recognition to the problem. On this basis the task now facing us is to develop a political analysis of women's oppression and to begin organising women to fight against that oppression.[76]

The S.W.G., following the release of their manifesto, ran a series of news pieces around issues working class women were facing both in the north of Ireland and around the world beginning in June 1976. In the second issue (August – September 1976) an entire page was devoted to women political prisoners of imperialist conflicts, ranging from Armagh Gaol to India.[77] This situated the republican women's incarceration within the broader subaltern women's sphere. The aim of this, they wrote, is that the S.W.G. feel it 'of fundamental importance that their [the female political

[74] Evason, *Against the Grain*, 25.
[75] Evason. *Against the Grain*, 25.
[76] "Editorial," *Women's Action: Socialist Women's Group,* Issue 1, 1976. Author's Collection.
[77] The S.W.G. situates women from the north of Ireland's oppression alongside global oppression of women and the struggle for liberation. They list the struggle of the northern women alongside the 1968 Dagenham's women's sewing machinists strike, the suffragette's meeting in London's Hyde Park in 1908, and the First Women's Rights Convention adopting a Declaration of Principles in 1848. The S.W.G. clearly includes the plight of the women in Northern Ireland with these efforts in the feminist movement to inspire the readership of the necessity of their involvement.

prisoners] heroism is not only acknowledged but that their release is fought for'.[78] By doing this, the S.W.G. located the anti-imperialist struggle in the north of Ireland within a broader global movement for the freedom of oppressed peoples. In this way, their philosophy is internationalist in its looking beyond the borders of Ireland for solidarity.

It was in this climate of resistance that the S.W.G. began to forge a new path within feminism. The headline 'Which Way Forward?' sets the tone for subsequent publications; the feminist magazine negotiated the turbulent ground between feminism, socialism, and the republican movement in the north of Ireland with an explorative tone. This inaugural edition situated the Socialist Women's Group within the tradition of rebellion and resistance within Irish history. In the context of the 1916 Easter Rising, the opening article announces:

> Throughout the course of Irish history, women have organised and fought for national liberation. When their men were in jail, it was the women, often despite great hardship to themselves and their children, who continued the struggle.[79]

This echoes the situation in 1976 Northern Ireland more broadly, from the mass internment of men and women to the British Army murders of civilians protesting for civil rights in Derry. This correlation can be understood as a call for nationalist people, particularly women, to persist in their resistance of the British imperialist state. A direct comparison is provided:

> After the 1916 Rising, when those who had fought were scorned by the majority of the population as they were led away to jail, it was the women of Ireland who, by demonstrations, collections and support for the prisoners, re-kindled a desire for self-determination amongst a people who for so long had merely supported the Irish Parliamentary Party.[80]

This is a direct call to the women in nationalist areas to continue to fight the anti-imperialist struggle, particularly with the women of the Relative's Action Committee (R.A.C.). However, this

[78] "Women Political Prisoners," *Women's Action: Socialist Women's Group*, Issue 2, August - September 1976. Author's Collection.
[79] "Which Way Forward?" *Women's Action: Socialist Women's Group,* Issue 1, 1976. Author's Collection.
[80] Ibid.

is not the same battle call as the Rising of 1916, the S.W.G. wrote that the women of the Irish Republic were left behind by the new state and that this was not acceptable this time:

> Those women who worked so hard had to endure imprisonment, continued raids, seeing their children go hungry, Black and Tan brutality – but what reward did they get for their heroism when the 'Free' Irish State came into being?... All that the women were told was that their place was in the home. But we cannot simply lay the blame on the male leadership. Nothing has ever been given to an oppressed group without a fight… And when their men were free, they then went back to their kitchens and their children, allowing the men to make all the decisions. They believed the myth that their own demands must wait – and so their needs were never discussed.[81]

This identifies a pattern of historical imperialist violence against women which centred around domesticity and the home. The S.W.G. implore women to not defer to gender stereotypes which were in place prior to times of violent political turbulence and agitation. Instead, they call for these women to actively disrupt these gendered structures. The myth that their own demands must come secondary to the national question is in direct response to the republican movement's patriarchal hierarchy.[82] The republican feminists through their demands rejected complacency with the status quo. In entering into rebellion, not only against the British State but also against misogyny perpetrated by the republican leadership, they cemented their legacy as revolutionaries.

Within the north of Ireland, a close alignment was forged between the S.W.G. and the R.A.C. group whose function was to lobby for and support the political prisoners. In 1977, the S.W.G. published an article on the anniversary of the establishment of the R.A.C.[83] The group which formed in 1976 in the Ballymurphy area of West Belfast was comprised of primarily women family members of those incarcerated in poor conditions within Long Kesh and Armagh Gaol. The S.W.G. article reads: 'The aim of the women was to highlight the condition of political prisoners, to fight for their rights and in particular, to demand the retention of Political Status category which the British Government had announced their intention to phase out from 1st March 1976'.[84] Within the first year of operation, nine other local R.A.C. groups formed with hundreds

[81] Ibid.
[82] Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the I.R.A.* (London: Penguin, 2007), 711.
[83] "R.A.C. – One Year On", *Women's Action.* Issue No. 5, February – March 1977. Author's Collection.
[84] Ibid.

of supporters.[85] While the R.A.C. groups were not feminist in their function (being solely republican) the correlations and interactions between republican feminist groupings and their subsequent splits is notable. Later, the *Women's News* collective (which are discussed in Chapter 5) would come to critique the work of the R.A.C.:

> The [prison protest] situation became an issue of particular importance for women's groups because of the involvement of some feminists with the Relatives Action [Committee's] Campaign and because some I.R.A. women prisoners joined the protest. The women's protest was not highlighted by the I.R.A. leadership, partly because the women enjoyed better conditions than male prisoners and also partly because less publicity in general was given to women 'on active service'. Publicity for the women's protest was achieved through the efforts of the group Women Against Imperialism.[86]

While women were given substantially less publicity, some were given a tokenistic appearance within the imagery of the Provisional I.R.A. in a series of posters which were released in the 1980s.

Figure 6: Irish Republican Army Poster, 1980s, "Examples of Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) Posters," *CAIN*.

[85] Although in 'Turf Lodge Women Speak Out' (*Women's Action*. Issue 6, April – May 1977, Author's Collection.) the S.W.G. acknowledge that this number significantly declines. The reasoning given by the Turf Lodge women is due to a lack of strong leadership.
[86] Roulston, "Northern Ireland: Women on the Margin," 51.

The images depict women on active service for the organisation alongside the quote: 'Ní Saoirse go Saoirse na mban'. This translated from Irish to English as 'No Freedom Until Freedom Of Women' (see Figure 6).[87] In this way, the objectives of feminism and republicanism, i.e. self-determination, are encapsulated within republican feminism. In this poster women are shown to be engaging in numerous forms of protest, from street demonstrations such as bin-lid banging to armed resistance. The slogan which is paired with this coupled republican feminism and active protest.

Arguably, it is not the women's protest in Armagh which divided this element of the feminist movement, but rather the relationship which each feminist group had with the R.A.C. and their motives of lobbying for republican political status. With this in mind, the S.W.G. accused the republican movement directly of sexism in regard to their treatment of R.A.C. protestors acting in support of political prisoners:

> That the issue of Political Status has not received wider attention cannot be attributed to the R. A. C. but to political organizations who have failed to give their full support to the Committee, and in particular Provisional Sinn Féin. One cannot help but feel that had this Committee been the initiative of men, it would not have been ignored or treated with condescension as has been noted.[88]

The S.W.G. argued that although the R.A.C. was not a feminist organisation they were treated with the same repudiation due to their gender. Despite this, S.W.G. contended that the R.A.C. opened a space for republican women to acquire experience in political organisation: 'Women have always participated in the anti-imperialist struggle, their militancy at times reflecting their frustration at not being able to play a more leading role both politically and militarily'.[89] The marginalisation of women's roles within the anti-imperialist struggle is met here with anger. The condescension and misogyny which is inherent in the rejection of women in positions of leadership during this period was fiercely criticised by the S.W.G. and R.A.C. alike.

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[87] "Examples of Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) Posters," *CAIN*, Accessed on: March 20, 2020. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/images/posters/ira/index.html
[88] "R.A.C. One Year On," *Women's Action.* Issue 5, February – March 1977. Author's collection.
[89] Ibid.

Issue Six of *Women's Action* (April – May 1977) opened with an interview with women from the West Belfast area of Turf Lodge, who were also active in the Relative's Action Committee for the area entitled 'Turf Lodge Women Speak Out'. The article opens by describing the women of the West Belfast area as an inspiration within the anti-imperialist struggle to protect local areas: 'On a number of occasions the troops have been chased out of the area altogether and barricades set-up, as after the murder of 13 year old Brian Stewart and after the recent attempt of the Brits to impose an illegal 'census' at 2 and 3 a.m. in the morning'.[90] This refers to the raids on nationalist homes during the middle of the night and also the death of a teenage boy in the area. Brian Stewart died six days after he was shot by a plastic bullet by the British Army near his home in the Turf Lodge area.[91] The women explicitly rejected and protested this incursion and violence from the British military and the women were endowed with a sense of heroism, which was missing from republican periodicals. The women of the R.A.C. are given the space within *Women's Action* to publicly criticise the republican leadership's tactics:

> We need a stronger leadership. We also need more support from the people who now don't seem to be interested. Although it's an awful thing to say, it will take a boy in H-Block to die and then they will come out, but that is too late, it's going to be one of our sons, and we don't want that. As soon as some of those boys die, they will be out in hundreds.[92]

The group called on the nationalist, and by virtue of publication in the S.W.G., socialist feminist readership for support in their campaign for the prisoners to gain political status. The republican women of the R.A.C. were able to find a medium for their voices to be heard in the *Women's Action* publication which was not readily available from traditional republican media outlets such as *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. This act of dissent in opposition to the masculinised republican movement towards a solidarity with feminists is a key moment within republican feminist history. It marks a moment of public criticism of the movement and the space for women within it.

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[90] "Turf Lodge Women Speak Out", *Women's Action.* Issue No. 6, April – May 1977. Author's Collection.
[91] "Malcolm Sutton Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland," *CAIN,* Accessed on: January 1, 2020 https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/sutton/alpha/S.html
[92] "Turf Lodge Women Speak Out", *Women's Action.* Issue No. 6, April – May 1977. Author's Collection.

Conflict

Although the S.W.G. began with intentions to solidify a socialist feminist subsection within the feminist movement in the north, it ended up occupying a turbulent space which would lead to its disbandment. A factor that led to the split was the evident dissonance within the socialist feminist movement and its base. The conflicting views were initially seen in an interview between multiple women from Turf Lodge and the S.W.G. The interview offered a multiplicity of experiences in response to the S.W.G.'s feminist ethos of fusing the national and women's struggle.

> Q: Should women play an equal part in the struggle i.e. decision making?
>
> A: Women should be as much involved politically as the men, after all it's the women's worry – her children's future. As far as we can see it is the women who do everything in Turf Lodge.
>
> Q: Do you see the need for a women's movement i.e. women putting forward their own demands, for e.g. nursery provision, divorce, abortion etc. or do you see these demands as being subservient to the national struggle?
>
> A: We do think that they are important, but living here we only have one issue and that's our children in H Block.[93]

The women interviewed, who were members of the R.A.C., chose to give prominence to the national question over the women's question, due to a prioritisation of the safety of their families in the face of fatal violent attacks. Whereas the S.W.G. aimed to bring together a group which combined the need for women's equality to be treated with equal importance to the national question, the realities of the day to day lived experience were clear in this interview. The anti-imperialist struggle took prominence due to its immediate and life-threatening nature.

Contention also existed between the northern feminists and British feminists within the depiction of the northern crisis. The British feminist periodical *SpareRib* published an article on

[93] Ibid.

the Peace Women, the core of which comprised of two women, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, who publicly challenged the Provisional I.R.A. to cease its armed campaign. The call came after Corrigan's sister's three children were knocked down and killed by a Provisional I.R.A. volunteer driving a car while escaping a British attack. In a letter to British feminist magazine *SpareRib* on 19th September 1976*,* Margaret Ward on behalf of the Socialist Women's Group described the group's scepticism towards the Peace Women, particularly Betty Williams for her 'anti-provisional hatred' and Mairead Corrigan for being 'on very good terms with the Catholic hierarchy' and for taking 'much advice from them'.[94] Specifically the S.W.G. were critical of the Peace Women's rejection of the anti-imperialist struggle, particularly armed resistance. They wrote that the Peace Women represented a 'shallow sentiment' which did not include the context of British imperialist violence: 'While the "Peace People" claim to be politically 'neutral' it is no coincidence that their initial reaction to the tragic deaths of the Maguire children and I.R.A. volunteer Danny Lennon, was to condemn the activities of the I.R.A. – ignoring the role played by the British Army in these deaths.' [95] In extension to this, the S.W.G. criticised the Peace People for 'suit[ing] the needs of the British Government' while also causing fractures within the nationalist community.[96] S.W.G. wrote to *Spare Rib* to advise that the one-sided nature of articles they printed was intolerable. The group wrote that to circumvent this in the future that they would provide documents on the position of women in Northern Ireland. Within this letter, S.W.G. accused *Spare Rib* of 'present[ing] too simplistic a picture and in fact distort[ing] the situation by an over emphasis on the past activities of women in Catholic areas. The days of bin-lid banging are long gone and women remain as oppressed as they ever were, with very little understanding of their situation emerged'.[97] Notably, the post-script of the letter nods towards the beginning of the

[94] This sentiment is continued on the front page of issue 3 of *Women's Action* (October – November 1976) claiming that 'the army have used division which has been created in the anti-imperialist population as an opportunity to intensify their military offensive on the Catholic ghettos' (*Women's Action,* Issue 3, 1976). Author's Collection.
[95] "Peace Movement – not the answer," *Women's Action: Socialist Women's Group.* (October – November 1976). Author's Collection.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Socialist Women's Group, Letter. N.d. Author's Collection.

feminist movement's rupture on this issue: 'After a discussion with other members of the group, there was some disagreement, so this is a personal statement by three members of the group – myself [Margaret Ward], Shelley Charlesworth, and Marie-Thérese McGivern'.[98] It was at this point that disharmony within the group began to lead to the demise of the S.W.G.

Split in Socialist Women's Group

Following this turbulence, the group split in 1977 and the Belfast Women's Collective was created. The new group proposed to continue to publish *Women's Action*. Likewise, with the S.W.G. before it, anonymity of writers was largely maintained throughout the newspaper. The genesis of the Belfast Women's Collective is only traceable from the first number of its second volume published in February 1978. However, in this magazine, the groundwork for the beginnings of a new publication are laid out in a manifesto:

> The group was divided both on its composition and on its general direction, some women feeling that by calling itself socialist, the group was in fact alienating those women who it mostly wished to work with. It was felt that a more open group was needed which catered for all women regardless of whether they were socialists or not.[99]

The outcome of the Socialist Women's Group meeting saw the formation of a new republican feminist group, the Belfast Women's Collective. The lines along which the group divided seem to be based upon the political description of feminism, i.e. socialist feminism, as a label being too extreme for popular support.[100] Explicitly, the Belfast Women's Collective said of the S.W.G. 'that by calling itself socialist, the group was in fact alienating those women who it mostly wished to work with'.[101] This reasoning shows that language was key within the breakdown of this feminist group.

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[98] Ibid.
[99] "Belfast Women's Collective," *Women's Action: The Belfast Women's Collective*, Vol. 2. No. 1 Jan – Feb. 1978. Author's Collection.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

Margaret Ward, on the split in the S.W.G. wrote that: 'There were two schools of thought, one felt that we should dissolve and form a broad-based women's movement that would agitate on issues affecting women and the other felt that the S.W.G. should be maintained and that we should form other socialist women's groups'.[102] The result of this was that from June 1977, S.W.G. splintered off into the Belfast Women's Collective, which continued to publish *Women's Action.*

Women's Action: The Belfast Women's Collective.

From this point on the newspaper took on a specifically republican ethos. Whereas the previous iteration of *Women's Action* was deeply invested in the socialist focus of dismantling the capitalist system and liberating the working classes, its new iteration developed a fundamentally republican viewpoint. The paper's function in these early transition issues were to focus on the testimonies describing how working-class nationalist women lived. The opening of Issue 8 published in September 1977 entitled 'Army Brutality in Turf Lodge', detailed the abuse that the residents of the area received at the hands of the British military:

> On Friday August 12th, at 2:45pm the Brits came to Mrs Bernie Hylands' house looking for her husband. On discovering that he wasn't there they proceed to punch her in the eye and mouth. They then dragged her out and kicked her in the stomach, and then knocked her unconscious with a blow from a rifle butt at the back of her head. Mrs Hyland was beaten and kicked in the stomach even though she was pregnant.[103]

Details taken from two more residents revealed similar levels of violence inflicted by the British army. The house of Breige May was raided at 2 a.m., on August 16th, which included digging up the garden. She recalled the army breaking her water pipes to flood her kitchen, the soldiers urinating on mattresses, and being informed that if she 'went on any more protests that they would put a bullet through her head'.[104] This testimony highlights an active threat against women rebelling

[102] Margaret Ward, 1987, quoted in Evason, *Against the Grain,* 25.
[103] Ibid.
[104] "Army Brutality in Turf Lodge", *Women's Action.* Issue 8, September 1977. Author's Collection.

against imperialism. The article details that the women in the area had had enough of this harassment by the British army: 'We all got together and decided to protest and keep the army out ourselves. We decided that instead of the children going out rioting, we would go out and rattle the bin lids and blow the whistles and thus keep the army out'.[105] This sets the tone for a new paradigm of republican feminism as the newspapers adopted the function of documenting the testimonies of women who experienced state violence. The form of printing these experiences is a republican feminist act of rebellion in itself as it resists the silencing which these attacks sought to achieve.

The B.W.C. report, written by S. Jackson, details 113 women who were arrested and taken to Castlereagh Interrogation Centre (or, as they termed it 'Castlereagh Torture Centre'). The B.W.C. employed language to convey the gendered violence carried out in Castlereagh. Through the use of the word 'torture' in the headline the group creates a framework for understanding these attacks as structural and pervasive**.** In this report, there are details of a baby being taken into custody with a mother, the attempted suicide of a woman, and those who were sent to Armagh Gaol on remand to await possible sentencing. A woman from the Turf Lodge area, which was heavily affected by these arrests, said:

> It seems the Army and the police have decided that women are an easy target. It seems that they have also woken up to the leading role women have been playing in the anti-imperialist struggle, in the fight for political status and now in protesting against torture in Castlereagh…We see this as another example of the leading role women are playing in the anti-imperialist struggle. Previously women's role has been seen as merely supporting to the fight of the men – these arrests show that this attitude is mistaken and dangerous.[106]

This interview highlights the changing attitude of the British state towards nationalist women. From 1973, when the first woman was interned at Armagh, there was a turn of the tide. Women

[105] "Turf Lodge Women Speak Out", *Women's Action.* Issue No. 6, April – May 1977. Author's Collection.
[106] "Short Strand Women Tortured in Castlereagh", *Women's Action: Belfast Women's Collective,* Vol. 2. No. 1. January – February 1978. Author's Collection.

were no longer thought by the state to be assuredly passive. It is in response to this that the *Women's Action* can be seen to take on a republican scope.

The Armagh political prisoners were featured often within the pages of the initial phase of the West-Belfast based publication of *Women's Action: Belfast Women's Collective*. The new grouping accused the republican movement of denying the women the same attention in comparison with the men in Long Kesh.[107] They surmised that the reasoning for this was due to the relatively small number of women incarcerated, the conditions within the women's prison being 'slightly better' and that 'women have traditionally played a secondary role in the anti-imperialist struggle'.[108] However, the increased number of women interned and incarcerated required the support of the republican movement. Ann Duffy, an interviewee, argued that:

> The struggle can't continue without [women]. Apart from the large number involved in the revolutionary side, there are many more involved in street protests. This is where the Relatives Action Committee is so important, because it is women organised and mobilising themselves. This is bound to effect their position inside the Republican movement. The men have got to accept them and realise what women can do – at the moment it is women who are doing all the propaganda and protests.[109]

It is through this that two factions within the republican feminist movement become apparent: that of militant republican protest and that of popular street protest. The republican feminist issue here crystallises around the women incarcerated in Armagh, and by extension the women involved in campaigning for them. The Belfast Women's Collective used their paper as a way of furthering the visibility of women's involvement in protest. This is in line with this thesis's central argument for voicing the experiences of marginalised republican women. Despite this goal to broaden horizons, the Belfast Women's Collective publications ended abruptly: 'The decision to dissolve the B.W.C. was taken partly because the tension between republicanism/nationalism and feminism became particularly acute for feminists during the period of the campaign for political status for

[107] "Armagh Women Political Prisoners", *Women's Action: Belfast Women's Collective,* Vol. 2 No. 1 January – February 1978. Author's Collection.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.

prisoners'.[110] This reasoning centred the debate around feminism/nationalism as the locus of the group's demise. The timing coincides with an escalation of prison protests, specifically through the beginning of the 1980, and then subsequent 1981, hunger strikes. These protests within the prison caused public uproar at the treatment of the prisoners, which culminated in marches and demonstrations in Northern Ireland and globally.

Although this fervour for reporting testimonies of women's lived experiences is evident, the paper was short-lived as it was felled by another split. Within the May/June 1978 issue, the Belfast Women's Collective announced that the group would splinter further with some members forming another republican feminist group: Women Against Imperialism. The two groups dealt with republican feminism but in differing manners; the Women Against Imperialism preferred to situate their feminism within the area of West Belfast, while Belfast Women's Collective took a broader approach to the anti-imperial feminist movement. The reasoning for this was that the newly formed W.A.I. members found that the B.W.C. was not treating their involvement with the Relative's Action Committee as a paramount issue for the group. W.A.I. wrote in their statement:

> In our view working with anti-imperialist women in the R.A.C. is not just another campaign. Imperialism is the major dominating force in the lives of women throughout Ireland and specifically women in West Belfast.

In response to this, the Belfast Women's Collective wrote:

> The Collective believes that the Women Against Imperialism group because of their emphasis on police and army brutality and the (R.A.C.) campaign for political status are presenting an over-simplified view of imperialism and how it is related to the oppression of women. While we recognise the R.A.C. campaign as the most important one in which large numbers of working-class women are at present involved. We do believe that it is vital for our group to work in as wide a range of women's issues as possible – including those which may not initially meet with a big response because they challenge traditional political and religious beliefs.[111]

[110] Roulston, "Northern Ireland: Women on the Margin," 50.
[111] "Anti-Imperialist Women," *Women's Action: Belfast Women's Collective,* Vol 2. No. 2 May – June 1978. Author's Collection.

The Belfast Women's Collective's commitment to understanding the effect of imperialism on the nationalist areas of the north of Ireland through the prism of feminism is key whereas Women Against Imperialism took an opposition to State imposed violence as their sole function. The B.W.C.'s objectives were to challenge a broader spectrum of patriarchal structures. These material concerns centred around issues such as childcare and contraception issues which disproportionately affected working class women. There were two distinct phases of the B.W.C.; the first phase encapsulated both the Armagh women's protests and also health concerns, such as contraception and motherhood; whereas the second phase of the B.W.C. focused only on health issues.[112] This second shift led to those women in the group wishing to focus on the republican protest and as a result leaving to form Women Against Imperialism. W.A.I. were a single-issue feminist republican grouping focussed on political prisoners. This exemplifies the multivariance in republican feminism(s) in its wide range of scopes.

Women Against Imperialism.

The Women Against Imperialism group consisted of women from Andersontown and also members who had split from the Belfast Women's Collective to form this new group. The women who left the B.W.C. to form W.A.I. cited that the former was too 'academic and middle class'.[113] Akin to the labelling of the N.I.W.R.M., the B.W.C. was criticised by W.A.I. as being a 'reformist' feminist group.[114]

The Women Against Imperialism group was also closely aligned with the Relative's Action Committee, which was borne out of the need for a community group to protest and campaign on behalf of the political prisoners within Long Kesh and Armagh Gaol. The W.A.I., therefore, was

[112] Evason, *Against the Grain,* 26.
[113] Belfast Women's Collective minutes, April 1978, cited in *Women's News*, Issue 11, Summer 1985, 4-5. Author's Collection.
[114] "10 Years of Feminism in N.I. 1978 – 1980", *Women's News*, Issue 11, Summer 1985, 4-5. Author's Collection.

aligned with the specifically narrow scope of anti-imperialist feminism. Explicitly, the W.A.I. wrote: 'We are unanimously in solidarity with their [the Republican women in Armagh Gaol] continuous struggle to free Ireland from British Imperialism, and we find the British Government guilty of torture and criminal oppression against Irish people'.[115] The Women Against Imperialism group centred their operations primarily in relation to the political prisoners in Armagh on protest.[116]

Women Against Imperialism called for an autonomous women's movement which put women's issues at the forefront of the national question: 'We see ourselves as part of the women's movement, but also felt it important to openly identify with the struggle for National Liberation'.[117] This grouping aimed to treat the national struggle as encompassing the women's issues and that of the working-class in equilibrium. Whereas, W.A.I.'s predecessors aimed to primarily relate republicanism to their primary base of feminism or socialism, for B.W.C. and S.W.G. respectively. Akin to S.W.G., the W.A.I. proposed bringing the working-classes to the fore of the liberation movement. They wrote that they 'believe that in order to grow further the women's movement must relate to the problems of the working-class women'.[118] The group expressed awareness of the controversy surrounding its establishment and their need to commit their ideas to this newspaper publication to which they invited input so they could adapt and change as their ideas were played out in practice.[119]

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[115] Women Against Imperialism, 31. British Library, London, England.
[116] Other campaigns which the W.A.I. ran were in protest of the ban on women drinking in Republican clubs. 'The point of the picket was not to start a campaign to get women drinking on Sundays, but highlight and expose the blatant discrimination practiced by so-called Republican clubs' (*Saor Bhean*, Issue 1, 1978, page 2). W.A.I. argued that the denial of women a space within the social clubs was 'making a mockery of women's leading role in the struggle'.
[117] *Saor Bhean.* Issue 1: August/September 1978. British Library, London, England.; *Saor Bhean.* Issue 2: November/December 1978. British Library, London, England.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

Free Woman

In the tradition of publishing a newspaper to circulate and promote republicanism and feminism, W.A.I. published *Saor Bhean/Beansaor: Free Woman*, which translates from Irish as an imperative to 'free woman!'[120] This paper echoed the first phase of the Belfast Women's Collective's *Women's Action* in its function of voicing the testimonies of republican women, especially the prisoners incarcerated in Armagh Gaol. The opening issue ran the cover page headline 'The Forgotten Women', which is a pithy description of women throughout Irish history. The opening article addressed the vast silences of women's experiences of the conflict within nationalist communities:

> When one thinks of internment and how it affected women, what immediately comes to mind is the imprisonment of Liz McKee and her comrades in Armagh. Of women like Mary Kennedy interned at the same time as her husband, of her young children being left without parents, indefinitely. We think of the young girls who followed them into Armagh, and the hardships they endured. While realising their importance and saluting them, and the women presently in Armagh in their fight against imperialism. What we easily forget is the women who were left in their homes, also struggling, having to cope with families, all too often isolated and without support.[121]

The group connected the struggle of those prisoners experiencing gendered violence with the every-day structural violence of women left to run a house and the issue of feeling unable to take British welfare support: 'The fight for women's liberation and the fight for socialism in Ireland are for the first time being viewed as an integral part of same struggle against imperialism in Ireland'.[122] The group wrote that women's visibility protesting on the streets of the north of Ireland has brought them into a position where they can no longer be forgotten about and ignored.

In their first issue of 1979, the group wrote of the Women Against Imperialism's two pickets at Armagh Gaol.[123] The first, held on International Women's Day (8 March 1979), saw the women protestors attacked and arrested by the R.U.C. for showing their support of the political

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[120] There is an overlap in the quotes from Women Against Imperialism and Nell McCafferty's *Armagh Women*. However, while McCafferty's text presents as a journalistic piece, Women Against Imperialism presents itself as a paradigm shift from a kind of 'white middle class feminism'.
[121] *Saor Bhean,* Issue 1: August/September 1978. Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[122] Ibid.
[123] *Saor Bhean*. Vol. 3. No. 1. Special Issue on Rape 1979. Author's Collection.

