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Gender Trouble In Northern Ireland: An Examination Of Gender And Bodies Within The 1970s And 1980s Provisional Irish Republican Army In Northern Ireland

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Gender Trouble In Northern Ireland: An Examination Of Gender And Bodies Within The
1970s And 1980s Provisional Irish Republican Army In Northern Ireland

by

Jennifer Earles

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Women's Studies
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Dedication

To the women of the Provisional Irish Republican Army; may their silence be shattered.

Tiocfaidh r 1!

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Thank you to my wonderful committee, whose unparalleled knowledge, encouragement, and feminist perseverance has inspired not only this thesis, but my commitment to feminism and continued education.

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ABSTRACT

With this thesis, I will utilize both feminist and queer theory to highlight the gendered and bodily tactics used by the women of the 1970s/1980s Provisional Irish Republican Army. I will explore how women can both manipulate gender and use their bodies as a response to gender, ethnic, class, and colonial power relations and conflict discourses, the limitations of these approaches, and how these actions can work to reconfigure political movements, local cultures, and create a space for social change and a future beyond conflict which includes women. My methods will include a feminist content analysis of interviews, written records, narrative/visual texts, material culture, and social interactions. These narratives will relate to the Irish Troubles, violence, nationalism, colonialism, militarization, and subjectivity, with a focus on gender.

Following a theoretical approach, I first will provide an historical perspective on the Irish Troubles. I then will discuss those women who joined the ranks of the Provisionals, the discourses surrounding their political action, as well as their manipulation of gender constructions. I also will provide the reader with an historical examination of feminine national images such as Mother-Ireland to which many women found themselves accountable. I also will examine the effects of surveillance and gendered punishment on Republican women, particularly when imprisoned and under the guard of British men and women, as well as the agency asserted by these Republican women. Lastly, I discuss the ways in which constructions of conflict and peace become inscribed with notions of gender, as well as value of Republican women's lives and actions in the development of viable feminist theories, practices, and movements.

Chapter One

Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, and Thesis Outline

Historical narratives which give voices to those who took up arms in the name of a united Ireland often ring with a masculine tone and typically reflect only those male-dominated politics and causes which patriarchy deems significant. While a few contemporary feminist scholars have sounded the struggles of those Republican women who actively served as volunteers in the Northern Irish conflict, much of these women's political practices have passed virtually unnoticed or been considered inconsequential next to those of their male comrades. However, when feminist scholars make women's stories visible, they help to expose the multiple ways in which constructions of femininity and masculinity are sculpted by the intersections of historical location, situation, culture, ethnicity, class, and in the particular case of Irish women, colonialism.

By examining the actions of the women who served in the 1970s and 1980s Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)¹ we are enlightened about the engendered yet often invisible gears of war, politics and, in particular, Irish Republicanism. Because the women of the PIRA deviated from their socially dictated path toward motherhood and instead perpetuated the masculine violence often associated with guerrilla warfare, feminist scholars also uncover the ways in which gender becomes both an unstable form of identity and disassociated from its perceived sex category. Through their manipulation of gender and the reclamation of their bodies as political weapons, activist women also reveal how war and social turmoil can invert gender hierarchies, magnify feminine/masculine dichotomies, and for some Republican women, create a newly defined femininity inspired by the powerful female warriors of a pre-colonist past. In effect, feminists can use the discourses available to these women to both deconstruct and

¹ The Provisional Irish Republican Army also is referred to as the Provisionals, Provos, and by some of its supporters as the Army or the 'RA; through public announcements and internal conversations, the PIRA also references itself as the Óglaigh na hÉireann (The Irish Volunteers), signifying the importance of asserting the Irish language in the struggle to obtain a separatist and united Ireland (Mulholland, 2003; Devlin, 1969; McGuire, 1973).