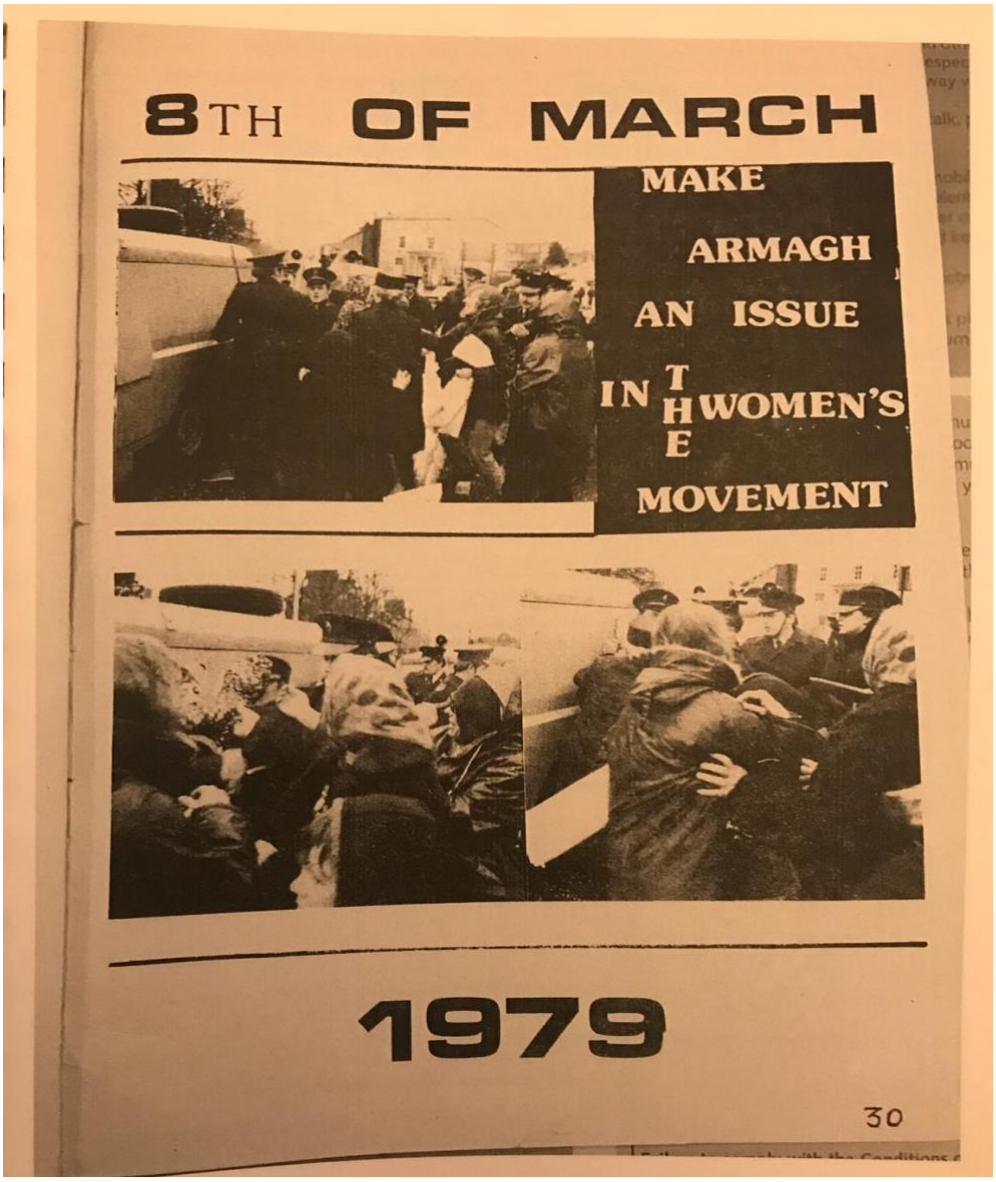

Figure 7: R.U.C. arrest women outside Armagh Gaol on International Women's Day, 1979. *Saor Bhean*. Vol. 3. No. 1. Special Issue on Rape 1979. Author's Collection.

women prisoners (see Figure 7).[124] Eleven women were arrested by the R.U.C. following their protest at the prison. Numerous women reported that the treatment meted out by the police force was unnecessarily aggressive and pointed in its sexism, as the men arrested were released in a small amount of time compared with the women who were held in custody.[125] The result of this saw two Women Against Imperialism members, Margaretta D'Arcy and Liz LaGrue, imprisoned for their

[124] Ibid.
[125] Women Against Imperialism, 1980, 2. British Library, London, England.

refusal to pay a fine for disrupting the peace[126]: 'They in turn joined the protest in prison, attempting to interest their fellow prisoners in feminism'.[127] The cover headline of Issue 3 of *SaorBhean: Free Woman* reads: 'We dedicate this issue to our sisters in Armagh'. This is the first instance of the use of the feminist term 'sisters' in relation to the republican women, which solidifies the link between both struggles. The unnecessarily violent response from the police force against a peaceful protest outside the prison walls is telling; the State response meted out against these republican feminists was violently misogynistic. The treatment of the W.A.I. echoes that of the S.W.G.'s May Day march in 1978 (explored earlier in this chapter) in that the fusion of republicanism and feminism was met by state violence on both occasions. The women both rejected and resisted this oppression and refused to be silenced. In this instance, a second picket was carried out at Armagh Gaol by W.A.I. on April 7th which passed peacefully.[128]

Within the International Women's Day 1980 edition of the Women Against Imperialism journal, an image was captioned: 'Militant Sisters shout support to their sisters' as the women shouted support up to the cell windows of Armagh Gaol.[129] This support was framed through the lens of feminism rather than republicanism. This distinction is pertinent as the pamphlet is single issue: the plight of the political prisoners. This image was paired with the International Women's Day, 8th March 1980. W.A.I. reported that 500 people were at the picket on International Women's Day 1980 compared with 50 the previous year; they argued that the increase was due to the support of the 'Armagh Eleven' arrested for protesting the conditions in the prison the previous year.[130]

The group continued to give coverage to the women in Armagh and subverted the image of the staunch republican prisoner by writing about the women's vulnerability in Armagh Gaol. This vulnerability is crystallised through writing about menstrual taboo: 'The Misery of Armagh'

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[126] *Saor Bhean*. Vol. 3. No. 1. Special Issue on Rape 1979. Author's Collection.
[127] Carmel Roulston, "Northern Ireland: Women on the Margin," 51.
[128] *Saor Bhean*. Vol. 3. No. 1. Special Issue on Rape 1979. Author's Collection.
[129] Women Against Imperialism, 1980. British Library, London, England.
[130] Ibid.

published the statements of women within Armagh and reported menstrual hygiene products as being inadequate: 'There are girls who have not taken their menstruation for 6 – 7 months and were told by the Doctor that it is due to the tension caused by the [23 hour] lock-up and that this could be helped if they came off the protest and went to work'.[131] A variety of experiences were reported in relation to the issue of menstruation. The Women Against Imperialism group claimed that some women in Armagh experienced extremely heavy periods due to their conditions.[132] Elsewhere it is described that some women's periods stopped due to the stress of the protest and the lack of nutrition in the prison food. This complements the idea of the multiplicity of republican prison experiences which should be explored to expand the narratives of the conflict. Further to this, the women have no ability to control their menstrual products: 'They cannot go and get these themselves but must wait to be given their ration. The supply is issued to each girl on a particular date of the month. If her period occurs earlier than this date, she must borrow from one of the others'.[133] An unnamed doctor is quoted within the W.A.I. paper:

> The most obvious stress results from the denial of adequate quantities of sanitary towels during menstruation. A ration of any sort is not only a cruel attempt at degradation which can be used only against women, but is physically inadequate. During heavy periods a single towel might require replacement after 15 minutes, 8, 10 or 12 towels per day may be necessary.[134]

In these instances of menstrual inadequacies, the women were made vulnerable through the making visible of the invisible, specifically the private bodily functions were made a collective, visible issue. This visibility is achieved through the publication of these written testimonies and as such the printing of these experiences is a radical form of resistance against imperialism and the patriarchy.

Like the Sinn Féin Women's Centre organised march against sexual harassment discussed earlier in the chapter, W.A.I. extended the feminist understanding of violence against women to

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131 *Saor Bhean*. Issue 1: August/September 1978. Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
132 Women Against Imperialism, 1980, 22. British Library, London, England.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid, 29.

encompass that of violence from men within their own communities and family units. The 'Violence Against Women' article drew a correlation between the violence meted out at the interrogation centres by the R.U.C. and the British soldiers, and the violence against women by men in their own communities. The statement from the Women Against Imperialism group wrote that 'everyday violence has been ignored by everyone'.[135] They called for the basic rights of women to include 'the right to walk down the streets at night without fear of being molested, the right to live at home without fear of being beaten by their husbands'.[136] There is a change of tone within the September 1979 article which shifts republican feminism from a state of existing alongside republican men who are compliant within the oppressive patriarchal structures of republicanism. The new paradigm of republican feminism demanded that these men also become active in the women's struggle for equality: 'In the struggle for national liberation, women's liberation is not secondary. Women's liberation is part and parcel of the overall struggle of our people against the injustices under British Imperialism'.[137] W.A.I. reasserted the necessary link between equality of the sexes and national freedom. In this way, W.A.I. echo bell hooks' argument for feminism to encompass issues of structural oppression, such as class and imperialism.[138] The women's liberation which W.A.I. aim to achieve challenges sexual harassment within structural sectarianism by the state and that of sexual harassment from republican men.

Like the Belfast Women's Collective before them, Women Against Imperialism produced an article on the abuses in Castlereagh 'torture centre'.[139] The paper documents the testimonies of those who were taken from their homes, usually in the middle of the night, for questioning there. The first is of a 13 year old girl, who had been arrested and taken to Castlereagh Interrogation Centre in November 1979, who writes that she was unable to get sanitary protection from her

[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] hooks, *Feminist Theory,* 40.
[139] Women Against Imperialism, 1980, 6. British Library, London, England.

bedroom after she was pulled from her bed at 3:45am.[140] The female body is under an added element of policing here, as the teenage child is blocked from gaining necessary sanitary protection to avoid a bodily humiliation through the soiling of clothing with menstrual blood. The next account detailed was that of a pregnant woman from the Ardoyne area of Belfast who was arrested in February 1979. When the woman arrived at Castlereagh Interrogation Centre, she complained of pains in her abdomen, which led the police to refer her to Dundonald hospital for medical care prior to questioning. It is reported that the woman underwent two internal medical examinations without her 'active consent': 'During one of the internal examinations a [pair of] forceps was inserted up her vagina and into the neck of her womb, presumably to check if she was telling the truth as to her pregnancy'.[141] In the treatment of both these women, there is an intersection between violence and medicalisation. Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic* wrote of the control and power which medical care, and those who are able to deny or fulfil this care, hold over the patient. Foucault argued of the power which medical professionals hold:

> The observing gaze refrains from intervening: it is silent and gestureless. Observation leaves things as they are; there is nothing hidden to it in what is given. The correlative of observation is never the invisible, but always the immediately visible, once one has removed the obstacles erected to reason by theories and to the sense by the imagination…The clinical gaze has the paradoxical ability to *hear a language* as soon as it *perceives a spectacle.* In the clinic, what is manifested is originally what is spoken.[142]

Foucault wrote of the attentiveness which the medical professionals must pay to the patient in order to listen and observe towards a diagnosis. However, the women in Armagh experienced a denial of this observation; within the domain of illness and health a power dynamic occurs that left the women denied healthcare. David Lloyd argued that the treatment of insurgency was akin to a medicalisation of the population:

> It is important to note that this event becomes, in turn, the object of forensic investigation on the part of the state which seeks to assign causes and agencies both to 'cure' the anomalies that can be seen as

[140] Ibid, 7. This account also appears in *Baensoar,* No. 4. 1979. British Library, London, England.
[141] Ibid, 7. There is also accusation that the woman was catheterised by a doctor, despite asking repeated to use the toilet.
[142] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1963]), 131 – 132.

> the remote causes of the violence and to isolate and eradicate the agencies that are its immediate cause. It is scarcely coincidental that a medical metaphor underlies the same logic to outbreaks of violence as to outbreaks of disease, to the body politic as to the biological body. In the larger narrative of state formation that draws together individual narratives of violence and counter-insurgency in the colonial sphere, the state comes to cure with its civility the disorders that are the consequence of a prior savagery, barbarity or tribalism.[143]

This 'savagery versus civility' viewpoint marks a division which runs through colonial thought of the colonialised. Liz Curtis's *Nothing But The Same Old Story: The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism* maps a history of this alignment between depicted Irishness and barbarism.[144] The medicalisation of the prisoners worked in exactly this way through the aim to 'cure' the political prisoners of the 'disease' of dissent. The treatment of the women prisoners in relation to Lloyd's idea of 'curing' insurgency constitutes an irony on behalf of the state; the methods used to 'cure' are barbaric in their nature (the naked body exposed, the speculum used for internal searches on the pregnant woman, for example).

Further, on 12th January 1980, Anne-Marie Quinn wrote that a prison warder refused her access to a toilet until the contents of her chamber pot were inspected.[145] Quinn refused, the female prison guard pushed Quinn, knocking some of the contents of the pot on her. Quinn described how the warder then lifted out a used sanitary towel from the pot and threw it at her.[146] There is a focus on sanitary protection throughout these republican feminist articles on Armagh Gaol. There is a distinct outlining of the menstrual made visible as a horror not to be tolerated in that the women's tales from the prison are firmly locked in the bodily realm. Kristeva wrote that the abject body is viewed as something which is on the cusp of recognisable, though distinctly repellent to a subject: 'Abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kind; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of memory'.[147] The lack of publication of these events in mainstream republican

[143] David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), 139.
[144] Liz Curtis, *Nothing But The Same Old Story: The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism* (Great Britain: Sasta, 1996).
[145] Armagh Gaol is a Victorian prison which does not have plumbing or toilet facilities in the individual cell blocks. Instead, while the women are locked in their cell, they are to use chamber pots to be 'slopped out' during their one hour out of their cell.
[146] Women Against Imperialism, 23. British Library, London, England.
[147] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 5.

media shows that the women's bodily invasions were beyond cognizance. Further, Kristeva argued: 'There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable'.[148] In this way the abjection caused by the women's protest is linked with an erasure of memory, specifically in the form of active silencing. The women's protest was beyond the confines of what can not only be discussed in mainstream media, but it was beyond the *thinkable*. The women's protest was unthinkable as it was explicitly engaged with gender equality both within the republican movement and society broadly. The lack of engagement with these horrors was a further misogynistic attack on republican women.

W.A.I. made a direct call for political status for the women prisoners on the cover image of this edition of the journal. In the medical section of this, Pauline McLoughlin, who suffered from anorexia nervosa during her time in prison is mentioned. Women Against Imperialism wrote: 'Pauline was informed by Dr Cole not to worry, that when her periods stopped that was the time to worry'.[149] The insinuation is that the other health concerns which were associated with the eating disorder were not taken seriously until the cessation of the prisoner's reproductive system. This medical negligence forces the woman's illness to develop to the stage of bodily torment which amounts to a kind of menstrual torture. Throughout the previous issues of Women Against Imperialism's journal, McLoughlin's case is referred to repeatedly. Eventually, Dr Cole declared her unfit for work when her weight dropped down to 6st 7lbs.[150] She was declared fit for punishment by Dr Cole when her weight reached 7st 6lbs.[151] McLoughlin was released from prison and re-incarcerated along with these fluctuations in weight under the 1913 Cat and Mouse Act, which allowed for temporary release for ill-health. This act was brought in to law in 1913 by the British government in response to the Suffragettes hunger strike. In McLoughlin's case it amounts

[148] Ibid, 1.
[149] *Beansaor: Free Woman*, No. 5, December 1979. Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

to a medicalisation of torture as the prisoners' health is used as a barometer for punishment. The body is used against the self in this way; a kind of gaze of the body is leveraged by the doctors against the political prisoners.

It was not only feminine hygiene products that were controlled, *SaorBhean: Free Woman* reports that the Governor of HMP Maze/Long Kesh banned Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*: 'First it was the red-headed matches, then tin foil and now it is books about Women's Liberation'.[152] The group argued that the appearance of the word 'sex' on the cover alarmed the

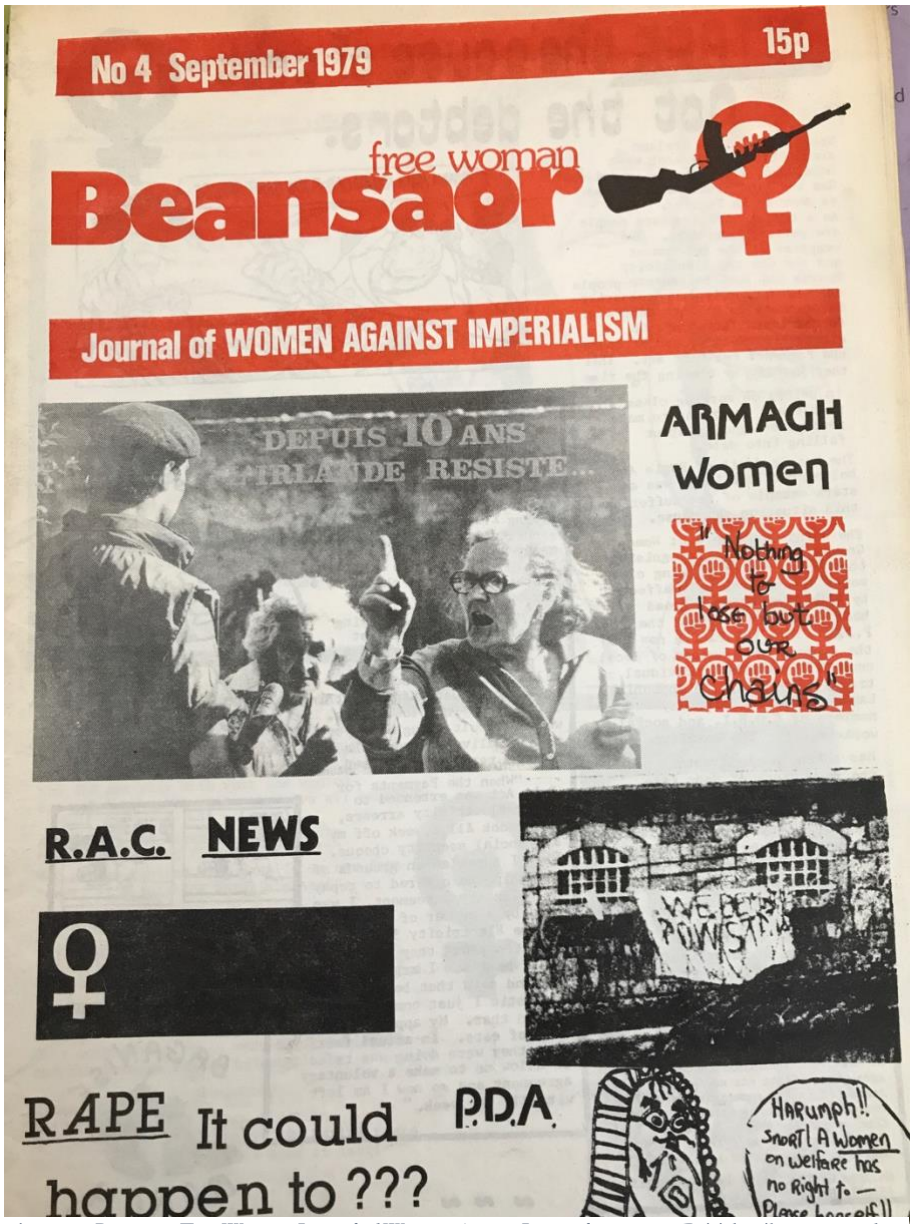

Figure 8: *Beansaor: Free Woman, Journal of Women Against Imperialism,* 1979. British Library, London, England.

[152] *Saor Bhean*. Issue 1: August/September 1978. Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Governor. The control over women's menstrual products was extended to an attempted intellectual control over what the women could access to read. They wrote: 'if he had actually taken the trouble to actually read the book he would have found that far from debasing and degrading womanhood the book is instead a well argued and thoroughly researched analysis of the treatment of women in our society'.[153] However, the fact that *The Second Sex* was within the circulation of reading material within the prison prior to its ban is notable. It is evident that by the year 1980 the women in Armagh were becoming invested in feminist literature.

Towards the end of 1979, the group made an explicit shift to link the issues within the wider feminist movement to republican feminism. On the cover of the September 1979 issue of *Beansaor: Free Woman, Journal of Women Against Imperialism* (see Figure 8), the issues, such as welfare rights and rape, which also arose in the *Women's Action: Socialist Women's Group* and then the later *Women's News* appear here on the cover next to republican feminist issues like the treatment of the Armagh women. Within this issue, the group wrote: 'The simple rule in war is that the winning side is the side that does the raping. Rape is the act of conqueror. The defeated enemies, women [are] part of the property to be abused just like the buildings and land'.[154] In this way, women are shown to be equated with inanimate objects to be pillaged as a consequence of war. The coupling of the criticism of sexual violence against women with the anti-imperialist struggle created the bedrock for the republican feminism.

In the same vein as this fusion of republican feminism, a poem appears in the journal from an unnamed politically protesting prisoner in Armagh:

> They pointed out women were not inferior
>
> And men have no reason to think they're superior.

[153] Ibid.
[154] *Beansaor,* Issue 4. September 1979. Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Today women have seen the light

And for equality they now fight

No longer is it continually the menial tasks

For women's liberation has come at last![155]

As with Bobby Sands's prison poetry, the unnamed woman prisoner invoked the literary form to support the republican feminist cause. The relationship between the literary form and political struggle is forged through these prison-texts which appear in the periodicals. Throughout there are numerous poems from the women in Armagh, two appear under the banner 'The Women's Army is Marching!' The Women Against Imperialism journal's editorial choice to include the literary expressions of anti-imperialist rebellion marks the importance of writing in this historical moment. This echoes Lachlan Whelan's assertion: 'Jail literature is excluded from public view in archives, anthologies, or university curricula precisely because it is frequently untidy… In the eyes of many critics… this uncleanness often extends metaphorically to the shape and content of such writings'.[156] The inclusion of the republican feminist poetry within the journal is a resistance against these types of literary and historical silencings which Whalen wrote of.

As a second wave of feminism was taking hold globally, there was an evident awakening of feminist thought within the prison. The above poem appears alongside images of Margaret Thatcher with the haunting depiction of two women prisoners hanging from her earrings: 'We want women's rights! Not right wing women!' (see Figure 9).[157] From this image, it can be deduced that Women Against Imperialism were arguing against a biologically essentialist form of feminism, in that, being a woman does not equate to inherently being feminist in outlook, as seen in the example of Margaret Thatcher. In this the women outline that being a feminist cannot exist in an apolitical vacuum; women's rights should include a socialist and anti-imperialist approach which

[155] Ibid.
[156] Lachlan Whalen, *Contemporary Irish Republican Prison Writing: Writing and Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.
[157] Ibid.

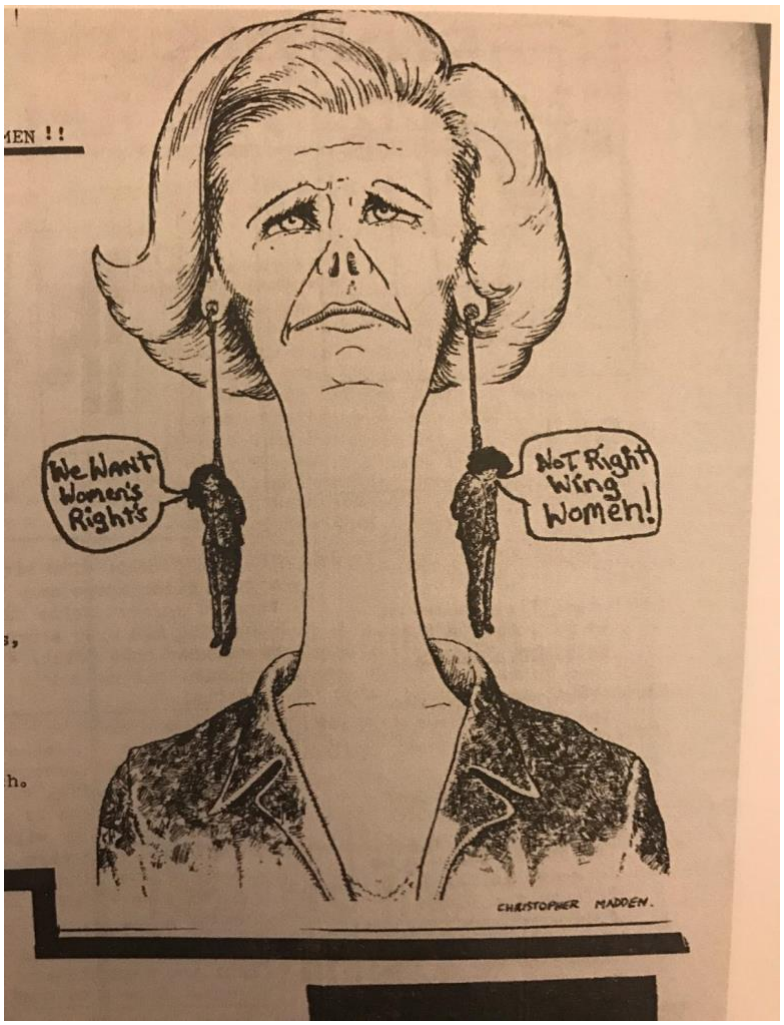

Figure 9: *Beansaor*, Issue 4. September 1979. Author's Collection.

seeks to unsettle domination of colonised people. The women in Armagh write of a link between their struggle in the north of Ireland and women engaged in other international revolutionary struggles, such as the women of the Basque separatist group, E.T.A. and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, amongst others: 'We recognise that all these women are engaged in a legitimate struggle for autonomy and self-determination'.[158] These two key traits, autonomy and self-determination, are key to republican feminism. Further, it situated the women within the tradition of an internationalist revolutionary feminism. The women wrote to draw a parallel between their struggle and that of the history of feminism: 'We have come a long way from Emily Pankhurst'.[159] They aligned themselves fully within the framework of feminism. Emmeline Pankhurst's dictum

[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

"deeds, not words" is thus extended by the Armagh women through their continuation of active resistance against encroachment on women's rights. W.A.I. believe there can be no disentanglement of women's rights and anti-imperial resistance.

The Women Against Imperialism group are said to have disbanded in early 1981 due to 'political division and family disputes'.[160] Some of the Women Against Imperialism group joined Sinn Féin following the dissolution of the republican feminist group.[161]

In conclusion, this period during the conflict was rich in the development of feminist groups. These republican feminist media groupings were created to protest and disseminate their resistance and activism against gendered violence through the publication of newspapers. Each group, the S.W.G., B.W.C. and W.A.I. contained differing objectives: respectively these were, socialist republicanism, broader feminism, and the single-issue of Armagh Gaol political prisoners. It is in these differences and interactions that a collective of republican feminism(s) can be seen to amplify the voices of republican women.

[160] "Armagh," *Women's News*, Issue 11, Summer 1984, 4 – 5. Author's Collection.
[161] "Ten Years of Feminism in NI: Part 4: 1980- 1985," *Women's News*, Issue 15, March/April 1986, 6. Author's Collection; Evason, *Against the Grain,* 28.

Chapter 5: Republican Feminist Media: Hiatus and *Women's News*, 1980 – 1986.

This chapter examines republican feminist periodicals during the period 1980 – 1986. In the years immediately prior to this (1975 – 1980), the Armagh prison protests and the genesis of the N.I.W.R.M. were key moments of note to the feminist movement. As such, this era was the crux of feminist debates throughout the 'Troubles' conflict. There was a dichotomy between the non-sectarian N.I.W.R.M. and the republican prisoners due to the nature of the political protest: **'**This is a period of crisis for all women's groups in the north. Just as the women's centre was getting started [in 1979], feminist groups in NI were torn apart by the debate over the political prisoners in Armagh women's jail'.[1] This tension reached a crescendo during the year 1980 when the prison protests escalated to hunger strike and further again in 1981 with the death of ten male hunger strikers in Long Kesh.

During this time, marches organised by the R.A.C. saw women taking to the streets in protest against the treatment of the hunger strikers. There was a sense of urgency in the response, particularly due to the commitment of the protestors to continue the starvation strike to their eventual deaths. The women publicly marched through the streets in protest against the Thatcherite British government's reneging on the agreement which ended the 1980 hunger strike and its refusal to meet the five demands in the 1981 hunger strike. In this period there was a dearth of widely circulated periodicals in the north of Ireland which were directly republican feminist, but a number did deal with republicanism only. While there was no official reason for the lack of republican feminist periodicals, it was a politically turbulent time from the hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981 and the escalation of the political unrest which erupted due to this. This instance typifies that kind of gendered silencing within republicanism.

[1] "10 years of feminism," *Women's News*, Issue 11, 1985, 4 -5. Author's Collection.

1980 – 1983: Hiatus

No publications were released during this period due to the nature of the ruptures and continued divides caused. With regards to feminism, between 1980 – 1983, a series of 'Unity meetings' were held in Belfast in an attempt to bring the disparate feminist organisations together on a series of issues. The topic of what happened to the feminist newspapers in the north was included within the agenda for discussion of the January 1980 Unity Meeting.[2] *Women's News* wrote of this period that 'Armagh brought ambivalent feelings towards republicans out into the open'.[3] The report detailed that not all of the women involved in the Belfast Women's Collective supported the republican political prisoners' campaign for fear of support being equated to tacit support for the armed struggle. In an attempt to maintain harmony within the different sects of the feminist movement in the north, the Belfast Women's Collective held 'unity' meetings to discuss shared feminist concerns. The anti-imperialist feminist groups refused to continue with these 'unity' meetings after they were moved to the N.I.W.R.M. headquarters in Belfast.[4] The fracture along the lines of the Armagh women protests intensified when the N.I.W.R.M. released their position formally:

> The fact that a group of women prisoners is demanding political status does not make it any more a feminist issue, anymore than the fact that Cumann na mBan exists makes a united Ireland a feminist aim. We do oppose the harassment and ill-treatment of all women prisoners, however, just as we oppose the treatment handed out to women in the name of 'community justice' by paramilitary groups.[5]

Eileen Evason argued this was due to the women's hunger strike, though the hunger strike took place in December 1980 and the statement is dated October 1980 in *Women's News*. Despite the good intentions, the fragmentation proved too much, and this initiative fell apart in 1983.[6] Eileen

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[2] Miriam Rose, Unity Meeting. 23rd January 1980. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] N.I.W.R.M. statement, October 1980 quoted in Evason, *Against the Grain.* 23.
[6] Evason, *Against the Grain.* 46.

Evason wrote: 'In Northern Ireland we have sometimes seemed oblivious of divisions elsewhere and started from the assumption that our divisions are special and our failure to unite a particular deficiency'.[7] Fragmentation is a hallmark of feminism; not every woman has a lived experience the same as any other woman, and to profess unity is to argue for an unattainable goal. Similarly, republicanism is defined by these fractures too. For example, the splits within the republican movement which formed two disparate groups: the Officials and Provisionals.

Christina Loughran added that another element to the disparate republican feminism(s) is the fact that women are not inherently peaceful, as they are often portrayed to be in the media: 'the anti-imperialist movement did not raise feminist issues, rather it was left to individual feminists from various groups inside that movement to force those issues and Armagh to the fore'.[8] Loughran levels a direct criticism at the misogynistic republican movement for their avoidance of women's issues. Instead, it is the republican feminist women who drove the campaign around the women political prisoners. This criticism is echoed in bell hooks' warning to anti-imperialist movements about the need to treat the struggle for total liberation as an intersectional venture. hooks argued:

> Struggle to end sexist oppression that focuses on destroying the cultural basis for such domination strengthens other liberation struggles. Individuals who fight for the eradication of sexism without supporting struggles to end racism or classism undermine their own efforts. Individuals who fight for the eradication of racism or classism while supporting sexist oppression are helping to maintain the cultural basis of all forms of group oppression. While they may initiate successful reforms, their efforts will not lead to revolutionary change.[9]

In essence, hooks asserted that the liberation of oppressed peoples if they are to succeed cannot ignore classism, sexism, or racism. This is applicable to the splintering of feminist groups around issues concerned with working-class nationalists, such as the Armagh prisoner's campaign and also seen through the dissolution of the Socialist Women's Group in 1977 (which is explored in Chapter

[7] Ibid.
[8] "10 years of feminism," *Women's News* Issue 11, 1985. Author's Collection.
[9] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory*: *From Margin to Centre* (London: Routledge, 2014), 39.

4). hooks wrote: 'Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression'.[10] This is of significance to this thesis as it rejects the apoliticism of the N.I.W.R.M. Instead, the work of the *Women's News* speaks to this celebration of difference.

1984 – 1986: Women's News.

Women's News formed following a four-year hiatus in feminist periodicals in the north of Ireland. The group was not explicitly linked with republican feminism, however, the editorial policy allowed for any feminist view to be printed within the editions. This allowed for a free debate around the intersections of feminism and republicanism.

The Women's Centre in Belfast, which was organised through the N.I.W.R.M., wrote in their monthly report of the beginning of *Women's News*. Although not directly involved with *Women's News*, the group debated the policy of printing all submissions regardless of political agenda: 'In the run up to the printing of the second edition of *Women's News* we had two heated meetings, trying to establish an editorial committee, editorial practices and the like. None of these issues could be considered resolved'.[11] The editorial decision arrived at for the *Women's News* newspaper was to print articles submitted regardless of political stand-point, which opened the feminist paper as an arena for political debate. The N.I.W.R.M.-ran Women's Centre remained unconvinced by the policy of allowing republican feminism a voice within this arena: 'We have come to the conclusion that we should continue to submit articles to the paper and give whatever help we are capable of. We feel we should look at *Women's News* on a monthly basis but that we should not abandon it'.[12]

[10] Ibid, 65.
[11] Women's Centre Report, N.I.W.R.M., 11th April 1984. Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.
[12] Ibid.

Due to this editorial policy, the *Women's News* reported similar ruptures in the feminist movement that was felt by the *Women's News* predecessors Socialist Women's Group's *Women's Action* and the *Belfast Women's Collective* publications. The April 1984 issue of the *Women's News* reported on the International Women's Day march. A woman named as only Christina sparked controversy when she addressed the 'Reclaim the Night' march with a 'fairly long statement about the protesting women prisoners in Armagh and as such angered some of the women on the march who felt that it was a political exploitation of a protest which had drawn together women from a wide range of political backgrounds to demonstrate against crimes which are committed against women in <u>all</u> sections of this society'.[13] There is a dissonance within this statement: claiming to speak for all women in society, while being angered by the support for one group of women within that society.

Writing on an event held in support of a range of issues affecting nationalist women in West Belfast, the *Women's News* reporter applauded the breadth of the issues, from plastic bullets, sex education and the housing conditions. However, the reporter criticised the event for effectively denying these issues a space for discussion on the day in favour of holding workshops on the Armagh women and so-called paid perjurers. The reporter wrote that it 'felt the whole thing was organised to conform to Sinn Féin's interests'.[14] The writer expanded on this:

> At the workshop I attended, several women asked why the abortion campaign was not represented and they were told that it was against Sinn Féin's policy, so the women felt that they were getting only a partial view of what work was actually being done by feminists in the north.[15]

This is a concern which arises regarding Sinn Féin's co-opting of republican feminism through setting up the Women's Department. Particularly given the inability to discuss prominent feminist issues, from bodily rights encompassing abortion campaigns to campaigns against sexual violence.

[13] "International Women's Day: Reclaim the Night March," *Women's News*, April 1984, 1. Author's Collection. Underline in original.
[14] Ibid, 3. Author's Collection.
[15] Ibid.

A discord within republican feminism is also apparent in the *Outwrite* and *Spare Rib* extracts which are used in May/June 1984 issue to posit the perceived dichotomy between republicanism and feminism in its article entitled 'Margaret Ward vs. Rita O'Hare'. The former is prominent in the socialist feminist movement, while the latter was a member of Sinn Féin Women's Department. The debate on 'the national question and feminism' between the two women occurred at Dublin Women's Conference at Rutland Street primary school and was aimed at harnessing a connection between the factions within republican feminism. Ward argued that women's liberation is of premier importance to the cause of republican feminism, while O'Hare contended that the national question supersedes feminism. While the audience are reported to be largely in support of the Armagh women's campaign, the meeting was derailed by the discussion being steered by a 'Communist Party supporter' towards the I.R.A.'s campaign of violence: 'Some Sinn Féin members became irate and a heated defence of the present military campaign ensued… were we discussing or rejecting the right of the people to militarily resist oppression or were we evaluating the I.R.A.'s campaign?'[16] The report ends with the refrain 'it is equally foolish to concentrate on what divides us rather than what unites us'.[17] Within *Women's News* Summer 1984 edition (Issue 4), Lynda Egerton, of the N.I.W.R.M. movement, wrote a response to the unnamed *Spare Rib/Outwrite* writer's report of the Dublin Women's Conference: 'I can only assume that the author feels that the military campaign of the I.R.A. and the I.N.L.A. should not be discussed along with the 'National Question'. If this is the case, then I think that she is burying her head in the sand'.[18] The debate around how the women's question interacts with and complements the national struggle, particularly with regards to the I.R.A.'s campaign, was met with contention. A division became evident here among republican feminists over which issue should receive prominence in their campaigns. Margaret Ward, writing for the *Women's News*, responded that 'these confrontation workshops appear to be the only occasions when women from different backgrounds meet, and

[16] "Conferences: Dublin's Women Conference," *Women's News,* May/June 1984. Author's Collection.
[17] Ibid.
[18] "Letters," *Women's News*, Issue 4, Summer 1984, 3. Author's Collection.

that in itself is a depressing reflection on the deep-rooted nature of the divisions that exist, and in our inability to extricate ourselves from that morass'.[19] Ward wrote that she was disappointed at the concentration of debate around national divisions: 'I do believe that feminism has the potential to bring women together on some issues, and I had hoped that this would have formed the core of the discussion, but this did not happen'.[20] The ultimate issue here was violence and how gender intersects with violence. On the one hand, the issue is the effect that violence has caused women disproportionately, while on the other, women are not inherently passive and thus are willing to defend their communities, even if that involves violence. It is this issue which the differences crystallised around.

The debate surrounding the I.R.A.'s armed campaign arose again within *Women's News* in 1985. In a letter to the magazine, a woman named only as Celia responded to an article in a previous edition of the magazine by Marie-Helene.[21] The series of interactions showed disparate elements of republican feminism. The article which Celia responded to invited debate on 'what campaigns of violence have to offer women apart from hardship'.[22] In defence of republicanism, Marie-Helene writes: 'Condemning the sporadic violence of the oppressed without condemning and attacking the constant violence of the system they suffer under is just righteousness, hypocritical garbage'.[23] Celia responded that she did not agree that the 'planned strategy of military resistance to British rule' amounts to 'sporadic violence'.[24] Instead, she wished to debate whether this was 'useful or necessary'. This was a circular interjection, as Maria-Helene in her article was asking the readership to consider how the armed struggle served women, which is tantamount to questioning its necessity. Celia continued to criticise Marie-Helene's claim of the 'lack of involvement of Sinn

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid,
[21] *Women's News* Issue 10, 1985, quoted in "Armagh – Different Views. Strip Searches continue," *Women's News*. Issue 11, 1985. Author's Collection. Every effort has been taken to locate a copy of this edition, however, none are archived.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

Féin in any women's issues but their own'. [25] She wrote: 'Which women's issues involve only Sinn Féin women, and which women's issues involve all women except Sinn Féin women?'[26] The crux of this dissonance between the two republican feminists amounts to whether there was support, or not, for Sinn Féin and their treatment of the women's question:

> There are no 'women's issues' in Ireland which are somehow nothing to do with the reality of British colonial rule, and there is no women's movement which is immune to its effect. That is why there are women among those offering armed resistance to it and why it is women who have been the backbone of this resistance.[27]

Marie-Helene wrote of her support of the women in Armagh yet she was critical of the political wing of the republican movement, Sinn Féin: 'I would reaffirm the right of every person to discuss and disagree with Sinn Féin policies and reject them in part, if that's the way they feel as I don't think anybody would ever suggest that they were perfect'.[28] Instead, Marie-Helene argued for women involved in the armed struggle to 'share their experience with other women, in mutual respect, and explain why they see it as necessary'.[29] The crux of this debate centres on violent republicanism, though, the call is to hear the voices of women within the republican movement. In this way, the debates which opened through the *Women's News* publication policy allowed for the voicing and printing of dissonant feminism(s), specifically republican feminism(s) which resisted silencing.

To conclude, with *Women's News,* and the period 1980 – 1985, there is an increase in dialogue between disparate elements of republican/feminism(s). This is in contrast to the previous period (1975 – 1980) in which antagonism and complete fragmentation comprised the dynamics. The editorial policy in the *Women's News* publication allowed any viewpoint as long as it related to

[25] *Women's News* Issue 10, 1985, quoted in "Armagh – Different Views. Strip Searches continue," *Women's News* Issue 11, 1985. Author's Collection.
[26] Ibid.
[27] "Armagh – Different Views. Strip Searches continue," *Women's News* Issue 11, 1985. Author's Collection.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

feminism and due to this, politically informed feminist groups were given the space for interaction. It is due to this policy that dialogues were opened up in this period, despite limited success.

Chapter 6: Poetry, Nationalism and Women: Seamus Heaney's *North* (1975) and Medbh McGuckian's *The Flower Master* (1982).

In contrast to the women's activist and prison writings of this period the writing landscape that developed following the onset of the Northern Irish 'Troubles' conflict did not adequately address the visceral violence of the war. When Seamus Heaney's poetry collection *North* was published in 1975 it opened up a space for highlighting the human cost of the events from 1969 – 1975.[1] However, as will be explored in this chapter, Heaney's depictions of gendered experiences of the conflict reinforced traditional nationalist stereotypes which left women silenced. During a 1979 interview with James Randall, Heaney said: 'I had the name for being a poet but I was also discovering myself being interviewed as, more or less, a spokesman for the Catholic minority during this early stage of the Troubles'.[2] In this, Heaney acknowledged that he was aware of himself as a kind of 'spokesman' for the oppressed nationalist community. Critic Daniel Tobin wrote of this: '*North*, the book born of his entry into wilderness, is more a decisive plunge into the dark of self and history'.[3] Given this 'plunge into the dark of self and history,' it is pertinent to question Heaney's portrayal of gender dynamics in the collection. It begs the question: are nationalist women represented here? These masculinised representations of the nationalist experience within *North* serve to further marginalise women. As has been asserted in the previous chapters, women directly resisted patriarchy and imperialism through the medium of writing. So, while Heaney became a reluctant nominated spokesman for the nationalist community, McGuckian's work offered a different approach, that of focusing on the female body. In this chapter, I will explore the development of gendered writing with the publication of Medbh McGuckian's debut collection *The Flower Master* (1982) which acts as a response to this literary silencing.[4] McGuckian's poems

[1] Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992 [1975]).
[2] James Randall, "An Interview with Seamus Heaney," *Ploughshares* 5.3. (1979) 8. Quoted in Daniel Tobin. *Passage to the Center: Imagination and the Sacred in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 104.
[3] Daniel Tobin. *Passage to the Center: Imagination and the Sacred in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 104.
[4] Medbh McGuckian, *The Flower Master And Other Poems* (Oldcastle, Ireland: Gallery Press, 1999 [1982]).

are concerned with non-violent nationalist feminisms as they draw away from their militant counterpart. I argue that this collection introduces an embodied experience of womanhood. The female body is depicted as a site of surveillance, pain, and ultimately one which inextricably links the political crisis with bodily developments. Through this, nationalist womanhood is written into the literary narrative of the conflict.

Seamus Heaney's North (1975)

I will explore the link between Heaney and the representation of nationalist womanhood, before examining the development of this representation in McGuckian's debut collection. Within *North* Heaney reinforces the stereotype of women as linked inherently to Irish nationhood; the female body becomes a vehicle for the discussion of the turbulent recent and ancient history of Ireland. Heaney utilises the imagery of womanhood evoked through nationalist symbolism. In an interview, Heaney discussed the parallel with Iron Age rituals, which he uses as a metaphor for modern Ireland throughout *North*:

> You have a society in the Iron Age where there was ritual blood- letting. You have a society where girls' heads were shaved for adultery, you have a religion centering on the territory, on a goddess of the ground and of the land and associated with sacrifice. Now in many ways the fury of Irish Republicanism is associated with a religion like this, with a female goddess who has appeared in various guises. She appears as Cathleen ni Houlihan in Yeats's plays; she appears as Mother Ireland. I think that the Republican ethos is a feminine religion, in a way.[5]

The 'Republican ethos,' to Heaney, is centralised around women, though only through symbolic imagery which was explored in Chapter 1. The interred woman described in the poem 'Bog Queen' invokes a double meaning: one rooted in the Iron Age history of the sacrificial murder and burial of a woman to bring fertility to the living women of the community; and the other as the murder and burial of those disappeared by the I.R.A. from 1972 onwards. There is an irony here in the

[5] Heaney quoted in Stephanie Alexander, "Femme Fatale: The Violent Feminine Pastoral of Seamus Heaney's North." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 39, No. 2 (2016): 226.

killing of a woman – who is capable of reproduction – in the hope that her death will yield fertility for others; in other words, killing in the hope of life. This historical mirroring is used by Heaney to criticise the Provisional I.R.A. for the senselessness of murder in the objective of freedom of the Irish people.

The central link between the images of the body within nationalism is explored further by Stephanie Alexander. She wrote of the link between Heaney's depiction of women and the republican female political prisoners that: 'the feminine body is exalted and becomes a vehicle for resistance, while at the same time it is never out of the control of men'.[6] Invoking Kristeva's abject body as feminine, Alexander makes a case for the physical protests held in Long Kesh as being distinctly feminine in their abjection. She criticised the male prisoners for capitalising on this feminine abjection while still maintaining control over women's bodies by refusing support for the women to also go on hunger strike and through the policing of women's sexuality within their community in the form of tarring and feathering, which is explored fully later within this chapter.[7] The link to be made here with Heaney, Alexander posits, is that Heaney both utilises the female body as a metaphor for the nation while rendering the women silent while he, the poet-narrator, speaks on their behalf. Heaney's 'Bog Queen' depicts the body of the woman, silenced, melding with the mud and the earth as she slowly decomposes and unifies with the environment. The language invoked to create this image is unsettlingly sexual throughout. 'My body was braille' invokes a sensuality which alludes to the female body as a text that needs to be touched to be understood, while 'stitchwork / retted on my breasts' nods to the dissolving of clothing to reveal the flesh underneath.[8] The woman's body becomes a symbol for critiquing republicanism while removing all female agency. She remains unnamed in an unmarked grave while her physical body slowly disappears to nothing; her bodily borders rotting out of existence.

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] 'Bog Queen,' Heaney, *North,* 25

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak theorised the subaltern women in post-colonial India as being 'doubly in the shadow' and thus 'the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read'.[9] She wrote:

> Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence'. It is, rather, that both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history, and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.[10]

In this context, Spivak uses the term 'insurgency' to mean a deference from the dominant social texts. Spivak writes on nationalism(s) that her stance 'operates on the notion that all such clear-cut nostalgias for lost origins are suspect, especially as grounds for counterhegemonic ideological production'.[11] Heaney's Bog Queen operates in this way, and as such, removes the validity of the poet as a spokesman for the nationalist experience. Reading the dissolving body of the Bog Queen through Spivak's critique of 'nostalgia for lost origins' as shown in atavistic nationalisms, the woman's body, the site of possible reproduction of future generations, is disintegrating out of existence. The result of this is that women are removed from historical and literary narratives, and as such, this undermines the telling of counter-narratives. While one may argue that the depiction Heaney offers here is one which reflects nationalist womanhood, he in turn commits an act of silencing. This representation of womanhood leaves women silenced, beyond existence, removed from the political landscape.

Again, the silenced woman is a key feature in the poem 'Act of Union' which is a metaphor for the colonisation of Ireland through the guise of the male narrator's sexual relationship, and eventual reproduction, with a female partner: 'Within whose borders now my legacy / culminates inexorably'.[12] The woman becomes a land whose borders are compromised through the sexual act

[9] Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 84; 104.
[10] Ibid, 82 – 83.
[11] Ibid, 101.
[12] 'Act of Union,' Heaney, *North,* 43.

resulting in the creation of a hybrid of two states over which she has no control. The metaphor is laboured:

> And I am still imperially
>
> Male, leaving you with the pain,
>
> the rending process in the colony,
>
> the battering ram, the boom burst from within.[13]

The sexual experience is one of pain inflicted upon the woman evident in the use of the words 'battering' and 'boom burst'. The binary of the male/female and coloniser/colonised is reinforced through this depiction of sexual interactions through the medium of violence. The violence is met by resistance from the colonised woman, as Alexander argued: 'Heaney wades here into radical abject pastoralism, where the landscape of Ireland is presented not simply as female, but as a mother-destroyer, a femme fatale capable of producing violent and rebellious offspring – a child with a "wardrum" heart whose fists are "cocked" like guns, whose hands "beat" at both the borders of his mother and his colonizer/father'.[14] In the 'mother-destroyer' the maternal is rendered as monstrous Other, but it is the offspring of the 'mother-destroyer' which poses a risk which amounts to a reimagining of the stereotype of Mother Ireland calling upon her sons to protect her. Women are portrayed as passive vessels for men to actively possess; women's bodies are the reproducers of history through this passive reproduction of further generations. It is notable too that the colonised person is depicted as an inferior weak woman. Heaney reproduced the colonial stereotype of the colonised while envisioning himself in the role of male coloniser. The result is that womanhood is equated with weakness. Not only does Heaney leave the female subject passive and silent, but he also by extension renders nationalism weak through the act of silencing.

[13] Ibid.
[14] Alexander, "Femme Fatale," 221.

Figure 10: Woman tarred and feathered, Londonderry/Derry, 1971. Bernard Weinraub, "Ulster Women Tar 2 Girls for Dating British Soldiers," *The New York Times*. November 11, 1971.

The gendered power dynamics at play within Heaney's 'Act of Union' are unsettled through the poem 'Punishment' which details the barbaric attack of tying a woman to a lamp-post, pouring a liquid tar (or black paint to give the visual effect of tar) over her head, and covering her body in feathers. This poem offers a view of gendered violence perpetrated by other women; while 'Act of Union' and 'Bog Queen' render women as lacking agency in their demise, 'Punishment' shows that women are capable of exacting pain and torture onto other women. The public visibility of tarring and feathering is shown to be carried out by the women in the community on another woman who has been deemed to have carried out an illicit affair with the 'enemy' of the community, specifically with a member of the British Army. Gender studies theorist Nira Yuval-Davis argued that the patriarchal containment of women is due to 'a concern about the 'genetic pool' of the nation. Nationalist projects which focus on genealogy and origin as the major organizing principles

of the national collectivity would tend to be more exclusionary than other nationalist projects. Only by being born into a certain collectivity could one be a full member in it. Control of marriage, procreation and therefore sexuality would thus tend to be high on the nationalist agenda'.[15] The act of publicly humiliating women for deemed sexual transgressions is a silencing tactic. Both *The New York Times* and the BBC ran news reports in 1971 on this act of violence against women (see Figure 10). In the former, the report details: 'A 19-year-old girl was tied to a lamppost and tarred and feathered in Londonderry last night while a group of 80 women shrieked: "Soldier lover! Soldier lover!".'[16] The newspaper reported that this was the second incident of tarring and feathering in the Bogside area of Derry in only a few days. This speaks to the prevalence of the act of torture enacted publicly upon women. Further, BBC Radio 4 ran a news report on this form of gendered violence. Ruth MacDonald wrote of the incident depicted in Figure 10: 'Her hair has been cut off and a black substance poured over her head. Behind her are two people. One stares off into the distance, one walks by. Neither makes a move to help her'.[17] The report also details the testimony of a woman remembering her pregnant sister being tied to a lamp-post, tarred and feathered for defying an I.R.A. request to store weapons in her house. Heaney offers a literary depiction of these horrific events in 'Punishment':

> her shaved head
> like a stubble of black corn,
> her blindfold a soiled bandage,
> her noose a ring
>
> to store
> memories of love.
> little adultress,

[15] Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 22.
[16] Bernard Weinraub, "Ulster Women Tar 2 Girls for Dating British Soldiers," *The New York Times*. November 11, 1971. Accessed on: March 20, 2020 https://www.nytimes.com/1971/11/11/archives/ulster-women-tar-2-girls-for-dating-british-soldiers-two-girls.html
[17] Ruth McDonald, "Has Northern Ireland Left the Past Behind?" *BBC*. November 27, 2009. Accessed on: March 20, 2020 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8381652.stm

before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.[18]

This opens a new literary paradigm of the gendered divisions of the conflict; that is, male on male violence with women as by-standers in the home. He shifts the focus here to surveillance and punishment carried out *by* women *on* women, which instils an active role to women.

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge[19]

This element of community-led policing ('intimate revenge') serves as a reminder of the involvement, whether palatable or not, of women involved in the violence carried out in the name of community.[20] Heaney foisted the blame onto the women ('betraying sisters'); the use of the word 'sisters' nods to a feminist solidarity which is – Heaney asserts – lacking amongst the nationalist women.

The importance of language and intended meaning(s) are loaded with dangerous consequences in the north; the wrong name given could be the difference between identifying

[18] 'Punishment,' Heaney, *North,* 30 – 31.
[19] Ibid.
[20] The community self-policing of relationships becomes a theme in Northern Irish literature from 1975 to the present day; within this Heaney collection, in Anna Burns' *Milkman* (2018) and *Little Constructions* (2007), and Lucy Caldwell's *Where They Were Missed* (2006). These latter novels are not within the scope of this thesis.

oneself as being from one side of the sectarian divide instead of the other. In the poem 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing', itself a nod to the I.R.A. 'Green Book' guidance on secrecy, Heaney ironically opens this notion of silence out to the public domain.[21] The spores of silence stretch beyond paramilitary organisations and perpetuated an environment of surveillance and silence: 'The famous / Northern reticence, the tight gage of place / and times'.[22] While Heaney has paid careful attention to the case for correct language as marker for identity, his depiction of women begs the question: what language, and words, can we use for the silenced, the voiceless? Women are used throughout Heaney's *North* as a symbol to speak *to* and speak *for* the nation, though not for themselves as women.

Medbh McGuckian's The Flower Master *(1982)*

Medbh McGuckian wrote in her debut collection *The Flower Master* of being the subaltern Irish woman in the north of Ireland. In an interview with Danielle Sered, McGuckian said:

> I know being a woman for me for a long time was being less, being excluded, being somehow cheap, being inferior, being sub. I associated being a woman with being a Catholic and being Irish with being from the North, and all of these things being not what you wanted to be. If you were a woman, it would have been better to be a man; if you were Catholic, it would have been a lot easier to be Protestant; if you were from the North, it was much easier to be from the South; if you were Irish, it was much easier to be English. So, it was like everything that I was was wrong; everything that I was was hard, difficult, and a punishment.[23]

McGuckian discussed her complicated relationship with her own identity; one in which she felt her identity constituted an exclusion, an othering from dominant modes. Poet and academic Leontia Flynn invokes American poet Adrienne Rich's call to women poets to write their lived experiences as women in a bid to shift the stereotype of female poet as being concerned only with

[21] "I.R.A. Green Book" reproduced within Coogan, Tim Pat. *The I.R.A.* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006).; "Text of Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) 'Green Book' (Book I and II)", *CAIN*. Accessed on: 01/01/2020 https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/I.R.A./I.R.A._green_book.htm
[22] 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing,' Heaney, *North,* 54 – 55.
[23] Danielle Sered, "Personal interview with Medbh McGuckian." Emory University, Atlanta, GA. April 1998. Quoted on: Suzanne Temple, 'Medbh McGuckian', Spring 1999. https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/11/mcguckian-medbh/ Accessed on: 10/08/2019

the romantic suffering towards an 'authentic female identity'.[24] Flynn wrote: 'Such a project implies the use of poetic language as a medium for the truth and often intimacy of female experience, and an uncovering of that which has previously been omitted or falsified'.[25] Further, Flynn argued that through the *The Flower Master*: 'McGuckian has moved her own autobiographical experience to the centre of the poem' and that through McGuckian's collection she has 'authored herself'.[26] McGuckian's debut collection *The Flower Master* asserts that the female body is a site of continual development and empowerment; this negates the stasis with which nationalist women are stereotyped through silencing images of Mother Ireland.