rebuild the discourses which confine us; through this, feminist researchers and social activists also uncover spaces for theorizing and healing which lead to both the empowerment and the transformation of lives. In consideration of this particular historical location, I urge feminists to consider these women's use of violence and refusal to assimilate as an attempt to reclaim their bodies, to reconstruct prevailing discourses, and to forcefully create a space in which their voices are heard. While violence can be unsystematic, it also can be organized and signifies the idea of society as an "incomplete project" (Feldman, 1991) or that which is socially constructed and therefore capable of change. I contend that feminism must deconstruct the way we define violence and to consider the violence which also accompanies enforced silence. Through these women's participation in political conflict and war and through the sounding of their experiences, silence explodes. It must be said, however, that my attempt is not to speak for the women involved in the conflict, nor is it my wish to valorize the Republican women's position or actions, but rather to act as a sounding-board and to unmask hope for future generations of Northern Irish women. With this research, I plan to utilize both feminist and queer theory in order to highlight the gendered and bodily tactics used by the women of the 1970s and 1980s PIRA in Northern Ireland to explore the ways in which political conflict works to construct gendered discourse and shape women's bodies. I also will investigate the ways in which women can both manipulate gender and use their bodies as a powerful response to these gender, ethnic, class, and colonial power relations and discourses of conflict, the limitations of these approaches, and how these actions can work to reconfigure political movements, local cultures, and create a space for social change and a reconstructed future beyond conflict in which women are included.

Literature Review

As social actors, Provisional women worked toward change through the use of gender manipulation, their bodies, assertive discourse, and collective actions. These women, however, become historically recognized actors through the narration of their words and efforts by scholars who build a distinct feminist body of knowledge. Republican feminist and Northern Ireland Civil Rights leader, Bernadette Devlin, initiated the conversation in 1969 with *The Price of My Soul*, detailing the historical

aspects of the civil rights efforts by working-class Catholics which culminated in the revitalization of Irish Republicanism as State-imposed violence increased. Through her own voice, Devlin (1969) accounts her genesis from Irish Nationalism² to committed Republican socialism. Through her narrative of the complex economic, social, and political problems of Northern Ireland, Devlin does not wish, as she asserts, to gain financial or literary successes; however, she hopes to explain why the historical and social circumstances present in Northern Ireland created the “phenomenon of Bernadette Devlin” (p. vii) – a person who in many other circumstances would not have existed in such a form. For her, *The Price of My Soul* referred not to the price for which she was willing to surrender to the oppressive forces she battled, but to the price we all must pay to preserve our identities. And as Devlin-McAliskey (she was later married) told Melissa Thompson (2005) during a later interview, national identities have historically been reserved for imperialist countries who have suppressed others. Countries such as Ireland, she tells us, have long struggled to develop a national identity independent of dominance.

With her *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*, Begoña Aretxaga (1997) developed an ethnographic account of violence and political conflict in Northern Ireland. Through a post-structuralist lens, Aretxaga creates a space for the voices of predominantly Catholic Nationalist women as they organized against institutionalized violence. Through a recreation of significant historical events, as well as through her late-1980s anthropological research for the women of West Belfast, Aretxaga connects the imaginary and existent boundaries of Belfast with the larger political conflict and the gendered forms of resistance by women. Aretxaga also analyzes these political dynamics in relationship to the larger issue of violence and discussions of legitimacy and terrorism throughout the modern world. Aretxaga’s work again lends weight to the feminist discussion which uncovers the potential for agency among women who find themselves amid multiple intersections of oppression.

² The Nationalists of Northern Ireland also have historically sought to reunite Ireland; however, this party of middle-class Catholics is not in favor of altering the existing political establishments (Devlin, 1969).