Within the poem 'That Year' in the original 1982 publication (renamed 'Eavesdropper' in the 1993 re-release), she writes of the loss of childhood innocence during the development of menstruation. The narrator remembers 'as a child the red kite' and 'the white ball a pin-prick on the tide'.[27] Both these memory images are laden with imagery of children's toys which appear against the backdrop of nature (the sky, the sea). The toys (ball/kite) could be pulled back to the child from the air/the tide, although the natural elements can deter this from happening (wind/current in the tide). The colour of the red kite in the sky returning to the grounded white ball is an allusion to the red and white of the shedding of the endometrial lining in the womb and the suspense in waiting for blood to appear on the stark white of a sanitary pad. Further, the first menstruation is described as becoming embedded in the skin, the self, irrevocably changing the woman:

> It was like a bee's sting or a bullet
>
> left in me, this mark, this sticking pins in dolls,
>
> listening for the red and white

[24] Leontia Flynn, *Reading Medbh McGuckian* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2014), 19.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 27.
[27] 'Eavesdropper,' McGuckian. *The Flower Master*, 15

particles of time to trickle slow.[28]

The bullet/bee sting are objects which can be removed from the flesh which will leave the skin permanently changed through scarring; it marks a change that cannot revert back to the original state. McGuckian makes a statement by employing the politically charged image of a bullet remaining within the body which is likened to the repeated stabbing motion of 'sticking pins in dolls'. The object of the doll shows no emotional response due to its inanimate status, likewise the violence which the female body experiences is aligned with this. The silences echo through this representation of pain.

Further, the reference to 'red and white particles of time' are both types of blood cells which she is attentive to as they migrate through her bodily system. All of these allusions to the female body are crossings of liminal spaces which are metaphoric for the development of identity: firstly, the child's toy kite requires a pulling action against nature's elements; the bee sting/bullet which pierce through the skin's barriers break the borders of internal/external; the 'particles of time to trickle' of blood migrating from inside to outside the womb. All of these are metaphoric for the pubescent developments of the female body. Significantly, each of these images of developments within the female body offer a painful sense of loss. The memory of each life event (from childhood to puberty) is told through boundaries broken (bee sting/skin, blood/womb lining). The memories of these are aligned with pain. These bodily transgressions offer a new representation of the political crisis for nationalist women; McGuckian shifts the focus on to the individual from the act of 'punishment' for bodily transgressions, i.e. for sexual relationships between nationalist women and soldiers. In this way, McGuckian maps a new relationship between violence, pain and the symbolism of the female body.

The link between menstruation and time, here, is key. Menses is often talked about as 'being late' or never arriving as a signifier of pregnancy. It is in this shift of time that McGuckian

[28] Ibid.

goes on through her poem to address the absent menstruation. Particularly from menstruation the poem develops to the filling and emptying of the womb through child birth. While Heaney's birthing scene in 'Act of Union' places the female body as birthing a collective nation, McGuckian grounds her depiction of a birthing scene within the bedroom which renders the act personal and individual. In the latter, the singularity of the female body within her home is left exposed and seen but only to those warranted into the domestic space of the family home. In a vulnerable state, however, the body exists within the privacy of the home. The poem portrays the narrator experiencing insecurity in her birthing where she 'wanted curtainings, and cushionings' to surround her in her bed to offer a sense of security, privacy and comfort.[29] The wishing for curtains around the marital bed is metaphoric of a rejection of the female body as symbolic reproducer of history as evident in the symbolism of the woman birthing a nation in Heaney's 'Act of Union'. Bernadette Devlin McAliskey wrote of this misogynistic link between women and pregnancy: 'Unionists must ensure that nationalists don't outnumber them. On the other side what are we confined to – outbreeding them? What are our choices? Either we shoot them or we outbreed them. There's no politics here. It's a numbers game'.[30] It is these representations of womanhood and pregnancy that McGuckian opposes. Instead, McGuckian's poetry reclaims women's bodies and asserts agency and control over bodily processes.

With the initial 1982 publication of *The Flower Master,* the poem 'That Year' included the final line: 'The grass is no bed after dark'[31], while in the 1993 edition, the poem retitled as 'Eavesdropper' had a revised final line: 'The grass is an eavesdropper's bed'.[32] The updated title evokes connotations of surveillance which in turn reflects the state of unease in communication in the north of Ireland, specifically for fear of being overheard by an unwarranted source. This

[29] Ibid.
[30] Bernadette Devlin, *Radical America* 25 (1995): 51-61 quoted in Kathryn Conrad. *Locked in the Family Cell: Gender, Sexuality & Political Agency in Irish National Discourse* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin, 2004), 118.
[31] Medbh McGuckian, *The Flower Master,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
[32] Medbh McGuckian. *The Flower Master And Other Poems*, (Oldcastle, Ireland: Gallery Press, 1993).

brings to mind the occupation of the top floors of the high-rise Divis Tower block in Belfast by the R.U.C. as an observation post.[33] The secrecy around information is beholden to a high level of integrity; the word 'tout' in Northern Irish colloquialism connotes somebody who gives away secrets, who tells on their own people. The use of the word carries such offense that a Derry punk band named themselves 'TOUTS' as a subversion of the surveillance culture in the north: 'The word Tout, in Northern Ireland, is one of the worst things you can call someone. It's a no-go, you'd almost blank it out in a newspaper. It's a super-grass, an informant'.[34] In this way surveillance and communication are loaded with political ramifications in the Northern Irish context. McGuckian's naming of her poem 'Eavesdropper' speaks to this.

'Eavesdropper' is another instance where McGuckian's work couples the political crisis with the mechanisms of the female body. Of this change, Lucy Collins argued that it is a 'subtle shift of emphasis away from the processes of memory and towards a more suggestive mode'.[35] Leontia Flynn extends this critique in her reading of the new phrase in terms of the slang for menstruation evoked in Nabokov's *Lolita:* Humbert Humbert speculates of Lolita that she had: "fall[en] off the roof' is, again, slang for menstruation'.[36] This etymological concealment from the reader in itself alludes to the other definition of the term – to listen in to a private conversation without consent, a kind of gaining unwarranted access to information. This clandestine way of gathering information is linked in both editions to the natural environment through the reference to 'grass'. In the 1982 edition an air of danger is linked through the warning of lying on the ground after dark, while the 1993 edition implies cyclical repetition in the daily routine of sleeping in the bed. The meanings which are concealed within 'Eavesdropper' depict a gendered surveillance of

[33] "Army begins removing Divis post," *BBC*, 2 August 2005, Accessed on: 30/03/2020 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/4738029.stm

[34] El Hunt, "'TOUTS' – The Derry punk band you can't blame for being angry," *NME,* 10 October 2018. Accessed on: 30/03/2020. https://www.nme.com/music-interviews/touts-derry-punk-2388223

[35] Lucy Collins, "Medbh McGuckian's Radical Temporalities." In *Contemporary Irish Women Poets: Memory and Estrangement* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 144.

[36] Flynn, *Reading Medbh McGuckian,* 21.

the female body. In this way, the new title comes to embody the new 'suggestive move' Collins identifies in McGuckian's work.[37]

Subtly McGuckian invokes the imagery of motherhood and nationhood in 'My Mother,' an ode to deromanticizing Mother Ireland. McGuckian in her collection responds to the gendered essentialism of drawing a parallel with womanhood and the land as metaphor for nationhood. Through the poem, McGuckian writes that her mother:

> Notices the smallest of all breezes,
>
> As if she were a tree upon the mountain
>
> Growing away with no problem at all.[38]

The mother in her poem is but a singular 'tree upon a mountain,' she is a microcosm within a larger ecosystem network but perceptible to the 'smallest of breezes'. McGuckian writes of women, living in co-existence with the land as represented by a singular tree. Subtly a part of the nation but not a personification of the whole, the mountain, the land. It is in this spirit that the writings of nationalist feminists operate as micro-narratives which alluded to a collective of nationalist experiences, from the militant republican jail-texts to the feminist journalism periodicals. Through this multivalence of representation, the narratives of both feminism and nationalism in the north of Ireland are reconfigured.

In another subversion of the Mother Ireland trope, McGuckian ponders in 'My Mother' how she came to be conceived by her mother and, as in Heaney's poetry, the colonizing male:

> Does she breed in perfect peace, a light sleep,
>
> or smothered like a clock whose alarm

[37] Collins. "Medbh McGuckian's Radical Temporalities" 144.
[38] 'My Mother,' McGuckian, *The Flower Master*, 23.

is unendurable, whose featureless

straight face is never wrong?

No one knows what goes on inside a clock.[39]

The following poem in the collection 'The Hollywood Bed' develops from the sexual body from which she is born to the development of her own sexual body. She writes of having sex with her lover:

while I lie crosswise

Imperial as a favoured only child,

Calmed by sagas of how we lay like spoons

In a drawer, till you blew open

My tightened bud, my full-buttoned housecoat,

Like some Columbus mastering

The saw-toothed waves, the rows of letter *m*s.[40]

McGuckian shifts the binary male/female and coloniser/colonised evident in the conquered female sexual body as in Heaney's 'Act of Union' or even within McGuckian's own 'My Mother' as the 'smothered clock'. Instead, the narrator's female body becomes the operative force, her body no longer a site to conquer. The male and female are both explorers, one 'imperial as a favoured child,' the other 'like some Columbus,' both on an equal mission for exploring the Other, both active in the pursuit of pleasure.[41] Through this subversion of the female body as a site to be conquered the narrator is reclaiming this trope of woman as land to be invaded and laid claim to ownership of herself and her empowered pleasure evoked in 'the rows of letter *m*s'.[42] McGuckian

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid, 24.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

subverts the image of the nationalist symbol of Mother Ireland through these two images of the motherhood, nationhood and the sexualised female body.

In conclusion, the shift towards a depiction of bodily representations which are mirrored in the political crisis in Medbh McGuckian's *The Flower Master* (1982) begins a remedying process of the 'falsified' accounts of female experience in the north of Ireland.[43] In the following chapters, I explore the development of feminist nationalism as it depicted in fiction.

[43] Flynn, *Reading Medbh McGuckian,* 19.

Chapter 7: Deirdre Madden's *Hidden Symptoms* (1986), Interconnection, and Reflections.

Deirdre Madden's *Hidden Symptoms*, published in 1986, was the first novel from the north of Ireland to address the gap in representation of women's experiences with close attention to detail. Prior to *Hidden Symptoms*, narratives which sexualise and diminish women's experiences were common as evidenced in Bernard McLaverty's *Cal* and Benedict Kiely's *Proxopera*.[1] In the former, the woman is reduced to a sexual acquisition to be conquered, and in the latter, women are most often described in terms of 'full-bodied' wine. Both of these representations present sexualised and belittling depictions of the female body. Instead, Madden's *Hidden Symptoms* maps the lives of those on the peripheries of violence; those who are bereaved, family and friends who are continuing to live with loss and those who experience residual trauma from living in a conflict which requires hypervigilance. The culture of surveillance takes an internalised form which is an invisible response to violence. The effects of the conflict are not temporally static, but rather after effects of traumatic memories of violence which are re-experienced through environmental and psychic triggers. The memories grow roots and reach deep into people's lives. *Hidden Symptoms* tells the story of a Belfast woman, Theresa, whose twin, Francis, has been murdered in a brutal sectarian attack. The novel illuminates the everyday experience of negotiating the conflict and the renegotiation of personal connections after trauma. Madden's characters form an interconnected network of people affected by the conflict. Grief, which particularly is experienced by Theresa, triggers a reflection on what 'freedom' means and how it can be achieved:

> In later years, she smiled when she thought back to these notions, but there had been truth, undeniable truth, in them, for when something happened which was truly dreadful it was the little peripheral pains which made the central agony so inescapable and so intense.[2]

[1] Benedict Kiely, *Proxopera* (London: Quartet Books, 1977); Bernard MacLaverty, *Cal* (London: Penguin Books, 2000 [1983]).
[2] Deirdre Madden, *Hidden Symptoms* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988 [1986]), 10.

In this way, Madden's novel explores the minutiae which contribute to an intense effect on the traumatised Theresa. The novel's title is a nod to this concealment of trauma in response to the events in Northern Ireland. The memories of the violence, and the issues surrounding truth and justice, compound the pain which Theresa experiences. The central trauma is compounded by these everyday 'little peripheral pains'. In an interview in 2001 with *The Stinging Fly,* Madden discussed the continual need for reassessment and negotiation of the traumatic events of the conflict:

> I'm interested in how peace has been brokered and how people live after a thing like that. I think it's like people after the Second World War or after any big trauma in society. It's not as if, Look it's over now and everybody's grand. I'm interested in how that impinges on a whole society and on individual people who've been through a very difficult thing, really tragic personal circumstances. How it does evolve and change but it doesn't go away, how it probably has to be managed at every stage. I think that's part of the real tragedy of it, how it never ends for the people who've had terrible, terrible tragedy.[3]

This temporally expansive nature of traumatic memories which Madden spoke of is evident with *Hidden Symptoms*. The experience of loss, mourning and disconnection disrupts any sense of normality for Theresa. Theresa's story, like Mary Beckett's *Give Them Stones* which followed in 1987, offers a feminist nationalist perspective which subscribes to a denial of violence in the pursuit of self-determination.

Paradigms of Republicanism

In setting up my argument for *Hidden Symptoms* to be considered within a tradition of feminist nationalist literature, I will begin by making the case for Theresa as a symbol for non-violent nationalism. Theresa is shown throughout the novel to be nationalist, not least in her comparison of the 'tasteless' Orange Order marches with those of neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan.[4] Theresa is placed most starkly in opposition to her only friend Kathy's boyfriend, Robert, who is a writer.

[3] Declan Meade, 'Interview Deirdre Madden'. *The Stinging Fly.* November 1, 2001. Accessed on: January 4, 2020 https://stingingfly.org/2009/11/01/interview-deirdre-madden/
[4] Madden, *Hidden Symptoms*, 45.

She goads him about his conscious decision to identify as apolitical despite his up-bringing as a Catholic: 'Do you feel like a second-class citizen, Robert? Do you feel that people hate you because you're Catholic? Well, you ought to, because they do. Don't believe one half of the liberalism you hear, for you do know what they really think we are? Expendable vermin'.[5] Not only is Theresa opposed to political passivism, she is also rejecting male elitist privilege to evade a stance on the political crisis, and through this Madden frames her as a staunch feminist nationalist.

While Theresa has a heightened awareness of the now sensitive interactions she has with other people, Robert is presented as the opposite. Robert is a case study in full emotional isolation; his parents are both deceased, he cannot feel empathy when imagining that his girlfriend has been murdered, and he rejects the emotional attachment with his sister's family. Robert is portrayed as selfish and insular to the extent that the imagination of lives lived and experience beyond his own is hard to contemplate: 'It was hard to believe that other people had real lives utterly independent of his own and, more amazing still, that in the humblest and most mundane features these other lives were just like his own'.[6] When this is considered alongside Heaney's reading of people as metaphors for countries with borders, Robert becomes a symbol of the totally autonomous; an entity who relies on nothing but himself. Madden uses this metaphor to unsettle and disrupt the romantic vision of a united Ireland. The lack of empathetic connections beyond Robert's own borders/selfhood causes an eventual self-disintegration which leaves him isolated. The need for interpersonal connections is a metaphor for the need for connection beyond the borders of the northern state; due to the nationalist tone of the novel this is aimed towards the Republic of Ireland, primarily, but also through addressing the relationship with Ireland's colonial history. The implication is that Ireland cannot be treated as being completely disentangled from its colonial past; it is always in dialogue with the past and, therefore, reliant on a renegotiation of relations. This places the north of Ireland in a liminal space which David Lloyd explained: 'The extraordinary

[5] Ibid, 47.
[6] Ibid, 58.

productivity of cultural forms in the last thirty years of the Irish struggle is at once a matter of continuing anti-imperial struggle and, given the extent to which those evolving forms call in question the traditional modes of Irish nationalism, a critical instance of contemporary postcoloniality'.[7] In this way, Irish literature is an important contributor in evolving and continued anti-imperial struggle. Madden's novel intervened in the on-going crisis in the north by envisaging a life beyond the conflict, as symbolised particularly in the final act of the novel. In this way the north of Ireland is shown to be in a state of flux in constant renegotiation of understandings of nationalism.

Madden's *Hidden Symptoms* shows a deference to the morbid in an interplay between reality and the imaginary, both of which are difficult to distinguish. The characters are fixated with fantasizing about the graphic death of their loved ones. They internally query: how would they react? What would they do? Theresa imagines 'morbid fantasies concerning her mother… Mammy walking out of the house and having half her head blown away by a stray bullet. Mammy in a shop when a bomb explodes and her body bursting into a scattered jumble of bloody pieces. Mammy being burnt alive in a firebombed restaurant. Mammy…'[8] This fixation on the possibility of horror acts as an insurance policy against the unimaginable, although it begs the question: how can one prepare for the effects of an event that the mind cannot yet comprehend? Robert thinks that 'too much reality is hard to bear'[9], yet he too can't help but imagine as a result of excess exposure to the gruesome bodily mutilations of the conflict he has witnessed. It is only when he tries to imagine himself at the epicentre of an attack that his limit is reached: 'He was not sure that he understood anything about evil, but my God it was easy to assimilate! … he remembered television news reports, where the casual camera showed bits of human flesh hanging from barbed wire after a bombing. Firemen shovelled what was left of people into heavy plastic bags, and you could see all

[7] David Lloyd, *Ireland After History* (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1999), 49.
[8] Madden, *Hidden Symptoms*, 50.
[9] Ibid, 88.

that remained: big burnt black lumps like charred logs… he could cope when it did not involve him personally'.[10] Theresa by comparison, despite her traumatic past, relies on connections with the people around her for her survival. However, this is not to argue that Theresa is sociable; rather, she unknowingly relied upon those around her; her mother for support in shared grief, Kathy for keeping her trauma secret when needed. To extend the metaphor, she is not an open border. Her interactions are guarded and considered:

> She wondered if people in general shared her iceberg mentality: was it common to feel that only a tiny facet of one's self was exposed and communicable to others, with the rest locked in ice, vast, submerged and impossible?[11]

It is in this way, that Theresa experiences 'hidden symptoms' of the conflict which remain uncommunicable to others, including her own mother who has the shared experience of grief. The 'iceberg mentality' is thawed through a combination of self-reflexivity and interpersonal connections.

Memory

Theresa inhabits a liminal space between remembrance and forgetting in which post-traumatic suffering is a permanent condition; a constant internal reminder is contrasted with the silence surrounding the taboo nature of verbalising the sectarian murder of her twin, both from herself and within her local nationalist community more broadly. The overwhelming nature of the frequency of the deaths of the conflict is felt through Madden's *Hidden Symptoms.* The novel is set between 1975 – 1977, and during this period alone 958 'Troubles' related deaths were recorded, which brought the total deaths from 1969 to 2,246 people.[12] The effects of this violence far exceeds these numbers, particularly as friends, relatives and colleagues also experienced a ripple effect of

[10] Ibid, 29 - 30.
[11] Ibid, 81 – 82.
[12] David McKittrick et al. *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women, and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2008), 1,473.

trauma. Further, the novel is set during the period when the 'Shankill Butchers' faction of the loyalist paramilitary, the Ulster Volunteer Force, operated in Belfast.[13] The gang killed 19 people over the space of a few years between 1975 – 1977, making them the most prolific murder gang in the UK to date.[14] The gang of eleven abducted, tortured, and cut the throats of their victims.[15] Francis's abduction, torture and the disposal of his body are based on the violent acts of the Shankill Butchers.[16] Following Francis's murder, Theresa becomes aware of a change in the interactions between herself and the people in her community. There is a reluctance for either herself or her neighbours to put the experience into words; the nature of the death of her brother is beyond the representability of language. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth wrote of the traumatic memories returning with an 'impact of its very incomprehensibility'.[17] This un-representable nature of the experience being committed to language is complicated by the role of the media in reporting the conflict. The death of her brother is known to the people in her community, yet, what is known is not verbalised; the death of her brother is relegated to the sphere of the unsayable. The connection between twins is one of heightened intimacy, and for this to be permanently severed through unnatural death is a doubly traumatic shock for Theresa. This compounds the already intimate nature of trauma as it is intensely personal in its bodily and mental affect. Despite this interiority, Theresa craves commemoration through the trial by media into the unexplained deaths of victims of the conflict.

> Only one of hundreds and the case short, obscure: what of those whose losses were famous and had made the English papers, *Newsweek*, history? … So little mattered. The temptation to make one's response a big as the disaster had to be resisted, for in truth what could one do, save collapse down to the horror of little details and keep living? 'But what can we *do?'* Inexorable time: often it was truly too late to do anything.[18]

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[13] "Violence - Significant Violent Incidents During the Conflict," *CAIN.* Accessed on: July 1, s2019 https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/violence/majinc.htm

[14] "Shankill Butchers held Belfast in a grip of terror," *BBC.* Accessed on: March 20, 2020. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-12858930

[15] Martin Dillon, *The Shankill Butchers: A Case Study of Mass Murder* (London: Arrow, 1990).

[16] Ibid.

[17] Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 6.

[18] Madden, *Hidden Symptoms,* 19.

The media reporting of the conflict allows a medium for the horrors to be re-presented to their community in an act of remembrance. This act of remembrance, however, is denied to Francis by the press's cursory treatment of his death. Madden details the drudgery of life after the traumatic death: what action can be deemed productive? The question of how to commemorate the dead is as pertinent (and politicised) an issue now in Northern Ireland in 2020 as it was in 1986. Theresa struggles to come to terms with the lack of societal commemoration: 'For every moment of every day until she also died, his death would be there, and if she forgot about it for a moment, a week, a year, even if it were possible for her to put it from her mind forever, it would not change the truth. His death would still always be there, waiting silently to be recognised and remembered'.[19] Sectarian violence has left Theresa unable to vocalise her pain while firmly fixated on the events. If Theresa is a symbol for a new feminist nationalism, it is her inability to speak of the violence that outlines her as a symbol for traumatised nationalist femininity. The women who produced and wrote the feminist periodicals discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 were more forthright with challenging feminist nationalist issues of oppression. The literary approach as exemplified in Madden's *Hidden Symptoms* is more suggestive and subtler.

Theresa is unable to attain a fully autonomous state: 'Just as it would be impossible to find Francis now, no matter where in the city or the world one went, so also it would be impossible not to find somewhere the man who had killed him'.[20] The act of remembrance here is linked with the act of looking *for* and being looked *at* in a dialogic process. Theresa is outwardly looking for answers surrounding the uncertainties of her brother's murder: 'Belfast was poisoned for her. She could not conceive of Francis's killer as an individual, as a person who might be arrested, tried and punished, but only as a great darkness which was hidden in the hearts of everyone she met… everyone was guilty'.[21] For Theresa, the Other is people who have not endured the traumatic event

[19] Ibid, 34.
[20] Ibid, 43.
[21] Ibid, 44.

which she has experienced. Theresa has an outward gaze to the Other for answers to her brother's death and as such Francis's death becomes synonymous with the population. The experience becomes bigger than the individual and is elevated to culpability of the collective. The issue is heightened by the politics of who is commemorated and who is granted public visibility for their mourning and justice seeking process.

Theresa argues during a discussion with her mother about the sequences of events leading up to the death of her twin:

> First of July,' she [Theresa's mother] said, scrunching up [the calendar page] June in her fist. 'Feast of the Holy Blood'.… 'Our Francis was a martyr, wasn't he?' she said.
>
> 'I suppose he was,' Theresa replied, 'but he had no choice, had he?'
>
> 'What do you mean?'
>
> 'I mean martyrs usually have a choice; if they deny their religion they're allowed to live, and if they won't deny it, well, they martyr them. And they just killed Francis because of his religion, he had no choice'.
>
> 'How do you know?' said her mother.[22]

The mother attempts to project agency into the death in a futile effort to gain control over the event; she tries to attribute a kind of noble reasoning to the outcome of the death of her son. This highlights the sense of desperation in the women's lack of agency in the crisis. His mother's desperate need to reason that Francis had a dialogue in which he decided not to deny his religion is an attempt to give clarity to the unknown. The unknowable is pre-empted by Francis during a trip he and Theresa made to Italy. He speaks of the tragedy of not being considered at all. Francis fears remaining invisible to the gaze of others:

> 'Everywhere I look, I see only eyes, God's eyes. God telling me what He did for me and wanting to know what I'm doing for Him; God looking and looking and wanting me to try to look steadily back'.
>
> 'That sounds terrible,' said Theresa. 'I can imagine few things worse'.

[22] Ibid, 42.

'Oh, there's something infinitely worse,' he exclaimed.

'Which is?'

'Not being looked at at all.[23]

In this, there is an importance of visibility and recognition within Madden's text. This compounds the lack of commemoration of Francis's death. There is an inherent power dynamic between the gazed upon and the gazed at; the power is held by those who do the looking, those who deny a person the space to be seen. In the context of the 'Troubles' there is a key issue in those who are publicly forgotten. In this scene, Theresa and Francis are discussing gaze and belief in religion while looking at the architecture of the churches in Rome. They gaze upon the permanent structures of a fixed stone monument, which stimulates a discussion of the spiritual and their existential beings. The tangible commemorative sites give rise to epistemological discussions. The discussion renders Theresa unable to continue looking at her brother: 'She turned away, for she could not bear to look at him, and she waited at the back of the church until he was ready to leave'.[24] This moment is remembered with an air of hindsight; Theresa attempts to conjure images of their interactions to remedy the loss of her brother.

Theresa's memory of coping with grief illustrates the interconnected nature of her and Francis's relationship: 'When they were children, she had fingered the pink satin binding on the edge of the blankets until they were frayed and split; and Francis, before sleeping, had plaited the fringes of the rug'.[25] This image of her dismantling and him assembling shows their symbiotic dualism; they both complemented the other by excelling in what the other lacked. When this symbiosis between the twins is severed through death, Theresa experiences an ability to function without it. Remembering a holiday in Venice with Francis, Theresa visualises seeing Francis's face appearing in the crowd: 'There were many people there, mostly tourists, all strangers; and then

[23] Ibid, 53.
[24] Ibid, 56.
[25] Ibid, 33.

suddenly she had seen Francis's face materialize out of the crowd, as familiar to her as her own foot or finger. This was what she had been seeking, and the faces of all those other people were masks, dross, distortions, faces which were wrong: suddenly the only right and real face in Venice appeared'.[26] Theresa's memories of her brother are tranquil in comparison with Robert's internal imagining of death. While Robert embodies a kind of self-willed isolation, Theresa has had her primary connection severed which has left her guarded in her nature. Theresa's experience of loss has not precluded the rest of her social connections, instead, she slowly opens to the connections to be made through friendship and family.

Reflections

Both central characters, Robert and Theresa, are shown to have moments of personal reflection and realisation when looking out of a window from a lit room into the darkness, the result of which creates a bright reflection on the glass surface: 'Robert sat by his desk and stared obliquely at the window, behind which a perfect image of his room was suspended in the dark air. He arose and walked to another chair so that he, too, was now reflected and was thus substantially within and insubstantially without'.[27] Upon gazing at himself, a kind of outward facing self-reflexive gaze, Robert thinks 'this is me… refined to perfection'.[28] What he deems to be a perfect state is that in which the reflection is a two-dimensional image without emotional ties to the outside world. 'Its [the reflected image] body could not feel pain… The solution to the Irish crisis is for everyone to live by night, to put strong lights in their rooms and draw back the curtains and so make a whole new population *identical to the one here now in all things but reality*. Let these dark illusions live our lives for us: they will do it much better than we can'.[29] Robert's ideal is for life to be identical to the

[26] Ibid, 85.
[27] Ibid, 87 – 88.
[28] Ibid, 88.
[29] Ibid, 88. Emphasis added.

current state but with an exclusion of emotional attachments and therefore an avoidance of reality. Here, Madden offers a critique that apoliticism does nothing to move the conflict on except create a passive stagnancy: 'He wished that he could stop being himself and become that double so that he could be dissolved into nothingness when the morning came'.[30] This apoliticism ultimately is a negation of the self as Robert craves the nothingness of his reflected image. In this way, the withdrawal from political engagement is a kind of self-destruction.

Further, the image is destined only to reflect passively, unable to be an agent of their own will. Robert's inability to confront reality through having an emotional interpersonal connection is further seen when he 'gazed *thankfully* past Theresa's head into the glass, where he could see the whole room reflected, circular and small, distorted at the circumference because of the mirror's convexity'.[31] Robert is unable to engage fully with Theresa and instead looks to the semblance of reality in the mirror. This disconnection is in addition to Robert's emotional detachment from his family. In essence, Robert finds himself in a reclusive state which rejects his own community. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) theorised that the colonial subject undergoes an alienation from the self through an appropriation of the language and thought of the coloniser: 'To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation'.[32] It is in this way that Robert's refusal to acknowledge that his 'inferiority' bestowed upon him by the coloniser and his acceptance of the colonial system is a negation of the self. Robert perceives himself as beyond the realms of the colonial framework of colonised/coloniser.

This physical and perceptual distortion through the mirrored image of reality is developed, in Gerry Smyth's reading of the text, as a psychological distortion. Smyth argued that 'the themes of madness and dreams which pervade the text are part of the invocation of another world, another

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid, 134 – 135. Emphasis added.
[32] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London and Sydney: Pluto Press, 1967 [1952]), 17 – 18.

plane of existence upon which the 'real' issues are being fought out'.[33] I would argue against the 'madness' which Smyth posits; instead, primarily through Theresa, it is an intense connection with the reality of the horrific murder of her twin which leads her to a state of traumatic hyper-vigilance. It is not a trick of the mind based in fantasy, but rather the full cognition of sectarian violence. Through the binary between reality and 'another plane of existence', Smyth reads the depiction of the violence as a madness, a fantasy, which in turn is a derealisation of the violence represented in the text. Michael Parker extended this by arguing for increased attention to be paid to Deirdre Madden's work, while also offering an analysis of its 'self-reflexivity'. His article focused on the self-reflection which, indeed, does not examine the interiority of self but rather roots its analysis in the meta-narratives of history and religion: 'Though a regular attender at Mass, there is little sign in Theresa's life of tribal solidarity. She ends as she began, torn between allegiance to her broken family and the need to 'rekindle the dying fire of her individuality. The novel's close discovers her longing for an end to 'shadows cast upon glass', to life as a mirror image'.[34] I offer a reading which will explore the importance of self-reflection which ultimately results in an opportunity for external connections. The meta-narratives of the conflict are not attentive to either nationalist women or the status of victimhood. With this in mind, I argue that Madden's work is a remedy to this, an elegy to the individual in relation to a collective.

While looking at Robert's sister's new born baby, Theresa notes that its eyes are 'dark and unseeing'.[35] The act of gazing, and the cognition of formulating an opinion on what is seen, is a learned ability. In considering being viewed by a new born, Theresa thinks: 'What if my body were at this moment drained of all blood and pigment, until I became transparent as glass?'[36] The baby looks on at Theresa with no context or ability to formulate a judgement; Theresa remains unseen.

[33] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997), 118.
[34] Michael Parker, "Shadows on a Glass: Self-Reflexivity in the Fiction of Deirdre Madden," *Irish University Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Special Issue: Contemporary Irish Fiction (Spring - Summer, 2000): 95.
[35] Madden, *Hidden Symptoms,* 118.
[36] Ibid.

This moment of new life being welcomed into the world is juxtaposed with Francis's funeral: 'Theresa and her mother had found themselves looking at their own reflections ghostly and bloodless as photographic negatives, cast upon the glass behind which lay the solid coffin and a few bright wreaths of flowers'.[37] The imagery of Theresa and her mother appearing as 'bloodless as photograph negatives' depicts them as something obscure which requires a concentrated gaze to piece together the scene. This is furthered through the parallels in gazing through glass and specifically the act of looking *through* and *for*. This in turn is evidenced through the transparent membrane of glass which allowed, in the instance of the baby, a glimpse *in* towards the living Theresa, though unrecognisable. But also, like a photographic negative, the inverse is seen in the gaze shown in Theresa and her mother looking through the glass in the hearse towards death, but glimpsing their own 'ghostly' reflection like the living dead. In this way, Madden revealed that the life in which the women are left living is stunted and static due to this violent event. Geraldine Higgins wrote of the reflection in the window of the funeral car scene: 'This glass which separates the living and the dead reflects no palliative doppelganger. Rather, it drains life from the survivors'.[38] While Elmer Kennedy-Andrews argued: 'The glass of the hearse gives back a ghastly image of material existence as itself insubstantial and unreal'.[39] The role of the gaze is pertinent in this as Theresa gazes upon herself and passes self-critical judgement, her image haunting her tangible self. However, it is in the ending which the metaphor for reflection reaches its conclusion when Theresa catches sight of herself in her reflection on the glass window: 'Who was that person? Could that pale, hunched, ugly, little person be herself? She could scarcely believe how intimately she must know the sad hinterland to the red-eyed girl's life'.[40] At this moment, Theresa feels a complete disconnect between the embodied self and the gazed at reflected self in the hearse glass.

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[37] Ibid, 124.
[38] Geraldine Higgins. "'A Place to Bring Anger and Grief': Deirdre Madden's Northern Irish Novels." *Writing Ulster*, Northern Narratives, 6 (1999): 154.
[39] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969: (de-)constructing the North* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2003), 150.
[40] Madden, *Hidden Symptoms*, 141.

While Robert's self-reflexivity shows his unwillingness for interpersonal connection, Theresa's leads her to a positive conclusion with this image of a frozen reality: 'Theresa turned her back upon the mirror, with its cold, circular, distorted room, and looked around the real parlour in which she was standing. She realised that she was very cold. Shivering, she crossed to the hearth, knelt down and tried to rekindle the dying fire'.[41] The act of shunning the cold semblance of reality symbolised through the reflected image is hopeful for a new beginning for Theresa; she is facing reality and tending to herself through the rekindling of the fire. For Geraldine Higgins, she wrote of this finale of the novel: 'The novel ends with Theresa's diatribe about the cold comfort of her faith - the difficulty of suffering and believing, knowing that she has to learn to forgive and love those who killed her brother'.[42] Michael Parker argued of the female protagonists which Deirdre Madden portrays that 'they long for a wholeness, unity and healing which will never be achieved'.[43] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews posits a postmodernist division between authenticity and reality: 'The novel ends with Theresa catching sight of her own reflection in the same mirror and realising the unbridgeable distance between subject and its reflection. At that moment she experiences the anguish of recognising presence marks only absence'.[44] It is in these conclusions at the close of the novel that interconnectivity is a pertinent issue; for Kennedy-Andrews, there are fractures between Theresa and her viewed reflection; Parker argued that the impossibility of healing, and the subsequent disjointed interactions with society, is key to the reading of this ending; while, for Higgins, Theresa must face the 'difficulty of suffering' to bring herself to be able to forgive. Each of these conclusions come together to arrive at Theresa's tending to herself. She lights the fire which will return her cold body to warmth, she turns her back on the nothingness of her reflected image, and, while not healed, she begins to forge a kindness towards herself.

[41] Ibid, 142.
[42] Higgins, "A Place to Bring Anger and Grief," 155.
[43] Parker, "Shadows on a Glass," 85.
[44] Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969,* 150 – 151.

For Gerry Smyth the ending is rooted in religious metaphors: 'The problem is not that no solution is offered [through the text], but that within the world constructed by the novel no solution is imaginable'.[45] Smyth weighs the novel up in terms solely to do with religion, which he suggested is the central point of the text. I argue that the novel ends not with any religious iconography or allusions, but rather, Theresa tending to the alter of herself through the embodiment of self-care. It is at this moment that the disconnection between herself and the reflected image is broken: 'Stretching up, she touched the mirror with the tips of her fingers. It was, of course, cold and smooth… She withdrew her hand and gazed again at her reflection. Me'.[46] Through the act of reaching out and making a connection Theresa symbolically finds herself as whole again. When the body is read as a metaphor for a national symbol, Madden alludes to the necessity of the attention we must pay to mending ourselves in order to gain strong connections with others. Madden's *Hidden Symptoms,* then, makes a case for a feminist nationalism which celebrates fostering connections. In this way, the novel speaks to the aims of the republican feminist periodicals in Chapters 4 and 5 which seek to explore these connections and celebrate multiplicities in experiences.

[45] Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation,* 120.
[46] Madden, *Hidden Symptoms,* 141.

Chapter 8: Mary Beckett's *Give Them Stones* (1987), Resistance, Feminist Socialism, and Baking.

On the cover of Mary Beckett's *Give Them Stones* the author Colm Toibín is quoted celebrating this text as 'clearly the best novel written about the North over the past twenty years,' however, this celebration should alert the reader to a demarcation of anti-nationalist sentiment within the novel.[1] Toibín in his essay 'New Ways To Kill Your Father' writes of a need for severance of the Republic of Ireland from the violent north embroiled within a civil war; in particular he argued for a refusal of sympathy with people in the north and the motives of the I.R.A., which at the time were steeped in national liberation rhetoric. Toibín wrote: 'Outside in the world there were car bombs and hunger strikes, done in the name of our nation, in the name of history. Inside we were cleansing history, concentrating on those aspects of our past which would make us good, worthy citizens who would keep the Irish 26-county state safe from the I.R.A. and I.R.A. fellow travellers'.[2] This forms part of the narrative cultivated by revisionist approaches to Irish history, as exemplified in the writings of Conor Cruise O'Brien, which sought to disengage and reject republicanism in the north.[3] The Field Day monograph series, which included works from David Lloyd and Terry Eagleton, sought to challenge this anti-nationalist rhetoric. These publications challenged revisionism by aligning the conflict in the north with global issues of anti-imperial struggles. For example, David Lloyd in *Ireland After History* draws parallels with the Philippines and India. At the crux of the Field Day monographs is the urgent need to give voice to and examine nationalism in (post)colonial Ireland. In this way Mary Beckett's *Give Them Stones* is a response to, and voice for, northern nationalism. Beckett's work is decidedly nationalist and does not adhere to the 'cleansing' of history from its colonial past. The text maps the intersection of Irish nationalism, gendered

[1] Mary Beckett, *Give Them Stones* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987).
[2] Colm Tóibín, "New Ways of Killing Your Father," *London Review of Books*. Vol. 15 No. 22 (18 November 1993): 3-6. Accessed on: June 29, 2019. https://www.lrb.co.uk/v15/n22/colm-toibin/new-ways-of-killing-your-father
[3] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972).

resistance and the effects of violence on northern communities. In this chapter I will argue that Beckett's *Give Them Stones* was a continuation of feminist nationalist literature from the north of Ireland.

Resistance

Beckett's novel maps the story of a woman from Belfast over the course of her life. It follows Martha Murtagh through her exile from the city to the countryside during the 'Belfast Blitz' bombings in World War Two through to the 'Troubles' conflict. Due to this, it covers a huge period, from the 1940s through to the 1980s. It is through this life journey that Martha learns to bake, and crucially, gains economic freedom. This autonomy is extended when she resists paramilitaries in her nationalist area. As a backdrop to this personal journey is the northern conflict, with the protests ranging from the breaking of the Falls Road Curfew to the prison hunger strikes. As a result, the novel charts a feminine response to the conflict.

Martha's development through the novel moves from one which fantasises about the ability to join in with militant republicanism toward non-violent nationalism. The opening of the novel sets the tone for rebellion and resistance which emanates from actions of the central character Martha: 'When [the Provisional I.R.A.] shot that boy in both legs up against my wall I was in the house sitting at the fire by myself. I jumped because the noise was so near and so loud, and then I ran out on the dark street to see what was happening… I shouted at them what did they think they were doing and then they shot him in the other leg and ran away'.[4] In this opening sequence, Martha has disrupted the I.R.A. during a so-called 'knee-capping', a type of 'punishment' shooting in which a bullet is shot through the victim's knee-cap. Martha as a maternal figure breaks away from an imposed societal rule which bids the community to 'Say Nothing' which arose from the

[4] Beckett, *Give Them Stones*, 9.

I.R.A 'Green Book' which in turn outlined guidance to fellow republicans from the Provisional I.R.A.[5] Martha reads this as a two-fold attack, one on the boy who received the punishment, and one personally against her and her defiance in refusing to stay silent in the face of societal torment of militant nationalism: 'The Provos [Provisional I.R.A.] chose to knee-cap that boy at the wall of my shop where the sun had shone on me in the mornings'.[6] It is a violation of the space where she enjoys being. After the punishment attack on the boy, Martha takes to the street to restore the area to its previous meaning by removing any remnants of the shooting and cleaning the blood stains from the ground until 'there was little sign that anything had happened'.[7] This act of returning the physical landscape of her community to its original state acts as an attempted remedy to the horror; the horrific event which many in the area overheard, but were impotent to react to, becomes alive only in memory.

The removal of the blood acts as a literal erasure of any signifier of the violence, which in turn extends to the silence which the community are bound to, leaving the events of self-policing and paramilitary attacks in a state of the unsaid. Martha's view of the 'punishment' attack on the boy is that the I.R.A. are acting as judge, jury and executioner in their policing of the local neighbourhood and this is to the detriment of the community. Of similar 'punishment' style attacks by paramilitary gangs in Derry in 2017, Deaglán Ó Donghaile argued: 'No group will claim these attacks because silence is the currency of terror. Fear travels most quickly across closed imaginations, transmitting rapidly from one person to the next, sealing mouths and closing minds'.[8] Through her vocal rebellion against the paramilitary violence in her area, Martha initiates a one-woman resistance to punishment attacks and exploitation of the community in the name of a

[5] "I.R.A. Green Book" reproduced within Coogan, Tim Pat. *The I.R.A.* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006).; "Text of Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) 'Green Book' (Book I and II)," *CAIN*. Accessed on: January 1, 2020 https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/I.R.A./I.R.A._green_book.htm
[6] Beckett, *Give Them Stones*, 131.
[7] Ibid, 9.
[8] Deaglán Ó Donghaile, "A Secret Police Built on Brutality and Fear must be resisted," *The Belfast Telegraph,* July 12, 2017. Accessed on: January 3, 2020. https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/news-analysis/a-secret-police-built-on-fear-and-brutality-must-be-resisted-35920509.html

romantic notion of nationalism which, in this text, the I.R.A. embody. She refuses to be complicit in the silencing:

> All the time I was brushing I was telling myself that I couldn't keep quiet about this. I had kept my head down long enough, so careful of myself, frightened of any change, never taking any risks. But I'd have no respect at all for myself if I didn't let them know what I thought.[9]

It is in these acts of rebellion and resistance that Martha becomes an emblem for feminist nationalism. By refusing to remain silent Martha articulates her resistance against authority. Her self-determination to be ruled by no other man's rules is a key theme which runs through the text; her ability to become autonomous in aspects of her life which are usually reserved for the masculine sphere (that of self-defence, economics etc.) Women are rendered static in the symbolism of imagery such as that of Mother Ireland. Martha subverts this meek maternal figure which bids her sons to defend her. Instead, Martha becomes her own line of defence, which she carries out through non-violent and economic means. In this way, Beckett's novel is reflective of the feminist journalism explored in Chapters 4 and 5, particularly the Socialist Women's Group and the Belfast Women's Collective, who sought to gain economic, political and sexual autonomy. *Give Them Stones* is a continuation of this position.

Politics

Martha's childhood tells of her listening to her uncles and father discussing the merits of republicanism versus those of socialism. This becomes instructional for how Martha's outlook later in life is moulded: 'I didn't like the stories about tribes attacking or being besieged but I loved listening to how Ireland was going to be free'.[10] The onus for Martha is on the meanings of 'freedom', which she grapples to understand. Martha's father and her two maternal uncles, Joe and Jimmy, argue over forms of oppression which affect the nationalist community. Her uncles debate

[9] Beckett, *Give Them Stones*, 9 – 10.
[10] Ibid, 18.

which should take precedence, national or economic freedom. The men argue between themselves as to which is the true enemy, imperialist or capitalist oppression. The debate arose after Joe read through Martha's school text book and tells the other men: 'Don't you see what it's telling them – you're safer in your cages. Don't even try to break out or you'll be sorry. Capitalist cages and the good kind master'.[11] In this way, the title of the novel nods to the nationalist working class resistance which the book charts. It is at this point that her uncle argues for the working class to resist and rebel against these structures of oppression: 'When they ask for bread don't give them crackers as does the Church, and don't, like the State, tell them to eat cake. Explain that man cannot live by bread alone and give them stones'.[12] The argument develops into a case for republicanism and the demand for independence from Britain as well as the need for a united working class irrespective of borders and nations. On the inability of men from Catholic or nationalist backgrounds to gain employment on the shipyards, she remembers:

> I'd look off down the Belfast Lough with the ships in it and the shipyard with the gantries and over to the little hills in Co. Down and Bangor with the yachts in front of it and I'd think wouldn't it be lovely if it was really our own country that we could be proud in, instead of being kept in cramped little streets with no jobs for the men and sneered at by the people who deprived us. It was as if we were all in prison looking out at a beautiful world we'd never walk free in.[13]

The view over the Belfast docks which Martha observes from Cave Hill shows the disparity in wealth and opportunities, particularly for working class nationalists. This passage shows Martha's socialist ideals; she wishes to break from the 'prison' of economic disparity. In this way, *Give Them Stones* is a literary mirroring of the activist periodical *Women's Action* produced by Socialist Women's Group. The group lobbied for a working-class movement which rejected imperialism. Martha also represents this exact sentiment of rejecting both imperialist and capitalist oppression.

The metaphor of being imprisoned by oppressive frameworks (imperialism and capitalism) is shadowed by the fear of literal imprisonment which haunts nationalist communities. These

[11] Ibid, 15.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid, 18.

communities were threatened by internment without trial, both in the period of the Border Campaign in the 1950s and later during the 'Troubles'. Martha's father met Uncle Jimmy, Martha's maternal uncle, while imprisoned for membership of the I.R.A.: 'That's all I ever knew about his time in gaol because he never talked about it at all. I never heard if he was in the I.R.A., or if he even did anything or if it was all a mistake'.[14] Martha herself is a product of the imperialist system which exists in the north through her parents' meeting as a result of political imprisonment. In this way, Martha's existence, and her coming into being, has been formed in a climate of political resistance to colonialism. The silence around her family history, and further the history of how she came to be, is left in the shadows; it remains relegated to the unsayable and the unknowable. Beckett's novel is a literary interpretation of the themes raised in archival materials such as *In the Footsteps of Anne*. In Chapter 2, I discussed how historical narratives which have previously been silenced are key to how nationalist women's history has been presented. These testimonies are reflected in the lack of elaboration into Martha's family history.

Martha's fusion of republicanism and socialism is expanded in her later years when she follows reports on the Civil Rights Movement through radio and television broadcasts. Specifically, Martha is influenced by the politics of Bernadette Devlin: 'I would have liked them [Bernadette Devlin and Gerry Fitt] better if they had said they wanted a united Ireland'.[15] Her sister's husband Brendan argues with Martha that 'would not have been good policy but I'd always rather have things out in the open'.[16] After the news reports of the violence meted out against nationalist areas of Derry, Martha remembers a change in the conversation in her area of North Belfast in favour of the I.R.A.:

> Where's the I.R.A. now when we need them?' the women said when they came in for their bread, terrified.

[14] Ibid, 17.
[15] Ibid, 117.
[16] Ibid.

> 'That's not what the I.R.A.'s for,' I argued. 'They're supposed to be getting a united Ireland, not fighting Protestants. Anyway, there's no I.R.A. this long time that ever I heard of in this parish'.
>
> 'They're for protecting us, so they are.[17]

Martha, here, is embodying her socialist upbringing, observing her father and uncles' discussions. The republicanism which Martha is arguing for is akin to that of the Official I.R.A. and their longing for support from the protestant working class in obtaining a united Ireland. This republicanism takes its cue from that of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen. Martha yearns for the socialist group People's Democracy to follow this vein and declare themselves as explicitly republican.

However, politics is not confined to conversations within the domestic in *Give Them Stones,* the political, instead, is shown to be absorbed in the Belfast landscape. The surrounding landscape is under surveillance due to the risk of a politically charged uprising. Martha and her sister are reprimanded by the police for walking up Cave Hill, in North Belfast, around Easter time. The State have reclaimed the natural environment as a space to be carefully monitored: 'There were policemen all over the place because they were always afraid at Easter there'd be a meeting of Republicans on the Cave Hill – a mixture of Wolfe Tone and Easter 1916'.[18] The United Irishmen, who were led by Wolfe Tone, met on the top of Cave Hill to plan their rebellion in 1795. The police who patrol this area to deter possible republican pilgrimages before an uprising opens up two areas for consideration. The first arises from the republican people are inhibited from walking to the top of Cave Hill to the historic site of republican history on the date of Easter which is significant for the Easter Rising in 1916. This shows the importance of place and time within the republican history of rebellion. Mary Beckett shows the conditions of the 'Troubles' conflict as embodying both these issues; spatial due to the oppression on the lived experiences of nationalist people and temporal as the longevity of the conflict continues on.

[17] Ibid, 119.
[18] Ibid, 69.

Secondly, it is through this passage that Beckett also raises the question: who will start the next republican rising? The crux of this scene focuses on two young women journeying to the summit of Cave Hill. Martha and her sister Mary Brigid during their walk see a man who is lying just below the caves and are startled by his condition. The two teenagers run to seek assistance from a policeman at the bottom of the hill who treats the young women with suspicion and serves them a summons to appear in court to answer to charges of being an I.R.A. decoy to lure the officer into an attack: 'Mary Brigid was in a state because if she was brought to court she might lose her job. We never heard another word about it but for a good while I worried about her, not for myself. I had nothing to lose. I was so fed up I used to imagine myself in court saying all kinds of grand things about freedom and a united Ireland and then being a martyr in gaol'.[19] Ultimately, Martha refuses this path towards 'freedom'; she chooses not to pursue violent republicanism. She described that if she were to talk of Irish reunification with her sister she would be seen as 'raving', while her mother would disapprove due to her 'father's ruined life' because he spent time in prison for his alleged membership of the I.R.A.[20] There is, however, a need for rebellion which remains a potent interest for Martha. The thoughts of rejecting colonialism through jail martyrdom are only a fantasy, though the kernel of the need to rebel persists. In answer to the question of who will drive the next republican rebellion: women are shown here to be aligned with historical uprisings through the geographical site of the meeting of the United Irishmen's meeting point on Cave Hill. Further, the rejection of the I.R.A. violence through the imagined court scene compounds Martha's opening scene of rejecting the I.R.A. 'knee-capping'. It is in this way that socialist republicanism, which Beckett argues adheres to non-violence, is encapsulated.

[19] Ibid, 69 – 70.
[20] Ibid, 70.

Baking as an Act of Resistance

Throughout the novel, protest against imperialism and capitalism is a common theme. Particularly, the period of the 'Troubles' conflict which tells of the need for community protection against imperialist violence. It is the role of women within the nationalist community which ultimately comes to fill this need for resistance. *Give Them Stones* details the Falls Road Curfew in July 1970 where the British Army searched houses in a cordoned area in Belfast around the Falls Road in the West of the city:

> We saw it on the television. I was crying, first with vexation and then with pride when a whole army of women with bread and milk came marching down from other streets further up and pushed the soldiers away, shouting at them to go home to England and learn manners. They handed the food in to the besieged houses.[21]

Bread, and the act of caring, is a symbol for both the rejection of imperialism and capitalism, as the women refuse to adhere to the curfew set by the British Army and also, through the giving of bread, which holds economic value, the women are in effect redistributing their wealth to those in need. Megan Sullivan argued that 'Beckett's equation between women and food suggests not women's essential role as nurturers, but rather that women here make the decision to counter colonisation with sustenance'.[22] Sullivan situated Martha and her act of baking as a Marxist symbol of socialism:

> Martha's bread *is* a product, but because she often gives it away free, because she conceives of its sustenance in terms of the relations it allows between and among women, and because for her it is that which may alleviate her family's poverty, the bread cannot easily be defined only as a commodity or neatly be assimilated into bourgeois production.[23]

Martha complicates neat distinctions within socialism due to owning her own business. However, her act of baking for her community in times of food shortage and economic struggle cements her

[21] Ibid, 121.
[22] Megan Sullivan, "Instead I Said I Am a Home Baker': Nationalist Ideology and Materialist Politics in Mary Beckett's *Give Them Stones,"* in *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities.* ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick. (The University of Alabama Press: Tuscaloosa and London, 2000), 236.
[23] Ibid, 242.

as a socialist. Bread is symbolic of the rebellion enacted by nationalist women against capitalist and imperialist oppression.

Martha is inspired by the women breaking curfew in the Falls Road; she from this point on refuses to have British soldiers in her bakery; she refuses their custom:

> Have the Republicans told you to do this?' he [the soldier] asked all confidential.
>
> 'No,' I said.
>
> 'Have they been misbehaving?' he asked, annoyed.
>
> 'No,' I said, 'not any more than usual'.
>
> 'What do you mean by that?' he demanded.
>
> 'Well,' I said, 'they're never very respectful but I suppose it's just their manners'.
>
> 'Are you a Republican?' he asked and I shrugged. I was going to be a heroine but instead I said, 'I am a home baker. [24]

In this, Martha draws a correlation between political resistance and the domestic sphere. She uses her designation as a home baker as an act of radical refusal of militant republicanism. Her actions reject and subvert meanings of political resistance. Martha comes to occupy a space which resists labels, Sullivan argued: 'As a woman worker, she will recognize that economic needs – not nationalist ideology – most concern her. After the scene in which her allegiance is questioned by the British soldier ('Are you a Republican'), Martha rejects nationalism and recognizes for women, national identity predefines them and gives paramilitary forces the power to control them ('Two young fellows that I had never seen before called into my shop one day that summer and told me I was not to sell any more bread to soldiers')'.[25] By refusing the soldiers, she gains the ability to self-determine; she asserts agency in a gesture of refusal and due to this she is fulfilling the criteria to be a feminist nationalist emblem. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, however, disagrees with Sullivan:

[24] Beckett, *Give Them Stones*, 122 – 123.
[25] Sullivan, "Instead I Said I Am a Home Baker," 231.

'If, through Martha, Beckett crystallises a positive image of female self-definition, there is also recognition of the limits of the philosophy of self-reliance. Martha's development may also be seen as a move away from a strict feminist self-sufficiency, which borders on self-absorption, towards both tentative embracement of part politics and a new, albeit qualified, sense of a mutuality of marriage'.[26] While I disagree that the 'mutuality of marriage' in Martha's case was beneficial, as her husband Dermot kept his own wages for himself without supporting the family income, the 'limits of the philosophy of self-reliance' opens the space for positivity in the network of support which Martha finds opening up to her through her home baking.