Two other integral collections also provide contemporary feminists with the opportunity to “meet” both the working-class Catholic women of Northern Ireland, as well as those Protestant women who found their lives intimately connected with the political conflict of this nation. Some of these women are feminists who actively participate in the struggle for equality, some are not; however, by underscoring the variability and complexity of women’s experiences, we no longer can restrict women to any one identity – we must accept that not one idealized and essentialized concept of “woman” exists, but that each “woman” exists dependent on her specific social, historical, situational, and political location. Eileen Fairweather, Roisin McDonough, and Melanie McFadyean position their 1984 *Only the Rivers Run Free, Northern Ireland: The Women’s War* as a collection of stories about war, grief, comedy, love, poverty, men, children, sex, and religion. As the authors tell us, these stories are not comfortable, but seek to legitimize women’s political and, therefore, personal struggles. The authors provide no answers or conclusions to questions of war, but effectively connect the emotional journey of Northern Irish women to the larger conflict permeating all areas of life. Women’s experiences are further explored by journalist and writer, Silvia Calamati, through her anthology of twenty-one interviews for her 2002 *‘The Trouble We’ve Seen . . .’ Women’s Stories from the North of Ireland*. By printing these women’s words, Calamati creates a space for Northern Irish women to voice their feelings of survival, struggle, sadness, and loss. By sounding the voices of Derry, Portadown, South Armagh, and Belfast women, Calamati effectively locks these women’s stories in history – stories that can no longer be erased and which become mirrors through which future women can see fragments of their own stories reflected back.

Themes of gendered punishment and surveillance are fundamental to the campaign by Republican and Loyalist³ women prisoners during the Northern Irish conflict. Melissa Thompson (2005) builds upon the small, but powerful body of knowledge addressing the imprisonment and prison protests of women. Thompson focuses solely on Republican women, interviewing several PIRA members following the

³ Loyalism characterizes those paramilitary groups who also used violence, but in a way that furthered the goals of the British Crown (McGuire, 1973).

Good Friday Agreement and their release from prison. By providing these women the opportunity to recollectively speak about their experience, we see how their accounts have transformed from their time of imprisonment. Thompson also provided me complete transcripts of her interviews with many Republican women, which account, in detail, these women's political and emotional journey as members of the PIRA and Sinn Féin.⁴ Continuing the discussion, Mary Corcoran's 2006 *Out of Order: The Political Imprisonment of Women in Northern Ireland 1972-1998* provides an extensive account of women's political endurance within Northern Irish and English prisons through their radical forms of protest. Corcoran shapes her work by exploring the formation of both women's prison community, as well as their close relationship with supporting outsiders. She draws on the innovation of women's resistance, interpersonal violence and subversion, and political negotiation and the law. Corcoran also addresses the challenges which sexual difference posed to resistant women during the Northern Irish conflict.

By working through a theoretical lens, I hope to provide a new way of investigating the opportunity for women's political agency and to help unhinge notions of gender from sexual difference. For this, I rely heavily on the works of Judith Butler and Candace West and Don Zimmerman, who have contributed to the fields of both feminist and queer theory and who provide feminist researchers with an avenue to critique gender categories, as well as the ways in which the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality become fluid. In this way, I also hope to lend to the ongoing alliance-building between academic theory and practical feminist action. For this, I turn to bell hooks (1991) in order to locate the potential for healing, empowerment, and feminist resistance within the works of both feminist and queer theorists. As hooks (1991) tells us, theory provides feminists a path toward understanding what is happening around us and enlightens us to the historical factors which have brought us to our current path. When contemporary discourses defined by patriarchy confine feminist researchers and social activists, theory provides the space in which women and men can not only work to understand the dominant intersections of oppression, but also the opportunity to resist and broaden those

⁴ The Republican political party, Sinn Féin (Gaelic for "Ourselves Alone") was founded in the early years of the twentieth century. It is the only political party that exists throughout Ireland, in both the six counties of the British North (where it was illegal during the Northern Irish conflict) and in the 26 counties of the Irish South (Mulholland, 2003).

discourses in order to include those who have been marginalized. As hooks (1991) makes clear, we cannot begin to those transform existing discourses until we find the understanding and language to express our oppressive pasts. Through this use of theory, we help to rebuild a feminist discourse, encoded and used by conscious-raising women about our own struggles and from which to enable women's agency and empowerment. With our continued use and development of theory, feminists can create a space to heal from those historical injustices which have scarred women and to build a renewed and powerful feminist movement which opposes sexism, racism, classism, and colonialism. As hooks (1991) puts into words, we must celebrate the triumphs of theory in enlightening others to feminist resistance. When we find the language to express the pain of patriarchal oppression through theory, we then develop the space to create mass-based feminist resistances. When this occurs, there is no gap between the discourse-building and healing power of feminist theory and the empowerment these theories create toward producing feminist social action. As hooks theorized, marginality cannot be viewed only in terms of helplessness, it also must be understood as a place of resistance for colonized people; as hooks tells us, when we view both the body and mind as fully colonized, we lose hope for the creativity of defiance (Pickering, 2002). For the purposes of this thesis, I rely heavily on the works of Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, Marilyn Frye, West and Zimmerman, Gayatri Gopinath, Michel Foucault, and others.