Heather Ingman argued that: 'Her bakehouse has become more than an economic necessity; it is Martha's world, a room of her own where she can express her individuality and creativity away from the violence outside. It has become more important to her than her republican sympathies: 'If I am not baking bread I am nobody and nothing' she says'.'[27] However, I argue that Martha's use of home baking is an act of resistance against violence, of both the State as well as the I.R.A., while asserting her interconnection with her nationalist community in an act of socialist solidarity. The need for autonomous control over one's economic status, which she gains from her baking, becomes a key element of *Give Them Stones*. Martha leaves the factory 'where [she] never got skilled' when her husband Dermot was employed as a bread-van driver: 'There were two drawbacks. First he [Dermot] thought because he was a man out at work and me a woman staying at home he had a right to marital comforts. I had to keep him straight on that. The other was a lack of money now I had none of my own'.[28] While raising her four sons, Martha returns to the traditions of baking soda farls which she had learned during her exiled time in the countryside during the Blitz. She begins giving the leftovers to her neighbours so it won't go to waste. As the neighbours begin bringing eggs and supplies to make the bread, Martha's mother encourages her to begin selling her

[26] Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969: (de-)constructing the North* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2003), 246.
[27] Heather Ingman, *Twentieth-century Fiction by Irish Women: Nation and Gender (*Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 160 – 161.
[28] Beckett, *Give Them Stones,* 88.

produce. The lack of financial security is a precarious position for Martha particularly due to a deficit of support from her husband as the sole earner in the household:

> Money was a terrible annoyance to me… I hated asking Dermot. It wouldn't have mattered what kind of man he was, I would still have hated it. But Dermot had been spoilt. He thought his money was his own… Now I suggested that he give me housekeeping money out of his pay. He looked miserable, asked what amount I would suggest and then handed it over, shading his wallet in his hand so that it would be hidden from me.[29]

After this instance, Martha begins to consider her options in how to become a self-reliant person. To do this, she uses her skills as a baker. The act of baking for her community becomes a political act of support for her neighbours. Martha refuses to be driven by financial gain and turns away the soldiers who continue to frequent her shop for her soda farls. Instead, she makes the act of baking a part of a political rebellion. Ciarán de Baróid wrote in *Ballymurphy and the Irish War* of the importance of food supply during the conflict: 'The author [de Baróid] lived in Ballymurphy from 1972 to 1976, spending many an hour lying in the gutter dodging bullets, or waiting for a lull to cross the street for a loaf of bread. And in the shops would be the women of Ballymurphy, buying the 'rations' and passing the time of day, with hardly a reference to the rattle of gunfire outside. The war had become part of life, and you simply worked around it'.[30] It is this defiance of the disruption caused by violence that Martha embodies. Heather Ingman wrote of *Give Them Stones*: 'Martha creates a parallel world apart from the violence in her bakehouse … She rejects a male-authored nationalist identity in favour of the female world of home baking'.[31] The designation of masculine/feminine equating to warfare/domestic nurture is reductive. The women's writing of militant republicanism in Armagh Gaol, which is explored in Chapter 3, counters this gender essentialism. The act of resistance which Martha gleans from baking is a rebellion which is also seen in the feminist journals examined within Chapter 4 and 5, particularly through the

[29] Beckett, *Give Them Stones*, 90.
[30] Ciarán de Baróid, *Ballymurphy and the Irish War* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 105.
[31] Ingman, *Twentieth-century Fiction by Irish Women*, 160.

publications of the Socialist Women's Group and Belfast Women's Collective who were concerned with the material hardships which nationalist women were disproportionately affected by.

Give Them Stones details the rent and rate strike carried out in response to the introduction of internment without trial on Monday August 9, 1971 of mostly nationalist men: 'The defiance of my neighbours made me ashamed. When I found out later that Dermot had never stopped paying the rent, I was mortified'.[32] Her husband Dermot gives his reasoning that baking to Martha was a central part of her being, her livelihood, her commitment to her community: 'I had to give out bread free, time and time again, but nothing seemed to be deducted from us'.[33] The act of community support is shown through Martha's selfless act. Further, the process of baking becomes irretrievably intertwined with her memories of the conflict: 'I was up baking when it started. I heard the banging of bin lids and the shouting and screaming and later on the shooting. My hands were trembling but I kept on baking'.[34] Martha is within a liminal space of observing the actions of women in direct rebellion to the conflict. Her baking is presented by Beckett as a necessary tool for resistance to state oppression through her will to carry on despite the violence. Opening her bakery is a service to her community, despite the eventual burning down of her premises by the Provisional I.R.A.; her perseverance shows an unshakeable determination for normality. The destruction of Martha's bakehouse which is a source of communal nourishment is a potent symbol for the rejection of republican violence. In this way, Beckett's novel rejects the violence meted out by the I.R.A. as a form of punishment. These acts serve to be a hinderance to the progression of the community. So, while Martha is republican, she advocates for a non-violent resistance to colonialism. While Martha's republicanism is evident throughout the novel, hers is one which embodies the feminist opposition to violence.

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[32] Between August 9, 1971 and December 5, 1975 a total of 1,981 people were interned; '1,874 were Catholic/Republican, while 107 were Protestant/Loyalist'. Martin Melaugh, 'Internment - Summary of Main Events'. Accessed on: June 29, 2019 https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/intern/sum.htm; Beckett, *Give Them Stones,* 130.
[33] Beckett, *Give Them Stones,* 130.
[34] Ibid, 125.

It's in the moment of viewing the horror experienced by hotel workers running for safety away from a bomb that Martha's republicanism is shifted permanently away from violence. The act of killing is made real to her through the violence being made visible. It is from this that Martha's views diverge from the militant republicanism led by the Provisional I.R.A.:

> The explosions didn't worry me at first. I persuaded myself they were never intended to hurt anybody. When they did, I blamed the police for not taking up the warning quick enough. But they did hurt people. They killed people. They blew off legs and arms. They cut faces in great slashes with broken glass. I tried to hide all of that from myself. The I.R.A. would never hurt ordinary people – only the system they were going to pull down… Then I saw on the television girls running away from the Europa Hotel… And they were hysterical. In broad daylight they lost their dignity like I lost mine secretly in my bed in the dark worrying about my sons. And I knew it wasn't right to do such things to people. It wasn't right to risk killing them or hurting them, and it wasn't right to frighten them.[35]

In this, there is an exploration of the reality of violence in pursuit of ejecting imperialist forces from the north of Ireland. Beckett writes of an acknowledgment of the denial of violence. For Martha there is a dissonance in confronting the violence: 'I tried to hide it from myself' is an acknowledgment of the wilful choice to turn a blind eye to the destruction and death caused, although, when confronted with the images, she cannot disentangle herself from the horror. The effect of terror is brought into focus after Martha can see it for herself on television. Edmund Burke in *An Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful* wrote of terror and affect that: 'When we go but one step beyond the immediate sensible qualities of things, we go out of our depth. All we do after is but a faint struggle that shows we are in an element which does not belong to us'.[36] Burke's writing of cognizance of terror as 'beyond the immediate sensible' shows that terror is beyond the imaginable:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime;* that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling [that of pain].[37]

[35] Beckett, *Give Them Stones,* 130 – 131.
[36] Edmund Burke, *An Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, Paris and Melbourne: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1981 [1757]), 140.
[37] Ibid, 44.

The bombing of the hotel is a disruption of the labour force which is comprised, in this scene, entirely of women. This is significant as it is the women who are at the forefront of economic gain through their employment, while also at the helm of experiencing terror. Beckett's novel shows women as bearing the brunt of the conflict.

It is in this that she sees an identification with the women workers and her worry for her sons' navigation of the hypermasculine need for acting out the role of defender or hero. Yuval-Davis wrote on the Othered position which women hold within society that: 'Women usually have an ambivalent position within the collectivity. On the one hand they often symbolize the collectivity unity, honour and the *raison d'être* of specific national and ethnic projects, like going to war. On the other hand, however, they are often excluded from the collective 'we' of the body politic, and retain an object rather than a subject position'.[38] Martha is a rejection of this ambivalence through the Othering imposed on her by the men in her own community and patriarchal society more broadly. It was not only the violent actions of the Provisional I.R.A. that Martha recoiled from; their prison protests also invoked a sense of repulsion within her: 'Then there were the hunger strikes and those ten young men leading us to despair. I was ashamed of the dirty protest. I didn't approve of the hunger strikes but I thought the British government tricked them, went back on their word, and then when one after another died I felt with all the other women, anguish'.[39] Beckett's description of the pained response of the nationalist public to the prison protest offers a subversion of the republican narrative of popular support for the protests. Instead, she writes of a feeling of demoralisation. Again, an affinity with the pain felt by other women drives this shift in her republican views. Martha has an affinity with women hurt as by-product of hyper-masculine republicanism. This in turn denies women their space within militant republicanism by denoting the homogeneity of women repulsed by the actions of the I.R.A.

[38] Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation,* 47.
[39] Beckett, *Give Them Stones,* 140.

Feminist critic Sara Ruddick argued for the alignment between the maternal and peace movements as being connected, however, in the case of Martha in *Give Them Stones* it is not motherhood which constitutes her rejection of violence.[40] bell hooks argued that the feminist project should encompass an 'overall end to violence'.[41] She argued against the gender essentialist readings of the link between maternity and peace employed by Ruddick: 'We must insist that women who do choose (even if they are inspired by motherhood) to denounce violence and domination and its ultimate expression, war, are political thinkers making political decisions and choices'.[42] This representation allows for a new understanding of feminist nationalism as an interjection into political discourse in the north. In celebration of multiplicities of experiences, Caroline Magennis wrote: 'Literary works can display and juxtapose divergent and contested memories and create mnemonic multiperspectivity'.[43] Further Magennis argued that fiction allows for 'dissonant voices to be heard and allow the diversity of experiences and reactions to be read outside of a narrow political narrative'.[44] Magennis continued by arguing that this plurality is necessary for discussions around the conflict: 'If we seriously want to deal with the past, we must to some degree be prepared to be undone'.[45] It is in this way that Martha exemplifies a plurality in identities: feminist, socialist, republican. She undoes understandings of the parameters of these identity demarcations. Gerry Smyth wrote of Martha's use of the act of baking as a 'defence against the erosion of her sense of self' in which she can 'challenge through self-expression the discourses into which she has been born and which constitute the limits of her identity'.[46] Despite Smyth's argument that Martha embodies the variants in political positions within sectarian binaries, he does not elaborate on the nuances in the nationalist political spectrum she offers. Instead, he argued: 'Martha makes no bones about her nationalist sympathies, but when she does try to describe these

[40] Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (London: Women's Press. 1990).
[41] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory,* 118.
[42] hooks, 128.
[43] Caroline Magennis, "My Narrative Falters, As It Must': Rethinking Memory in Recent Northern Irish Fiction," Ed. McGuire. *Post-Conflict Literature: Human Rights, Peace, Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 45.
[44] Ibid, 45.
[45] Ibid, 53.
[46] Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997), 136.

feelings her own voice fades and the prose adopts the style and tone of popular nationalist discourse,"[47] or in other words, 'insight fades to rhetoric'.[48] However, this analysis opens up a reading of Martha as an emblem for feminist nationalism through her actions and that which cannot be said explicitly. A life-affirming resistance as opposed to the nationalist paramilitary silencing of the community which only gives a semblance of unity.

Martha's outspoken attitude towards the Provisional I.R.A. ultimately ends with them burning her house, which included the bakery and store-front. This is a metaphor for the destruction that militant republicanism had on its own community as a by-product of pursuing a romantic notion of a united Ireland. This text, however, ends with Martha and her husband Dermot seeking a new property to open as a bakery to begin from the bottom up to restore what once was. The money used to help them open a new bakery store to rent as separate from their home is funded through compensation given to them by Sinn Féin after the fire. There is an irony here that the political wing of the I.R.A. supports while paramilitaries destroy livelihoods. Through Martha's continued pursuit of baking as an act of resistance, Beckett's *Give Them Stones* offers a positive reaffirmation for a feminist, socialist republicanism which denies violence.

[47] Ibid, 136.
[48] Ibid, 137.

Chapter 9: Anthologising the Republican Feminist Short Story

The critic Kevin Barry argued of the Field Day Anthology series that 'the project of an anthology is not to be representative but indicative… One main purpose of such an anthology is to provoke a perception of the interdependence of contradictions'.[1] The irony here is that a controversy surrounded the publication of the Field Day Anthology for its lack of gender diversity. In this way, the collection was a misogynistic amplification of male narratives. This speaks directly to the issue of exclusion of female narratives which this thesis argues against. The original Field Day Anthology was indicative that women's work was not valued as having literary value amongst those within male dominated spheres like publishing. This exclusion of women resulted in the Field Day Anthology of Irish Women's Writing (Volumes 4 and 5 of the series). This anthology included republican feminist viewpoints through, for example, the article 'Belfast Women's Collective, Women Against Imperialism, and Derry Women's Aid' and excerpts of an interview from a woman I.R.A. volunteer in Catherine Cleary's 'Women at War'.[2]

The short story anthology should open up a multivalence of views which provoke the reader into a new kind of seeing, making visible a range of new experiences to the reader. In this section, I will consider the ways in which short story anthologies of the 1980s opened up a space for republican feminism and the intersections between the two movements. The case study I will use for this section will be Brenda Murphy's short stories as featured in *The Female Line,* an anthology published by the feminist umbrella organisation Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (N.I.W.R.M.); Belfast-based publisher Blackstaff Press's *The Blackstaff Book of Short Stories* (1988); and her pamphlet short story collection *Committed* which was published later in 1999.

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[1] Kevin Barry, "Anthology as History: The Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature." *The Irish Review*, No. 12 (1992): 50 – 51.

[2] *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Vol. 5: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions.* Ed. Angela Bourke et al. 'Belfast Women's Collective, Women Against Imperialism, and Derry Women's Aid', Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2002), 394 – 298; *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Vol. 5: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions.* Ed. Angela Bourke et al. Catherine Cleary, 'Women at War' (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 2002), 398 – 400.

The N.I.W.R.M. publication of *The Female Lines* was the only book released by the organisation and their fraught relationship with republican feminism was reflected in this. The Blackstaff Press is still a prominent publisher of Irish interest works of both fiction and non-fiction which encompass a range of political views. For the purposes of this thesis, I will primarily focus on Murphy's works within the time period of the 1980s.

The Short Story

Murphy's work becomes part of a body of work through its situation as part of a whole anthology. The politics of anthologisation is one of exclusion/inclusion and amplification/silencing of voices. The choice for inclusion within an anthology should always be considered. David Malcolm argued that collections as a whole provide context for the reader's approach to the individual short story.[3] The setting of the anthology can do this as it collates the individual texts under a theme, or banner, for example Frank O'Connor's edited collection *Classic Irish Short Stories*.[4] This portrays the collection as representative of that theme and enables the reader to view the texts through the lens of representing the Irish nation. It is important to consider the collections in which Murphy's work appears and the themes within her work that arise in each setting. By doing this, a correlation can be made to the 'hidden' critiques of feminism or republicanism in her works which have remained out of the stories due to the expected readership. For example, *The Female Line* collection, which was released to mark 10 years of the N.I.W.R.M. This readership can be expected to be primarily supporters of feminism. The content of Murphy's stories within this collection are overtly of the female body and its relationality to oppressive environments. This collection was revolutionary in its celebration of women's writing and as such it sought to amplify women's writing and experiences which were lacking in other anthologies of the time. The N.I.W.R.M.'s disjuncture

[3] David Malcolm, *The British and Irish Short Story Handbook* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 47.
[4] Frank O'Connor, ed. *Classic Irish Short Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985 [1957]).

with republicanism is detailed fully in Chapter 3. I will explore how Murphy's work appealed to this audience. While the other literary texts in this chapter deal with the republicanism and feminism in abstract ways, Murphy's work takes an autobiographical approach to her fiction which heightens the interaction between republicanism and feminism on a factual basis.

It is argued that the short story as a form is one in which the marginalised in society is most apt to being represented. Writer Frank O'Connor in *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (1965) contends that the novel relies on the 'concept of a normal society' without which its composition 'is impossible'; the short story, he contends, does not operate in these confines.[5] These differences, he asserts, are 'not so much formal… as ideological'.[6] The short story is a medium for the expression of those who are marginalised in society, those who operate beyond the confines of the dominant narratives: 'Always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society, superimposed sometimes on symbolic figures whom they caricature and echo—Christ, Socrates, Moses'.[7] Further, O'Connor contends: 'We can see in it an attitude of mind that is attracted by submerged population groups, whatever these may be at any given time—tramps, artists, lonely idealists, dreamers, and spoiled priests… the short story remains by its very nature remote from the community—romantic, individualistic, and intransigent'.[8] Similarly, critic Heather Ingman argued: 'With its sidelong glance and its marginal status in comparison with the novel, the short story, by its very nature, is, it has been argued, ideally suited to playfulness and subversion'.[9] These critical readings of the short story as a medium for 'submerged' groups lends itself to a parallel with understandings of the subaltern, as in, a group which exists, silenced, within a population. As has been explored in Chapter 2, republican women's testimonies and writing occupy a subaltern space within dominant historical and literary narratives

[5] Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice; A Study of the Short Story* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2011 [1965]).
[6] Ibid, 19.
[7] Ibid, 18.
[8] Ibid, 19 – 20.
[9] Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Shorty Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 12.

of the 'Troubles'. In this way, the short story is an apt form for voicing the subaltern and unsettling discourse.

It is within these analyses of the short story as a medium for 'submerged population group', in this case republican women, that Brenda Murphy's works adhere to both the subversion and the playfulness to challenge imperialism and sexism to varying degrees throughout the anthologies. It is against a backdrop of social turbulence that Declan Kiberd wrote: 'The short story is particularly appropriate to a society in which revolutionary upheavals have shattered the idea of normality. In the years in which the modern Irish nation took shape, the short story was the form in which many writers chose to depict their vision of the emerging Ireland'.[10] In this light, Murphy's stories disrupt through political writing about the conflict, particularly by situating the female body as a site of resistance and vulnerability. The fragmented nature of the short story assists in this aim. The form reflects the social, political and historical turbulence within the north of Ireland through these vignettes that Murphy presents.

Committed *(1999)*

It would be remiss to examine the work of Murphy without mentioning her pamphlet publication *Committed*, a small collection of three stories, published in 1999 with Glandore Publishing. While the pamphlet story collection is of inferior production quality than the other two anthologies, which are printed as books, the content is no less evocative. The date of this publication is significant as it comes after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This agreement was not uniformly accepted by republicans. Marisa McGlinchey's study of dissident republicanism *Unfinished Business* (2018) details that so-called 'revolutionary republicans' were not supportive of

[10] Declan Kiberd, "Story-Telling: The Gaelic Tradition." In *The Irish Short Story* ed. Terence Brown and Patrick Rafroidi (Gerards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), 15.

this shift in focus without the reunification of Ireland.[11] There was a split within republicanism when the Good Friday Agreement was brokered and some I.R.A. members felt it to be against the aims of republicanism. Ex- I.R.A. member Dolours Price in the Netflix documentary *I, Dolours* accused Sinn Féin of 'climbing over the corpses' when they agreed to sign up to the Good Friday Agreement.[12] Price's disappointment is echoed in her earlier article for *The Blanket* online journal when she wrote: 'There is unfinished business and as each day passes I feel the urge to see it finished'.[13] Murphy's pamphlet collection also expresses discontent with republicanism.

After previously having two short stories included in book length anthologies, there is a notable change in the production of the pamphlet with Glandore Publishing. The pamphlet publication shows a kind of marginalisation of the dissenting republican viewpoint, that is to say, one that is critical of the republican movement, particularly post-Good Friday Agreement in 1998. The stories within the *Committed* collection are more explicit in the variety of oppression experienced by republican women than the anthologised stories within *The Female Line* and *The Blackstaff Book*. The eponymous story, 'Committed', tells the story of a woman who is being taken to Armagh Gaol in 1971 to serve a prison sentence. Brenda Murphy started to write when she was released from prison in 1981 as many of her stories draw directly upon this experience.[14] The character who has been imprisoned is also called Brenda Murphy, which further compounds the autobiographical nature of her fiction. The short stories studied here are a creative reflection of Brenda Murphy's testimonies explored in the following chapter. The act of fictionalising these lived experiences shows a bind between memory and writing. The act of writing provides a kind of catharsis which is not evident in the verbal form for the writer. The memory studies theorist Mark Freeman

[11] Marisa McGlinchey, *Unfinished Business: The Politics of 'Dissident' Republicanism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).
[12] *I, Dolours*. Directed by Ed Moloney. 2018. Accessed June 1, 2018.
[13] Dolours Price, "Gerry, Come Clean, You'll Feel Better," *The Blanket Journal.* February 26, 2008. Accessed on: October 9, 2019.http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/DP290308.html
[14] John Mullin, "A Terrorist in the Wings," *The Guardian.* February 25, 1999. Accessed on: January 10, 2020 https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/feb/25/gender.uk1

described memory as a 'richly textured, multivocal text'.[15] Further, he wrote of the narrativization of memory as a process within life story-telling:

> The inchoate narrative wrought via memory will become codified, solidified; a second order narrativization will take place… The issue of genre will become more acute as well, and, to a greater or lesser extent, whether consciously or unconsciously, there will be contact with specific plotlines and modes of telling.[16]

The act of story-telling from lived experiences involves a necessary narrativization of the past. These links between history, memory and narrative are heightened in the case of writing auto-fiction. While Murphy's testimony in *A Kind of Sisterhood,* which is explored in Chapter 10, causes her emotional pain to verbalise, writing is a way of giving testimony. In Murphy's fiction, the criticism of republicanism operates through what Marie-Louise Pratt terms as 'moment-of-truth narratives': 'Moment of truth stories focus on a single point of crisis in the life of a central character, a crisis which provokes some basic realisation that will change the character's life forever'.[17] Murphy's 'Committed' operates in this way. It opens with a central focus on a prisoner's entry to prison for the first time, but the title also gives rise to questions of loyalty to the republican cause. Pratt wrote of novels as a narrative of a life, while the short story is a moment within that life, though 'this relationship of whole to fragment is not a necessary one'.[18] Murphy's stories in this collection show a long-view of her experiences during the conflict. It is through retrospection tinged with regret that the stories are told. The query of commitment to republicanism is the substance of the 'moment of truth' narrative within these short stories.

Within the story 'Committed' this moment of realisation occurs when the narrator remembers: 'She [the prisoner] hoped they [the female guards] would not start to knock her about. Her fat young body was stiff, sore and bruised in places from being hit by the policemen. She

[15] Mark Freeman, "Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative." In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates.* ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (Fordham University Press: New York, 2010), 263.
[16] Ibid, 264.
[17] Mary Louise Pratt, "The Long and the Short of It." In *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. Charles E. May (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), 99 – 100.
[18] Ibid.

didn't think she could take another knocking about without crying this time'.[19] This sits in opposition to the testimony from a republican ex-prisoner in a *Women's News* article: 'They thought my womanhood would serve to defeat me. They didn't understand that the strength of ideals cannot be stripped from one's mind.'[20] There is a tension evident here between Murphy's fictionalisation and the *Women's News* testimony. This fractures any notion of an appearance of a unified force within republicanism. The sentiment within the *Women's News* testimony is also seen within Bobby Sands's jail writings, for example the poem 'The Rhythm of Time':

> It lights the dark of this prison cell,
> It thunders forth its might,
> It is 'the undauntable thought', my friend,
> That thought that says 'I'm right!'[21]

It is notable that Sands's work has received greater appraisal than Murphy's work. The reasoning for this is twofold: firstly, Sands has been immortalised within the hagiography of republicanism due to his involvement, and death, on hunger strike; secondly, Murphy's work unsettles dominant narratives of the republican movement during the era, particularly on gender and loyalty to the cause. She offers a critique, and this makes her a voice of dissent within masculinised republicanism. Her work is particularly subversive as it directly links to her time during political imprisonment in Armagh Gaol. Her depictions of this time centre around gendered violence, silencing and traumatic memories of the events. She writes of this time as deeply troubling to her, which is explored in further detail in Chapter 10. In her fiction, Murphy, again, refutes this republican mind over matter mentality as exemplified in Sands's poetry: 'She was sure that she was probably supposed to refuse to take her clothes off, *as a Republican*. But she couldn't bear the thought of being held down and stripped naked. She was too sore to bear being dragged into a bath and washed and humiliated by strangers'.[22] When she was instructed to remove the sheet or

[19] Brenda Murphy, 'Committed,' In *Committed.* (Glasgow: Glandore Publishing, 1999), 3.
[20] 'Strip searches in Armagh,' *Women's News*, December 1984, 6.
[21] 'The Rhythm of Time' *The Bobby Sands Trust* Accessed on: March 15, 2020. https://www.bobbysandstrust.com/writings/the-rhythm-of-time/
[22] Murphy, *Committed*, 5. Emphasis added.

face having it removed for her, the narrator says: 'This was worse than being hit or yelled at'.[23] The yelling is a mental torment, which the narrator cannot withstand. It is through this that Murphy unsettles the emphasis on endurance within republican resolve which Sands writes in reference to. These semi-autobiographical depictions sit in opposition to the idyllic rejuvenating final scene in Maeve Murphy's filmic depiction of Armagh Gaol *Silent Grace* (2004) in which the prisoner washes following the end of the protest.[24] Instead, Murphy's work allows a space for vulnerability, fear and emotionality to be brought into the narrative of the conflict. It is in this mode that Murphy's work rewrites the relationship between republicanism and feminism in her short stories. Instead of the resolve of mind, Murphy's stories inextricably link memory and the body as fragile and vulnerable.

The Female Line (1986)

The reception of *The Female Line*, the collection of short literary works by women from Northern Ireland, was mixed. Feminist newspaper *Women's News* ran several articles in response to the publication of this anthology. This newspaper, as explored in Chapter 5, had a policy of printing any view as long as it pertained to feminism. Patricia Martin wrote for *Women's News*: 'The book is a potpourri of views, styles and subjects, including prose and verse. It is not, however, feminist in perspective and the one major fault I found with it was its lack of scope, particularly in regard to the subject of women and work. To be fair though, it was not intended to provide a feminist platform'.[25] Another critic, Jayne Egerton, argued that the problem with *The Female Line* is that its texts portrays women as contingent on their relationship with men, through their status as wives, daughters and mothers.[26] Another reviewer, Claire McGowan, remarked on the feminist *modus*

[23] Ibid, 9.
[24] *Silent Grace,* Directed by Maeve Murphy. Dublin: Follower Productions, 2004.
[25] "The Female Lines review," *Women's News* Issue 13: December 1985/ January 1986.
[26] Ibid.

operandi evident in the collection: 'It was felt that there was definitely a place for such a book, as so few local women writers had had their work published in anything other than a local magazine, if at all'.[27] Nevertheless, the text was written to celebrate a decade of the N.I.W.R.M, and with the feminist ethos as its intention, so due to this, the intended audience, at least, can be understood as a feminist readership.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the N.I.W.R.M. aimed to embody a depoliticisation of the feminist movement to create a sense of unity. It is no surprise then that within *The Female Line* biographical note, Murphy does not include her republican past.[28] This is in comparison to her information in *The Blackstaff Book* in which she writes in her author's information that she 'spent six years in Armagh Women's Prison'.[29] Murphy therefore offers an non-politicised version of herself to a feminist audience in *The Female Line*. However, within this publication her subject matter deals implicitly with republicanism through a feminist lens. *The Female Line* anthology showcases Murphy's key theme of mapping the experiences of republican women intersecting with gendered oppression within literary texts. The short story 'A Curse' depicts a woman who, it becomes apparent, is being held in custody at the police station prior to questioning. The opening sets up the woman's experience without any explanation that she is being held in a police holding cell; instead, there is a focus on the female bodily pain caused by menstruation. Within this institutional captivity, the narrator is aware of her bodily pains: 'Cramping pains gripped her lower belly, holding her, then tightening their grip by spasms. A deep ache in the small of her back. She lay huddled, knees drawn up, face to the wall'.[30] The woman is unperturbed by the holding cell but rather is focused on the internal menstrual pain. This is significant as this story on menstruation is within the feminist publication as the issue of menstruation by political prisoners is one which

[27] "The Female Line: The Written Word," *Women's News,* Issue 13: December 1985/ January 1986
[28] Brenda Murphy was convicted in 1972 of: possession of a firearm and ammunition with intent; possession of a firearm and ammunition; possession of a firearm without a certificate; possession of ammunition without a certificate, and in 1977: of belong to a proscribed organisation and burglary. PRONI Ref: for 1972 conviction BELF/1/1/2/246/25 and 1977 conviction BELF/1/1/2/273/5 BELF/1/1/2/274/103
[29] *Blackstaff Book of Short Stories*. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1988).
[30] Brenda Murphy, "A Curse," in *The Female Line,* ed. Ruth Hooley (London: Women's Press, 1986), 40.

does not find a literary representation beyond Murphy's work. As is explored in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, the nature of menstrual blood used in a protest setting was not often disclosed in republican narratives of the conflict. Other texts which deal with the women's dirty protest, such as Maeve Murphy's film *Silent Grace*, omit the menstrual blood element of the protest.[31] It is within Murphy's *The Female Line* stories that she deals most directly with the female body and connection to the body as a metaphor for the treatment of women in the north of Ireland. Murphy's story describes the texture and feeling of the menstrual blood flowing from her body: 'She coughed and felt the ooze between her legs, the familiar ooze, the heat, the wetness'.[32] Murphy portrays an affective, physical bodily pain; she describes the process of the menstruation with detail which evokes the senses. The image draws the reader in in sympathy for the imprisoned woman.

Murphy depicts the bleeding female body to illustrate a gendered hierarchy in the north of Ireland. She shows a power dynamic which depicts that the furthest distance from menstruation the higher the power held: the policeman refuses the bleeding woman any sanitary protection; the female police officer reluctantly gives the woman a sanitary towel; finally, at the lowest level of subordination is the bleeding woman without sanitary protection. When confronted with the male police officer, the incarcerated woman immediately requests to make her plea for hygienic products to a woman, when this is refused she is left with having to ask the man. He responds: 'Have you no shame?'[33] The narrator muses to herself: 'What is the colour of shame? All she could see was red as it trickled down her leg'.[34] She then pleads: 'I'm filthy, I'm bleeding… I don't think even your wife would stand here and bleed in silence'.[35] The phrase 'even your wife' subtly invokes the existence of a hierarchy of womanhood which adheres to acceptable behaviours in respect to taboo subjects such as menstrual bleeding.

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[31] *Silent Grace,* Directed by Maeve Murphy. Dublin: Follower Productions, 2004.
[32] Brenda Murphy, "A Curse," in *The Female Line*, 40.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, 40 – 41.

Further, Murphy unsettles the utopian notion of feminist alliance on the basis of biology with this story. Through an anti-imperial feminist lens, she challenges feminists to consider the intersections of imperialist oppression on women. This is similar to the work of Nell McCafferty and the Women Against Imperialism group who challenged feminists to consider imperialist oppression on women through their journalism and activist periodicals respectively. In 'A Curse' Murphy bids the reader to question power dynamics inherent within institutions, specifically the intersection between imperialism and patriarchal institutions. Murphy uses her space within this feminist anthology to disrupt the idea of feminist solidarity. The protagonist is thwarted in her attempts to draw a female-alliance based on a shared understanding of womanhood. The woman asked the female police officer if she could have fresh clothes and somewhere to clean herself while covered in menstrual blood – 'you know what it's like when you have your period'.[36] The woman is led into the police interview, without having had the chance to clean herself, blood remaining visible between her legs: 'It was exactly as she remembered it. Bright, electric, windowless'.[37] Both the image of the menstruation and the inhumane treatment of the bleeding woman become a metaphor for the cyclical nature of this institutional harassment. Through this, the menstruating female body becomes aligned with the political, a stark rejection of the non-sectarian stance of the N.I.W.RM. which is explored in Chapter 4. Murphy's story thus takes on an oppositional approach to apoliticism by firmly rooting the female body as a political battleground.

Again, Murphy chooses to examine women's bodily pain within her second *The Female Line* story, 'Happy Birth Day' which depicts the pain experienced during childbirth. As each story can be mapped on to her experience of prison it can be deduced that Murphy's work is semi-autobiographical. Murphy gave birth to her daughter in Armagh Gaol and the traumatic effects of parting with her child is explored within Chapter 10: Documentary Film. Murphy, like McGuckian,

[36] Ibid, 41.
[37] Ibid.

shows the birthing scene as an individually experienced pain in a shift away from the abstract birthing of a nation evident in Heaney's 'Act of Union'. Heaney's image of 'Mother Ireland' is subverted through this scene: 'I want it out. At this moment it is not a baby, it is a pain I want to get rid of. I feel it will rip open the seams of my skin. I will burst like some human tomato'.[38] The extreme pain feels akin to the bodily borders tearing, although the woman overcomes this: 'I touch the matted hair, plastered down on her head with my blood'.[39] This is another feminist subversion of the Pearsian 'blood sacrifice'; the symbolism of blood being shed for a new Ireland, as discussed in the new paradigm shift of 'blood sacrifice' to a life-giving womb blood sacrifice, is extended through Murphy's imagery. Murphy extends the menstrual blood sacrifice to that of shedding blood through the creation of life. This pain is then transformed to adoration upon seeing the new born baby.

Within the collection's final story, 'Limbo', Murphy depicts an inability to sustain a constant loving connection with her partner: 'I sit clutching yesterdays like a vice in my mind, squeezing from them memories to wrap myself in. I sit disliking today and fearing tomorrow. I feel separate, apart, discarded'[40] This story encapsulates a variety of temporal vignettes as Murphy writes of nostalgia for the past, fear of the future and where it will take her, but from the view point of the present. O'Connor wrote that temporality is a pivotal aspect which differentiates the novel form and the short story; while the novel has the ability to develop chronologically through a story, the short story must present carefully chosen vignettes to illuminate the tale: 'Time is his [the novelist's] greatest asset; the chronological development of character or incident is essential form as we see it in life, and the novelist flouts it at his own peril… Because his [the short story writer's] frame of reference can never be the totality of a human life'. [41] The narrator explores the strain on her life due to isolation and solitude created by a ruptured personal connection which leaves her

[38] Brenda Murphy, "Happy Birth Day" in *The Female Line*, ed. Ruth Hooley (London: Women's Press, 1986), 93.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Brenda Murphy, "Limbo" in *The Female Line*, ed. Ruth Hooley (London: Women's Press, 1986), 136.
[41] O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice*, 20.

in a liminal space. Heather Ingman argued: 'If Ireland has always been a place where identity is made and unmade, arguably the Irish short story will reflect this… This in-between place of shifting identities, of change and transformation, is the realm in which the Irish short story also operates'.[42] As the name of this story suggests, there is a 'limbo' or 'in-between' space which the narrator is occupying. The focus on the embodied experience of pain through the medium of the skin is the 'in-between' between inside and out. This liminality is embodied in the narrator: **'**This human skin I'm in contains all those emotions, good and bad'.[43] Murphy discusses the loneliness and depression which the narrator embodies; in doing so, the intensity of trauma is encapsulated within her skin. It envelops her. Edmund Burke wrote of the dialogic nature between mind and body: 'Our minds and bodies are so closely and intimately connected that one is incapable of pain or pleasure without the other'.[44] Further Burke wrote of the body/mind in relation to fear:

> The only difference between pain and terror is that things which cause pain operate on the mind by the intervention of the body; whereas things that cause terror generally affect the bodily organs by the operation of the mind suggesting the danger; but both agreeing, either primarily or secondarily, in producing a tension, contraction, or a violent emotion of the nerves, they agree likewise in everything else.[45]

This inextricable link between the fearful mind and the affect felt within the body is exactly the experience that the character within 'Limbo' details. It is this theme of vulnerable mind and bodies which unsettles the republican narratives which Sands and Sweeney alike detail in their writings. Both of these representations centre around experiences of the female body and gendered experiences of pain. It is pertinent that the expression of the pained female body found its outlet in a feminist anthology.

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[42] Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Shorty Story,* 11 – 12.
[43] *The Female Line,* 136.
[44] Edmund Burke, *An Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful.* (London, Paris and Melbourne: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1981 [1757]), 144.
[45] Ibid, 142 – 143.

The Blackstaff Book of Short Stories (1988)

The three of Murphy's stories that are anthologised in *The Blackstaff Book of Short Stories* offer a critique of the conflict, particularly the human cost of the violence. Specifically, these stories are more firmly rooted within a critique of republicanism. The first, 'A Social Call' is narrated by a woman who is visiting her friend who had just returned home to Ballymurphy from hospital after having a baby: 'It was no wonder she looked pale. She signed herself out of hospital after only three days because her man said he couldn't cope'.[46] This tongue-in-cheek nature employs the 'playfulness' and 'subversion' which Ingman details as being characteristic of the form. As identified earlier in this chapter, the subaltern subversion within the short story form is key to approaching Murphy's work. The irony is that in previous stories by Murphy, such as 'Happy Birth Day', the female body feels like it will 'rip' and 'burst' during the birthing scene. Whereas within 'A Social Call' the man is unable to cope with the running of the household in the absence of his wife. The subaltern in both these stories are women who experience bodily pain, through birth and domestic violence respectively. From the point of the return from the hospital with the new-born baby, the story then centres around her nameless friend's relationship with her abusive husband. The bodily pain from childbirth becomes secondary to the inflicted domestic abuse.

The narrative develops from the narrator witnessing her friend being subjected to verbal abuse – 'You still sittin' on yer arse? Why don't you tidy this place up?'[47] – to physical abuse by the husband which leaves the new mother injured: 'Her nose is swollen looking. Big fat droplets of blood plopped from it. She cupped her hands round it'.[48] This gendered power dynamic is compounded by the fact that the new mother is under the financial control of the husband. She says, prior to the physical attack on her by her husband, that she's 'going upstairs to get my wages off Joe' and when she does so she catches him putting a gun he had stashed in the house into the

[46] Brenda Murphy, 'A Social Call' in *Blackstaff Book of Short Stories* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1988), 43.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid, 45.

waist-band of his trousers.[49] She confronts him on keeping the weapon in the house in the vicinity of children when he attacks her. The narrator runs to her friend's aid – 'you dirty bastard, leave her alone'[50] – and in response she is referred to as an 'interfering wee whore'.[51] Murphy presents this act of female solidarity in defiance of the male, presumably republican, paramilitary. Following this, the narrator walks home alone feeling 'sad and sickened' by the violence she had witnessed in her friend's home.[52] Ingman extends the work of Catherine B. Shannon when she argued that 'A Social Call' highlights that 'there was no safe domestic space' in nationalist Belfast.[53] Referring to domestic violence in the north of Ireland, Shannon wrote: **'**Oral material as well as official studies have shown that women in heavily-armed areas of the north were more vulnerable to sexual harassment, exploitation and domestic violence, owing to the easy availability of guns. Many were reluctant to seek police help for fear of retaliation for bring the police into the area, or because this might endanger a republican or indeed a loyalist activist whose political position they otherwise supported'.[54] Murphy's 'A Social Call' acts in response to this fear of retribution. Murphy's short story serves as a criticism of gendered violence within nationalist areas, which echoes Cathy Harkin's assessment of the situation as being akin to an 'armed patriarchy'.[55] Murphy utilises the theme of graphic violence against women to undermine hypermasculine paramilitary violence. There is an irony in the failure to conceal the weapon which is intended for national liberation. This is further compounded by the fact that it is used within the home to oppress a member of the nationalist community, the woman.

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[49] Ibid, 44.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid, 45.
[53] Ingman, *A History of the Irish Shorty Story,* 242.
[54] Catherine B. Shannon, "The Woman Writer as Historical Witness: Northern Ireland, 1968 – 1994. An Interdisciplinary Perspective," in *Women and Irish History,* ed. Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997), 249.
[55] Quoted in Lynda Egerton, "Public Protest, Domestic Acquiescence: Women in Northern Ireland," in: *Caught Up In Conflict: Women's Responses to Political Strife,* ed. Rosemary Ridd and Helen Callaway (London, Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1986), 79.

Further, Kathryn Conrad argued that the community itself, through the silencing and policing imposed by paramilitaries, can become a kind of prison cell for its inhabitants. Specifically, Conrad commented on the graffiti daubed on the walls of nationalist areas, which act as a public message board for intimidation, threat and humiliation: 'The walls are not liberatory; the language on them is even more palpably limiting than the walls on which they are written. And their power comes not only from their relationship to sectarian politics they voice but also from their anonymity and their power to make the private public'.[56] Murphy's fiction acts in the same way as Mary Beckett's Martha in *Give Them Stones* in mounting a one-woman rebellion against this silencing. The result of this is that both fictional accounts portray women in a state of isolation. Murphy's protagonist steps out into the public domain alone, at once vulnerable to the dark surroundings of the alleyways where the teenagers receive 'punishment' attacks for their perceived societal transgressions. For Murphy's protagonist to stand up in defiance of misogyny, within the assailant's own home, is an act of rebellion. In rejecting this gendered violence, the character sets herself out as a dissenter with the community and from the republican movement.

In the morning, the protagonist opens the *Irish News* newspaper and sees the front-page headline 'Punishment Shooting' which details an attack within Ballymurphy area the previous night. The paper reports that a so-called 'punishment' attack was carried out by three men on a sixteen-year-old boy. Murphy uses irony to highlight the implementation of violence against the teenager's 'anti-social behaviour' by the republican man who is a proponent of domestic abuse: 'Beneath [the headline] I read how a sixteen-year-old had been dragged from his home by three men. Two held him down while a third shot him in both knees. The incident happened in Ballymurphy. The local paramilitary group, who claimed they were responsible, said they shot the boy for repeated anti-social behaviour'.[57] Murphy criticises patriarchal violent republicanism and

[56] Kathryn Conrad, *Locked in the Family Cell: Gender, Sexuality & Political Agency in Irish National Discourse* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin, 2004), 134.
[57] *Blackstaff Book of Short Stories,* 46.

this stance on community policing. She is especially critical of the doublethink of the republican paramilitary's justification of community violence in a bid to protect the community. O'Connor wrote of the central characters of the short story as being members of a 'submerged population, unable to speak for themselves'.[58] The submerged population within Murphy's stories are those who condemn or critique the violence of republican paramilitaries. In an extension of the literary legacy of the 'submerged population' written through short stories, Murphy presents the 'submerged' group, the women particularly, as silenced for fear of so-called 'punishment' attacks within or beyond the home.

The theme of violent attacks and the effect it causes on women is extended through the story 'That Certain Smell' which is a surprisingly emotional short story about the value of love and life. It begins with the narrator cleaning the fire out in the living room and remembering an argument she and her husband had had the night before over 'farting in bed'.[59] In response the narrator 'had moved to the edge of her side of the bed and beaten the blankets down between them like a barricade'.[60] The following day her husband, Seamus, goes to work on the building site where he is murdered. He is targeted in his workplace as a Catholic. This type of attack was carried out by paramilitary gangs who targeted the civilian work forces as a method of intimidation and terror. There is a marked moment of intimacy when the wife in the story is taken to the hospital to identify his body: 'She pulled off the sheet completely. He was still in his working clothes, his boots and jeans dusty with cement. His eyes were closed. There was a small hole with a bruised and blackened circle round it on the side of his head. She put her hands into his hair and felt it stiff and hard in her fingers. You need it washed, love, she thought'.[61] This final line shows through an act of devotion a painful severed connection. Murphy's depiction of this moment of loss and the act of mourning is subtly moving. The death stands in stark opposition to the triviality of the

[58] O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice,* 26.
[59] Brenda Murphy, 'That Certain Smell' in *Blackstaff Book of Short Stories* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1988), 47.
[60] Ibid, 48.
[61] Ibid, 50.

previous evening. The crux of this story relies on the pain caused to civilians. This theme within an ex-I.R.A. member's semi-autobiographical work is significant as is alludes to a sense of regret.

In two instances Murphy's work explicitly alludes to its autobiographical nature; within *The Female Line's* 'A Curse', discussed earlier, which depicts the pains of menstruation while held in a cell, and also within the *Blackstaff* anthology story 'Human Waste'. Heather Ingman also noted this reflection of Murphy's life within her these two short fictions as being 'based on the author's experience of the 1978 dirty protest in Armagh Jail' and how these reflections 'challenge Catholic and republican attitudes to the female body'.[62] 'Human Waste' depicts the Armagh Gaol women prisoners' no wash protest in response to the denial of toilet facilities to the republican prisoners in 1980. The prison, built in the Victorian era, did not have washing or toilet facilities within the individual cells, so the denial of facilities cultivated an unhygienic environment. As the chamber pots filled, the women had to empty them within the cells:

> She [the prisoner] held her breath, reached in, and with the folded paper moulded to the shape of her hand, she removed the turd [from the chamber pot]. She gagged, her whole stomach making a sickening lurch trying to get up her throat. She swallowed and breathed deeply until the nausea passed… She started to spread the shit across, smearing it. She prayed the paper would not tear or that her fingers wouldn't go through it, for she knew if that happened she would vomit.[63]

The story can be read in two ways: first as an allusion to the physical human waste which was made visible on the walls of the prison cell which renegotiates the links between nationalist women and the body; secondly, as the act of a human life wasted in the prison cell. There is also an exploration of the theme of abjection which arose in the prison writing featured in earlier chapters. The above depiction sits in opposition to Margaretta D'Arcy's depiction of the dirty protest as a creative act within *Tell Them Everything.* Unlike D'Arcy, Murphy's writing of the protest alludes to a repulsion to the act involved in smearing faeces.

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[62] Heather Ingman, "The Short Story," in *A History of Modern Irish Women's Literature,* ed. Heather Ingman and Clíona Ó Gallchoir (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018), 289.
[63] Brenda Murphy, "Human Waste" in *Blackstaff Book of Short Stories* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1988), 52.

'Human Waste' also undermines the oft-used tropes of female solidarity in the women's prison. The central character, Billie, is sharing a prison cell with another republican prisoner, Lorraine. She feels in incongruency with her 'comrades' who are also politically protesting: 'Billie [a republican prisoner] liked some of the screws [prison guards], which was weird to her. She found some of them decent, likeable girls. Some of course were bastards, but then some of her fellow inmates, or 'comrades,' were bastards too'.[64] While Murphy's story serves as a disruption of the republican solidarity, it also unsettles the republican feminist solidarity too, which is discussed further in Chapter 10: Documentary Film. This challenges the feminist solidarity which is depicted within *In the Footsteps of Anne*. Instead, there are nuances within the republican feminism. The narrator's experience in 'Human Waste' largely reflects the isolating prison experience of the author. The setting of the single cell reduces the story to an individual level to oppose the totalising grand narratives of the conflict.

In conclusion, Brenda Murphy's short stories vary in their criticisms of either feminism or republicanism dependent on the anthology in which they are published. In *The Female Line,* Murphy offers an explicitly feminist criticism of her experiences in Armagh Gaol and within republicanism more broadly, while in *The Blackstaff Book of Short Stories,* her works are more pointedly critical of republicanism. These portrayals match the intended readerships (feminist and Irish interest focused respectively). These criticisms subtly unsettle the notion of totalising solidarity within grand narratives of both movements. This is a feature which is extended to Murphy's involvement in republican feminist documentary films of the conflict discussed in the next chapter.

[64] Ibid, 54.

Chapter 10: Documenting the Troubles: Film, Feminism, Nationalism in *A Kind of Sisterhood* (2015) and *Mother Ireland* (1988)

The inclusion of documentary works in this thesis reflects documentary's unique ability to visually capture events contemporaneously. So, while the films studied here were released after the 1986 period for this research, the footage draws directly upon experiences and memories of the era. With respect to *Mother Ireland,* the interview material within the documentary was filmed within the time period for this thesis, while *A Kind of Sisterhood* uses archival material and memories of the era to guide the film. Documentary theorist Harvey O'Brien wrote of the reflected relationship between Irish documentary films, or 'non-fiction film' as he termed it, and the nation and society: 'The raw material of the documentary film is not the illusory cinematic image, but the event it 'captures'. Documentaries are not presented as a constructed alternate reality, but as collected incidents of recorded actuality'.[1] This is an echo of the vérité style which is concerned with the act of truth telling through an ability to follow progression as it happens. The documentaries discussed here take this style and incorporate it with an act of remembrance. While both documentaries explore republican feminism, I argue that they operate in subtly different ways: *A Kind of Sisterhood* maps the history of republican feminist sisterhood forged through the prison experience while *Mother Ireland* is a republican feminist interrogation of the construction of this national symbol.

The films document the women's act of recollection of the events they experienced at Armagh Gaol up until its closure in 1986. This offers retrospection alongside contemporaneous truth-revealing vérité style documentary film. Within *A Kind of Sisterhood,* the camera follows the participants around the prison site, Armagh Gaol, recording their reactions as it happens while

[1] Harvey O'Brien, *The Real Ireland: The Evolution of Ireland in Documentary Film* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 9.

also eliciting the retrieval of memories. *A Kind of Sisterhood,* directed by Michele Devlin and Claire Hackett, uses archive material of video footage from inside Armagh Gaol during its years of operation as a political prison during the conflict (1969 – 1986) coupled with interview material of ex-prisoners recounting their experiences during a visit inside the gaol. The interview material, both set within and outside the prison site, contains geographical, psychological and temporal distance which allows for a re-evaluation of the roles, meanings and understandings of the era. This documentary style is also seen with the Prisons Memory Archive's *Unseen Women: Stories From Armagh*, though, *A Kind of Sisterhood* portrays the events through a strictly feminist lens, while the Prison Memory Archive documentary functions as a documentation of oral history.[2]

Director Anne Crilly's *Mother Ireland* also uses the intersection between republicanism and feminism as a framework for her exploratory interviews into the meaning of the nationalist symbol of Mother Ireland. The production company who created the documentary were Derry Film and Video Collective, of which Anne Crilly was a member, who also created texts in support of republican women. Republican women through feminist documentary film making are able to voice their experiences of the conflict. In this way, the making of documentaries makes a permanent testimonial record. There is also an element of feminist activism in these texts through their voicing of marginalised experiences. The construction of memories is pertinent to this thesis as the women are engaged in telling their testimonies in their own words; they are speaking *for* themselves. Considering these documentaries also brings the fictional work of Brenda Murphy, studied in the previous chapter, into sharp focus. It allows a comparison between the fictional and the reality.

[2] *Prisons Memory Archive: Unseen Women: Stories From Armagh.* Directed by Jolene Mairs. 2011.

Memory, History, Story-telling

In the introduction for 'Patterning the National Past', Hodgkin and Radstone invoke Abbas Vali's assertion that 'No ideology needs history so much as nationalism' and the argument for considering nationalism as not a 'discourse of origin' but rather 'a discourse of identity … constituted in a relationship of otherness'.[3] They argued of this relationship between constructed identity and the act of remembrance that: 'Memory, then, with its particular purchase on the construction of subjectivity, and its insistent bearing on the present, must equally be central in constituting the historical narrative of identity within which the nationalist subject is produced. In nationalist movements and in achieved nation states alike, the appeal to memory articulates the narrative of the nationalist past and enjoins its subject to recognise and own it'.[4] The question arises in relation to the north of Ireland: who is granted the ability to be the author of their own history? In the north, the patriarchal structures create barriers which obstructs anti-imperialist women conveying their narrative of the past. The autobiographical memory texts in the form of documentary films are a rejection of this hegemonic national past borne out of a totalising narrative of the conflict. David Lloyd in his monograph *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* argued that histories which unsettle a state-affirming narrative are treated as 'atavistic and unnecessary' and the act of story-telling can serve as a remedy to this.[5] He wrote:

> The notion and practice of 'telling', to the contrary, recognize the proliferating persistence of boundaries and interfaces are always and uncertainly charged with the potentiality of violence. Telling becomes the practice of interpretation that confronts every difference, every unfamiliar location over and again with suspicion and with a repertoire of popular epistemological marks… Telling itself it is cumulative rather than culminative – it is closely related etymologically to 'tally' and bears, indeed, a penumbra of fatal calculation. Telling is not a narrative operation, but rather the constant interrogation of juxtaposed spaces suspended in their unbridgeable differences.[6]

[3] Abbas Vali quoted in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, "Patterning the National Past" in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 169.
[4] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, "Patterning the National Past" in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 169.
[5] David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), 140.
[6] Ibid, 141.

Documentary films operate through this renegotiation and interrogation of experiences which are different to those of the viewer. The film, through its visuality, forces the audience to confront differences and reconcile them with their own lived experiences. The documentaries examined in this chapter express stories which are only available to a minority, and by this, I mean republican feminists. The amplification of these marginalised voices through *A Kind of Sisterhood* and *Mother Ireland* feeds into this 'cumulative rather than culminative' knowledge of the past.

It's worth beginning with the use of memory made visible with the documentary form as a kind of commemorative memory-text. The documentary form reveals a new way of looking at history and in this sense the republican feminist view has been allowed to develop most explicitly. Discussing the intersection between history and memory Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone argued:

> There may be agreement as to the course of events, but not over how the truth of those events may be most fully represented, or what should be the explanatory and narrative context that would make sense of a given episode. And if these arguments are partly historical, memory, in such debates, occupies a particular place. In all the debates over the relationship between memory and history, one constantly recurring theme is that although history is about the present, so too is memory, and much more directly. Memory is still live and active, still charged with the weight of these contests, and it is to memory that one should turn in order to reveal 'what really happened.[7]

Hodgkin and Radstone explore the autobiographical texts, in the forms of diaries, letters and other self-authored texts, as a kind of memory text in its unique ability of being about the past but of the present. The documentary films examined here are memory texts in their ability to be both retrospective and an examination of the present.[8] In relation to Basque nationalist women, Carrie Hamilton wrote that collective memory is configured of the private and public story-telling which come to constitute a communal narrative of their history and identity.[9] She argued: 'Collective memories, as expressed for instance in political speeches or popular literature on the history of

[7] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, "Patterning the National Past" in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 1 – 2.
[8] Ibid, 13.
[9] Carrie Hamilton, "Memories of Violence in Interviews with Basque Nationalist Women" in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 121.

E.T.A., are likely to be constituted as a series of coherent and chronological events'. However, there is value in the personal, unscripted recollections which, she argued: 'rarely respect chronological order, and are often characterized by rupture and pause, one set of memories sometimes collapsing into another'.[10] This style of testimony is seen, particularly, in the interviews conducted in Armagh Gaol in *A Kind of Sisterhood.*

The documentaries examined here typify these kinds of memories collapsing and converging. Both texts merge contemporary interview footage and archive film to challenge dominant narratives of the conflict. Linda Williams contends: 'For some form of truth is the always receding goal of documentary film. But the truth figured by documentary cannot be a simple unmasking or reflection. It is a careful construction, an intervention in the politics and semiotics of representation'.[11] The fusion of the past and the present footage of the conflict is used in precisely this way in the republican feminist documentaries. They offer a political intervention through the commentary of the events through the prism of hindsight.

A Kind of Sisterhood (2015)

The documentary film *A Kind of Sisterhood* focuses on the republican feminist experience in Armagh Gaol until its closure in 1986 and then Maghaberry prison from that date. The film, directed by Michele Devlin and Claire Hackett, was released and shown at Belfast Film Festival and The Irish Film Festival in London in 2015. Further screenings were seen in 2019 at WANDA: Belfast's Feminist Film Festival and also through the community organisation Leeds for Change in Leeds, England. The film interviews participants who were involved in the issues of gendered violence, incarceration and oppression which crystallised around the events in Armagh Gaol; these discussions around republican feminist issues were raised by participants which included Brenda

[10] Ibid, 122.
[11] Linda Williams, "Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary." *Film Quarterly* 46, No. 3 (1993): 20.

Murphy and Nell McCafferty. *A Kind of Sisterhood* operates by using historical archive material and testimony to illustrate the little discussed area of republican history. This differs from, for example, the Prisons Memory Archive documentary output in that it views this period of the conflict through a feminist lens, making a case for a republican feminism borne out of the time spent incarcerated within Armagh Gaol. Within the parlance of militant republicanism the concept of camaraderie between fellow members of the organisation is often emphasised. Those incarcerated remember a bond with their organisation members which had been forged through adversity. Within *A Kind of Sisterhood* there is a shift in this linguistic marker of loyalty to the republican cause towards feminism. This is reflective of the change of language from republican to a fusion with feminism which is written about in Chapters 4 and 5.

Republican hunger striker Mary Doyle (imprisoned between 1974–76, 1977–83) is interviewed for the documentary.[12] Doyle sits in a chair in Armagh Gaol answering questions asked by an interviewer to provoke her memory of the era. This material is punctuated with news clippings of her time spent on the hunger strike in 1980. Doyle speaks of not originating from a staunch republican family; her mother came to Belfast from a rural village in Wicklow and, she says, was unaware of the extent of sectarian divides when they first arrived in the city. In a memory of her first experience of sectarianism, she describes her mother being refused employment based solely on her accent from the Republic of Ireland. Doyle identifies that it was seeing this social injustice for Catholic workers, internment and Bloody Sunday which turned her to militant republicanism: 'When you looked about ye and seeing how Catholics were being treated as second class citizens, and then obviously you had internment and then Bloody Sunday. Don't talk about it, do something about it'.[13] This need for action in response to witnessing the violence and

[12] Mary Doyle (now Clarke) is still involved within republicanism through her work as a Sinn Féin councillor for West Belfast.; Mary Doyle convicted in 1974 of: attempted murder: causing an explosion: belonging to a proscribed organisation. PRONI Ref: BELF/1/1/2/258/78; Convicted 1978: Possession of explosive substances with intent. Possession of explosive substances. Conspiracy to commit arson. Possession of prohibited articles. Placing prohibited articles (2 counts). Belonging to a proscribed organisation. PRONI Ref: BELF/1/1/2/280/27

[13] *A Kind of Sisterhood.* Directed by: Michele Devlin and Claire Hackett, (Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2015), 4:10 – 4:26.

oppression meted out against the nationalist community is a frequent response for the republican prisoners. This is echoed by ex-prisoner Sinead Moore (1977–85)[14] who recalls that it was upon seeing how Catholics were treated on her native Falls Road which encouraged her to join the I.R.A.: 'You were just reacting to things that were happening around you… There was just a sense of I need to do something about this'.[15] For both these women the initial pursuit of republican notions of national 'freedom' led them to imprisonment in Armagh. Although, this takes on a republican feminist paradigm within the prison for Mary Doyle as she remarks: 'Men didn't want women on hunger strike'.[16] The women are marginalised directly due to their gender when they decide to mobilise in a form of bodily protest.

This nostalgic memory, and indeed the objective of the documentary, marks out a shift from loyalty to republican comradery to a feminist republican solidarity. Liz Maskey (nee McKee) (the first woman to be interned in Armagh Gaol in 1973 - 1974) during her interview remembers the bond formed in prison with the other republican women:

> Quite a lot of the women were very young women, they were teenagers really. There were a few older women with longer life experiences which perhaps none of us had. There was a sisterhood there. Perhaps we didn't even realise it was a sisterhood, it grew into a sisterhood. Perhaps even we didn't realise until later on in life when we left the prison that that sisterhood was there and that the friendships that were made there are bonded and are life-long friendships.[17]

This retrospective view allows a re-evaluation of the camaraderie often espoused by republicans that they felt during their prison time and shifts it towards a feminist comradeship, which amplifies the separation from the masculine republican movement. Carrie Hamilton wrote of Basque nationalist women's memories of the conflict: 'Women's nostalgia for their days of activism, which stresses female friendship and solidarity, is therefore an alternative memory to that of the male

[14] Sinead Moore convicted in 1977 for conspiracy to murder: possession of firearms and ammunition with intent: carrying firearms in a public place: possession of firearms: hi-jacking: belonging to a proscribed organisation. PRONI Ref: BELF/1/1/2/274/33
[15] *A Kind of Sisterhood.* Directed by: Michele Devlin and Claire Hackett, (Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2015), 4:37 – 4:57.
[16] Ibid, 1:30 – 1:35.
[17] Ibid, 1:07:22 – 1:07:50.

warrior'.[18] This is a theme which runs through a number of the texts in this thesis, not least from the feminist periodical produced by Women Against Imperialism. It is through voicing and writing of these experiences of female solidarity that an opposition to male-heroics based narratives can be rejected.

In *A Kind Of Sisterhood,* Brenda Murphy participates in a moving interview within Armagh Gaol in which she remembers going into labour in the prison and the aftermath of bringing her baby back to the jail. Women Against Imperialism detailed that two women, Brenda Murphy (more information on Brenda Murphy's literature can be found in Chapter 9) and Jean Hamill, gave birth while on the republican protest in Armagh Gaol.[19] Murphy gave birth to a daughter in March 1978 and Hamill gave birth in January 1979. The women both sent their babies home within six and two weeks, respectively, due to their continuation of protesting for political status. Due to this, both experienced distress at the separation from their babies so soon after birth. It is important to note that if the women were not protesting for political status, they would have had the right to keep their children with them for six months after birth. The political prisoners were stripped of various rights, for example to receive parcels and visits, though the removal of the right to keep a new born child with the mother is distinctly inhumane. This further punishment of the women is one that Murphy reported as being particularly hard to reconcile, that of her maternal instinct versus her political commitments. This experience of pregnancy and birth within the prison setting is a marginalised part of the history of the conflict. Brenda Murphy while interviewed standing outside Armagh Gaol for *A Kind of Sisterhood* portrayed the pain she experiences in recalling the memories of this time of her life:

> There were screws standing here and I had to sign a chit, a form to say, you know when you send goods out when you made something for your family in here in handicrafts you signed for it. One harp or whatever it was. One child female fair hair blue eyes 7 lbs 5, and I had to sign that. And they handed the child out to my mummy here because I was going out into the wing. The baby was out and I was back on the wing. They wanted the handover to happen here and not up in the wing. I had to sign her out and my mummy took the chit [BM is visibly upset at this point]. And I stood here watching her

[18] Hamilton, "Memories of Violence," 127.
[19] Women Against Imperialism, 20. British Library, London, England.

> walking out. Fuck. Sorry. [Pause. Visibly shaken and unsettled by the retelling of this memory]. [Crying] So I just watched my Mummy carry my fucking child out that door.[20]

Murphy makes vocal the experience of bodily and psychological trauma; giving birth while incarcerated and also the mental anguish she felt in signing her new born baby out of prison as if she was a piece of property being exported out. This experience had a lasting effect on Murphy, who in an interview in 2015 with *Belfast Live* made clear that this topic was now out of bounds for discussion. Interviewer Jilly Beattie wrote of this: 'Jail time has left a scar on her and her eldest daughter, a scar that is still tender to the touch. So she leaves it alone and asks me to do the same'.[21] Murphy's painful recollection in *A Kind of Sisterhood* takes on extreme importance due to this. It is a testament to the trauma felt and experienced. Hodgkin and Radstone wrote of the importance of speaking these experiences into existence within a historical narrative:

> The individual who speaks of the suffering s/he has experienced is the iconic figure, and the moment of disclosure, in which the unspeakable tries to find representation in speech, is the central and shattering instance. The relation between silence and speech is figured as one of liberation, both politically and personally: to reveal truths which have been denied and to remind the world of its responsibilities to those who have suffered, on the one hand; to heal the self by the very act of speaking and being heard, on the other. The injunction to remember, and the corresponding language of forgetting and denial, are directed equally at individuals and at groups.[22]

It is within Murphy's attempt to convey the memories that are difficult to commit to language that the pauses and silences become loaded with meaning. Her act of speaking of the traumatic event is exactly a 'disclosure in which the unspeakable tries to find representation is speech'.[23] The event becomes a topic which Murphy does not publicly speak about. She has been heard, through her testimony in *A Kind of Sisterhood,* and so has fulfilled the role of acknowledging the suffering caused by this gendered form of colonial imprisonment.

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[20] *A Kind of Sisterhood.* Directed by: Michele Devlin and Claire Hackett, (Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2015), 22:33 – 23:22.
[21] Jilly Beattie, "Brenda Murphy: Convicted I.R.A. gun runner's latest play hits the stage in Belfast," *BelfastLive.* March 2, 2015. Accessed on: January 20, 2020 https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/brenda-murphy-convicted-I.R.A.-gun-8755031
[22] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, "Remembering Suffering: Trauma and History," in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 99.
[23] Ibid.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak invokes Pierre Macherey's reading of ideology in her argument on the silenced subaltern: 'What is important in a work is what it does not say… a method might be built on it, with the task of measuring silences, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. But rather this, what the work *cannot* say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to silence'.[24] Spivak furthers this argument that a refusal to speak within literary texts is a false application, but rather 'something like a collective ideological *refusal* can be diagnosed for the codifying legal practice of imperialism'.[25] While the voicing of experiences of the conflict are important, Luisa Passeroni argued that there is just as much importance to listen to the silences within these narratives: 'One can think of photographs, portraits, letters. Or of the custom of keeping a minute of silence in order to commemorate somebody who has died. Or of silences in a psychoanalytic session. All these are examples of silences which are connected with remembering, not with forgetting. Finally, silence is essential in order to remind us that memory is not only word, it is the 'embodied memory' enlivened by intersubjectivity'.[26] Memory is more than words, so it is useful to think of the documentary material as a site invigorating the embodied memory of the time spent in prison. The pauses and silences within *A Kind of Sisterhood* amplify the embodied memories of the interviewees. Passeroni argued: 'Taking silence into account means watching out for the links between forms of power and forms of silence. It means, finally, looking more deeply in those aspects of memory which have to do with oblivion'.[27] It is in these forms of oblivion, or silencing, that Murphy's testimony portrays which bring her autobiographical short stories into sharp focus. It is evident that verbalising, that is making the event sayable, is an emotionally difficult task, though writing offers another medium for testimony.

[24] Pierre Macherey quoted in Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 81 – 82.
[25] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 82. Emphasis in original.
[26] Luisa Passeroni, "Memories between Silence and Oblivion" in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, (ed.) by Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 248.
[27] Ibid, 249.

Derry Film and Video Collective, Strip Searching and Mother Ireland (1988).

While *A Kind of Sisterhood* received a welcome reception as it was lauded for 'highlight[ing] their courage and resistance using their own voices,' its republican feminist predecessor, directed by Anne Crilly and Margot Harkin, *Mother Ireland* in 1988 had turbulent beginnings.[28] The production company Derry Film & Video Collective was comprised of Anne Crilly, Jim Curran, Stephanie English, Margo Harkin, Tomas MacCoileain, Geraldine McGuiness, and Brendan McMenamin.[29] The group applied for funding from Channel Four for the production of *Mother Ireland*. Later in 1989, the group would also continue on to produce the feminist film *Hush-a-Bye-Baby.*[30] In each of these instances, the Derry Film & Video Collective were deeply invested in activism to change the material lives of republican women.

Prior to *Mother Ireland,* the collective produced an activist film, *Strip Searching: Security or Subjugation* (1984)*,* in support of the women being subjected to strip-searching in Armagh Gaol. For this, the group carried out interviews with members of the public, ex-prisoners and academics to raise awareness of the gendered violence within the prison. The group's significance is seen through their invitation to the European Parliament in Strasbourg in June 1986 to screen the film for M.E.Ps. During which the group held four screenings across four days, including one screening exclusively for British Conservatives.[31]

Following this, the collective went on to produce *Mother Ireland* in conjunction with Channel 4. The film explores the relationship between the nationalist image of Mother Ireland and nationalist women's views of the symbolism. Belinda Loftus wrote of how *Mother Ireland* became embroiled within the censorship debate surrounding the illegality of airing republican representatives under the new clauses in the Broadcasting Act imposed on British media

[28] Peadar Whelan, "Armagh women's prison struggle told in inspiring film," *An Phoblacht*. March 6, 2016. Accessed on: July 22, 2019 https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/25797
[29] "Mother Ireland," *Northern Ireland Screen: Digital Film Archive.* Accessed on: March 20, 2020. https://digitalfilmarchive.net/media/mother-ireland-331
[30] Ibid.
[31] Derry Film and Video Collective, Linenhall Library Belfast, Northern Ireland.

companies in 1988. The filming of the *Mother Ireland* project began in 1983 and following this British broadcaster Channel Four committed to funding the project in 1985 with final edit of the television documentary programme concluded in London in the early months of 1988. As part of the documentary, Mairead Farrell is interviewed. Loftus wrote that it was only when Farrell was murdered by British SAS soldiers in Gibraltar on 6th March 1988 that Channel Four became aware of her status as an I.R.A. member. Of this period, Loftus wrote: 'Channel Four felt that she should be removed and replaced with someone of the same age and stance, a proposal which Derry Film & Video Collective were prepared to consider'.[32] Channel Four were supposedly radical in funding this documentary on interrogating nationalist iconography, yet, here they are seen to be actively promoting the silencing of republican women. It is ironic that this is the response of the funders of a documentary which challenges the silencing of republican women. However, the broadcasting corporation then subsequently requested the removal of various other footage material deemed not to comply with the law, including: clips of a woman who was blinded by a rubber bullet; sound clips of a Christy Moore song; images from the *Anne Devlin* (1984) film; and a poster of a masked female volunteer.[33] The media silencing of republican women is a double blow due to their subaltern status within the north of Ireland as both republican within an anti-republican state and also a woman within a patriarchal organisation. This is a silencing which works two-fold to silence the political opinion of the women and also works as an extra layer of silence due to their lack of representation and recognition within the republican movement more broadly, which is explored in Chapter One. This exclusion was resisted by the Derry Video & Film Collective production team. The film was finally broadcast by Channel 4, with the Farrell interview included, on April 11, 1991.[34]

[32] Belinda Loftus, "Mother Ireland, Anne Crilly Derry Film & Video, 2 November 1988." *Circa*, no. 44 (1989): 33.
[33] Ibid.
[34] "Mother Ireland," *Northern Ireland Screen: Digital Film Archive*. Accessed on: March 20, 2020. https://digitalfilmarchive.net/media/mother-ireland-331

Anne Crilly and Margot Harkin's *Mother Ireland* poses the question of how the interviewees respond to the image of the nationalist maternal symbol calling her sons to arms to protect her and Ireland. Mairead Farrell noted that the image had little effect on her joining the I.R.A.: 'This mother image where her sons have to go out and defend her because she has been defiled. It isn't an image that I can relate to at all. I don't think it represents today to me. It wouldn't make me want to go out, in fact it would have the opposite effect'.[35] In this Farrell explicitly rejected the Mother Ireland image. The image Farrell describes is one which implies inaction and passivity for women, and further one which defers to male activism against imperialism. The meanings of Mother Ireland as a symbol are in direct opposition to the active role women took in the conflict. Within *A Kind of Sisterhood,* Monsignor Raymond Murray detailed that there are, in his estimation, two groupings of female prisoners within Armagh which are roughly organised by generation: 'You could nearly divide the prisoners in two periods when those first prisoners when all that [political status] ended, and then you had a next group of prisoners coming in later on in the later seventies. And, of course Eileen [Hickey] was gone by that stage, and then it was Mairead Farrell who was the one in charge'.[36] Critic Belinda Loftus criticised the generational shift that Monsignor Murray suggests:

> I suspect that too neat a distinction is indicated between the warm feeling for a nurturing mother-image held by older republican women who are themselves mothers, like Rita O'Hare and Bernadette Devlin, and the 'Mother Ireland, get off our back' attitude of younger *childless* republicans like Mairead Farrell and those imprisoned with her in Armagh Gaol. Evidence in written accounts of life in the gaol suggests that both the Virgin and Celtic goddesses provided inspiration and support to some of the women prisoners there.[37]

Monsignor Murray attributes this alignment of a generational shift due to the removal of political status for prisoners who entered the prison after 1st March 1976.[38] Loftus argued that due to the religious iconography within the prison, Murray's claim regarding the younger prisoners' rejection

[35] *Mother Ireland.* Directed by Anne Crilly and Margot Harkin. (Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland, 1998), 2:26 – 2:41.
[36] *A Kind of Sisterhood.* Directed by: Michele Devlin and Claire Hackett, (Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2015), 11:42 – 12:01.
[37] Loftus, "Mother Ireland," 33
[38] 'Special Category Status' *CAIN.* Accessed: July 20, 2019. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/glossary.htm#S

of Mother Ireland as a symbol is false. However, Father Murray's generational shift which he notes occurred after the removal of Special Category Status also coincides with the genesis of the republican feminist movement's periodical output from 1975. The periodicals (discussed in Chapter Four and Five) contain correspondence and testimonies from the Armagh prisoners, so, this would have brought about the inception of feminist thought within the prison.

With this in mind and the time passed since the events of the conflict, the art of documentary memory-texts takes on an urgency to ensure a counter-narrative. The documentary form acts as a commemorative memory-text, and the silences within the testimonies contained within them unsettle the totalising grand narratives. Both republican feminist documentaries studied here, *Mother Ireland* and *A Kind of Sisterhood*, ensure that these women's experiences form a part of the larger historical narrative of the conflict.

Conclusion

The texts studied in this thesis work in concert to create a body of anti-imperial feminist writing which unsettles and disrupts stereotypical notions of feminine nationalist images such as 'Mother Ireland'. That is to say, passive conduits for the communication of national history. The pursuit of social revolution sought to endow republican feminist women, and their stories, with autonomy, politically, economically and culturally. The period examined in this thesis, 1975 to 1986, saw the increase of politically motivated protest both within and beyond Armagh Gaol. Particularly, the dirty protest, and the use of menstrual blood in this, caused frictions between the feminist and republican movements. In section one of this thesis, I explored the historical narratives of the conflict and examined representations through testimonial writings of the women incarcerated in Armagh Gaol; both as autobiographical texts and as proxy journalism for jail writing. Due to this, republican feminist groupings developed in the interstices of the two movements. These niche groupings (Socialist Women's Group, Belfast Women's Collective, Women Against Imperialism) published periodicals which responded to the prison conditions. Section two interrogated the multitude of ways the feminist groupings responded to the gendered violence in Armagh Gaol. The final section examined anti-imperial feminist writing which sought to dismantle patriarchal stereotypes of nationalist women. Each of these forms took self-determination and autonomy, economically, politically, and culturally, as their core objective. In this way, the tradition of republican feminism(s) was multivalent and expansive.

The pertinence of the study of republican feminism's representation in 2020 is best expressed through Hodgkin and Radstone's assertion about contested pasts:

> The idea of contest in the literal sense is apparently a straightforward one: it evokes a struggle in the terrain of truth. If what is disputed is the course of events— what really happened— new answers, particularly by groups whose knowledge has previously been discounted, may challenge dominant or privileged narratives. But to contest the past is also, of course, to pose questions about the present, and what the past means in the present. Our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical

> consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward.[1]

Each of the texts studied within this PhD thesis amplifies republican feminist narratives by disrupting and resisting the oblivion to which their narratives have been condemned by the dominant patriarchy.

This thesis is important in the current era as it urges a reassessment of what republicanism/feminism means in the current climate. The recent Sinn Féin election materials in December 2019 which called for women's equality is pertinent given the 2018 Repeal the Eighth campaign for reproductive justice in the Republic of Ireland. The party had a confusing message with regards to the abortion rights referendum, one in which they refused to use the word 'abortion'.[2] For Sinn Féin, their stance on bodily autonomy has recently changed from a 'pro-life' stance to that of women's rights to bodily autonomy. The death of Savita Halappanavar, who died in 2012 in hospital after her abortion request was refused, caused national outrage and the beginning of the movement for the Repeal the Eighth campaign. Following this, Health spokesperson for Sinn Féin Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin TD said: **'**The policy as reaffirmed by our 2008 Ard Fheis states that Sinn Féin is not in favour of abortion nor do we believe that the 1967 British Abortion Act should be extended to the Six Counties.'[3] This stance towards reproductive rights in the north of Ireland then changed in 2018 following the successful grassroots activism and referendum in the Republic.[4] Another grassroots campaign, led by activists, calls for the inclusion of the north in this wave of digital feminist activism through the Twitter hashtag #TheNorthIsNext. A sign with this slogan was co-opted by Sinn Féin President Mary-Lou

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[1] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone. "Introduction: Contested Pasts." In *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (New York, New York and Abingdon, Oxfordshire, Routledge, 2003), 1.

[2] Kevin Doyle, "Sinn Féin wants to Repeal the Eighth but refuses saying 'abortion," *Independent.ie.* April 20, 2018. Accessed on: April 5, 2020. https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/abortion-referendum/sinn-fein-wants-to-repeal-the-eighth-but-avoids-saying-abortion-36825406.html

[3] "Ó Caoláin appeals for compassion and understanding in debate on Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill," *Sinn Féin,* June 20, 2013. Accessed on: April 5, 2020. https://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/26973

[4] "Historic Sinn Féin Ard Fheis to take place this weekend – Pearse Doherty TD," *Sinn Féin,* June 13, 2018. Accessed on: April 5, 2020. https://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/49764

McDonald and Vice-President and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland Michelle O'Neill at the Dublin Castle celebrations in May of 2018. Following the success of the grassroots movement in the Republic of Ireland, Sinn Féin in June 2018 voted for women to have access to abortion services within limited circumstances, such as fatal foetal abnormalities. This differs from both the legalisation passed in the Republic as a result of the Repeal referendum and also the 1967 Abortion Act in Great Britain.[5] Due to the outbreak of coronavirus in 2020, abortion up to 12 weeks has been brought into Northern Ireland to prevent the necessary travel between Northern Ireland and England for the procedure.[6]

Figure 11: Protest at Saoradh Building, Derry. *Derry Daily*, April 22, 2019.

[5] Ella Willis, "Sinn Féin members vote to liberalise abortion laws in Northern Ireland," *Evening Standard*. Last modified on: June 16, 2018. Accessed on: April 20, 2020. https://www.standard.co.uk/news/health/sinn-fein-members-vote-to-liberalise-abortion-laws-in-northern-ireland-a3864741.html

[6] "Regulations Published for Northern Ireland Abortion Provision amidst COVID-19," *Alliance for Choice*, Last modified on: March 25, 2020. Accessed on: April 5, 2020. www.alliance4choice.com/news

The intersection between resistance and republicanism in 2019 came in opposition to the dissident republican groupings, specifically the paramilitary group the New I.R.A. and their political counterpart Saoradh. The New I.R.A., which formed in 2012, claimed responsibility for the murder of journalist Lyra McKee in the Creggan estate in Derry in April 2019. Saoradh, the political party with links to the New I.R.A. responded that the intended targets of this attack were the police who were responding to rioting in the area; in effect laying the blame directly at the feet of the PSNI.[7] This response to the journalist's death was met with protests across the north. This is of interest to the conclusion to this thesis as a protest was subsequently held by McKee's friends and family, all women, in Derry city centre. The women dipped their hands in red paint and placed red hand prints over the Saoradh headquarters (see Figure 11). This imagery challenges the republican group and accuses them of having blood on their hands over the death of the journalist. A group of men from within the Saoradh building emerged to stand, with their arms folded defensively across their chests, to watch the women. The optics of this are striking as the republican men stand in an attempt to intimidate the protesting women, however, the women were not deterred. This public resistance, orchestrated primarily by women, challenged republican violence. Like the anti-imperial feminist literature in Section 3, these women advocate not only on behalf of their late friend but also for the cessation of insurgent violence. Further study, which is beyond the scope of this PhD, is needed to explore the intersections of queer activism and republicanism in the north of Ireland. This would open a new paradigm of the meaning of protest narratives in the north, particularly given Sinn Féin's involvement in flying a rainbow flag for the first time at Belfast's City Hall during the LGBTQ+ march for the annual Pride protests across

[7] Connla Young, 'New I.R.A. admits murder of journalist Lyra McKee and offers 'sincere apologies" *The Irish News*. April 23, 2019. Accessed on: April 5. 2020.
http://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2019/04/23/news/dissident-republican-new-ira-group-admit-murder-of-journalist-lyra-mckee-and-offer-sincere-apologies--1603611/

the north in August 2019.[8] A new paradigm of republicanism and the meanings of 'freedom' and 'liberation' can be explored.

Following the death of McKee, an effort was made to stem dissident republicanism within Maghaberry Prison. Marissa McGlinchey's academic text *Unfinished Business* was banned from Northern Ireland prisons in the wake of the McKee tragedy.[9] This echoes the censorship of republicanism which was seen through the Broadcasting Act in the 1980s. Whilst the actions of the New I.R.A. are reprehensible, the act of silencing academic material which serves to enlighten readers about their views is troubling since silencing serves only to hide the grievances and tensions as well as providing propaganda for the group.

This theme of the friction between silence and authority over their own story also stems from the writings of male republicans. This is evident in Patrick Magee's *Gangsters or Guerillas? Representations of Irish Republicanism in 'Troubles Fiction'*. Magee, himself an ex-I.R.A. prisoner, located as a central concern the chasm between 'misrepresentation and reality'. In his own words:

> The outstanding lesson from a study of Irish resistance to British rule is that the struggle was most effective when a broad mass of people had a role and voice… However, it has always been the imperative of the powerful to exclude, marginalise, ridicule and silence the voices of those classes which it would subjugate.[10]

Magee argued that republicans have been silenced for their political beliefs and while this is true and evident through the use of media broadcasting bans, a further level of imposed silencing is imposed on the women within this strand of Irish nationalism. The importance of authorship and authority to tell personal history is the crux of the issue that Magee, and other republicans have. This is seen in the response by Danny Morrison, former publicity officer for the Provisionals, to

[8] Shauna Corr, 'Mayor up at 'break of dawn' to hoist Pride flag above Belfast for first time' *Belfast Live.* August 3, 2019. Accessed on: May 6, 2020. https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/belfast-mayor-up-break-dawn-16692650

[9] Connla Young, 'Author of academic book featuring views of hardline republicans surprised at 'ban" *The Irish News.* May 1, 2019. Accessed on: May 6, 2020. https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2019/05/01/news/author-of-academic-book-featuring-views-of-hardline-republicans-surprised-at-prison-ban--1609823/

[10] Patrick Magee, *Gangsters or Guerrillas? Representations of Irish Republications in 'Troubles Fiction'* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2001), 10.

Anna Burns's novel *No Bones*.[11] Although Anna Burns's *No Bones* is outside the parameters of this thesis, it is worth noting that Morrison took issue with the novel for its 'unrealistic' representation of the nationalist area. Morrison criticised Burns for 'really push[ing] the body count' in her depiction of gendered violence, drug addiction, paramilitary-attack related murders, and male suicide.[12] Burns, who has lived experience of growing up in the Ardoyne area of Belfast, has her fictional representation of her home measured against a masculinised empiricism.

Moreover, major publishing houses, particularly Faber, have renewed interest in Northern Irish fiction which focuses around republicanism.[13] Anna Burns's third novel *Milkman* was met with critical success, not least in her winning of the Man Booker 2018 prize.[14] Also, David Keenan's *For The Good Times* garnered significant critical attention.[15] While the latter plays on misogynistic tropes of hypermasculine war time heroics within paramilitary republicanism, the fact of its publication shows a renewed interest in the 'Troubles' conflict within contemporary fiction. Burns's *Milkman* is a contemporary revisiting of the gendered violence experienced by nationalist women, from street harassment to self-policing within a surveillance society. The panoptical nature of the latter alongside the hierarchy of what is considered a violent act, that is to say, gendered sexual harassment is deemed unproveable. *Milkman* is a continuation of the tradition of republican feminism which I have outlined within this thesis.

There is also a renewed interested in the conflict through the global media streaming website Netflix which has had an active interest in documentary material of the 'Troubles', particularly *Bobby Sands: 66 Days, I, Dolours,* and *The Miami Showband Massacre*.[16] This is in addition

[11] Anna Burns, *No Bones* (London: Harper Collins, 2002).
[12] Danny Morrison, "No Bones by Anna Burns," Accessed on: August 18, 2019. https://www.dannymorrison.com/wp-content/dannymorrisonarchive/255.htm.
[13] Likewise, the publication of unionist focused fiction has also seen success with major publishing houses Picador and Doubleday Books with the publication of Wendy Erskine's short story collection *Sweet Home* (2018) and Jan Carson's *The Fire-Starters* (2019).
[14] Anna Burns, *Milkman* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018).
[15] David Keenan, *For the Good Times* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019).
[16] *Bobby Sands: 66 Days*. Directed by Brendan J. Byrne, 2016.; *I, Dolours*. Directed by Maurice Sweeney, 2018.; *The Miami Showband Massacre*. Directed by Stuart Sender, 2019.

to the reports of the development of a *Making a Murder* style docu-series based on Patrick Radden Keefe's *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland,* an award-winning non-fiction account of the disappearance of Jean McConville.[17] This shows that the interest exists beyond the parameters of Ireland to assess the meanings of violent republicanism in the modern world.

It is in light of these developments and continual reassessment of the intersections between both feminism and republicanism that this thesis intervenes. The texts studied in this PhD, from jail-writing to documentary memory-texts, are cultural interventions which act as a remedy to dominant patriarchal narratives which silence women. As I have explored, republicanism is concerned with ideas of revolution, power, and political disruption. I have shown that this is achieved through the republican feminist objective of self-determination. As such, this examination of nationalism and gender offers a new way of viewing republican history. Through considering a multiplicity of feminist republican experiences, I contend that there is a paradigm shift in understanding of the history of the conflict.

[17] "Family of Jean McConville 'upset and disgusted' at TV series of mother's murder," *Journal.ie,* Accessed on: January 5, 2020. https://www.thejournal.ie/jean-mcconville-tv-mini-series-4533409-Mar2019/ ; "New TV show to document one of the most infamous murders during The Troubles," *joe.ie.* Accessed on: January 5, 2020. https://www.joe.ie/movies-tv/documentary-series-made-661447.; Patrick Radden Keefe, *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland* (London: Doubleday, 2019).

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