Methods

This thesis will encompass a feminist content analysis of historical interviews, written records, narrative and visual texts, material culture, and social interactions. These narratives will relate to the Irish Troubles⁵, political violence, nationalism, colonialism, militarization, and subjectivity, with gender at the center of my qualitative content analysis. Specifically, I will connect those social constructions which affected the lives of Republican women to those overarching discourses which influenced the Irish Troubles. In effect, I will follow those feminist researchers who have helped deconstruct the historical components which have dictated how women and men are viewed in

⁵ The Irish Troubles refers to the period of ethno-political conflict in Northern Ireland which dated from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, and specifically to the Belfast Agreement of 1998 and the Comprehensive Agreement of 2005 (Mulholland, 2003).

relationship to their societies. In effect, from the disruption of lives comes the break down of existing discourses and the opportunity for feminist reconstruction through healing and empowerment. By looking specifically into the ways in which gender is narrated, we pinpoint those viewpoints which become marginalized, the ways in which difference becomes articulated, how traditional notions of femininity and masculinity become reconstructed and contested through these narrations (Leavy 2007), and help to untangle notions of gender from essentialized concepts of sex. When feminists analyze constructions of gender, gendered language, and the manipulation of femininity and masculinity, researchers also help reconstruct those moments in which women transcended popular notions of gender to become visible. With a focus on gender, feminists work from these moments of deconstruction in order to create a future space for women to heal and again locate empowerment.

With this thesis, I will utilize the work of pioneering feminist researcher, Shulamit Reinharz (1992), as well as that of Patricia Lina Leavy (2007), which serve as a guideline for feminist approaches to the content analysis and the deconstruction of secondary sources. Through this analysis of both marginalized and dominant cultural documents (see Appendices A and B), as Reinharz (1992) explains, I also will uncover the ways in which these products do not just reflect norms, but also shape them. Through this examination, I will expose the processes through which discourses can become deconstructed and subsequently rebuilt in accordance with feminism. As Leavy (2007) also tells us, we must first dissect those historical analyses in order to discover the patterns between existing and missing records to locate the power and gender relations of this time period in which these women found themselves. By exploring these historical and current documents through a feminist lens, we begin to ask questions that have been previously unanswered and which may help to serve those women who continue to fight injustices. For instance, as the Republican struggle to unite Ireland continues in the North, women and men may theorize about the paths taken by their predecessors as answers to future negotiations.

By examining the cultural products of the 1970s and 1980s Northern Ireland and by performing what Reinharz (1992) refers to as “feminist subversive intertextual

reading,” I will uncover both the texts of this particular time and location, as well as the processes of their production and the people behind them. As Reinhartz (1992) discusses, dominant cultures tend to privilege some types of information and invalidate others. For instance, Irish Republican women and men often were portrayed in British historical documents and journalistic depictions as villainous terrorists who became a threat to the Western institutions which benefit those in power. During the Troubles, British reporters also were not permitted to record or directly broadcast comments or statements from the PIRA (Thompson, 2005) which diluted and morphed Irish narratives through the words of their oppressors. Consequently, Northern Irish Republicans often were depicted as a danger to not only the dominant institutions of capitalism, Protestantism, and traditional family, but to the routine lives of those who viewed these governing structures as protectors against change and disruption. With this thesis, I have analyzed not only the narratives of Republican women and men written both during and following the Troubles, but also the historical products which attempted to safeguard the dominant culture’s attempt to influence those living outside the boundaries of Northern Ireland. In this way, I have reconstructed the lens through which Northern Irish Republicans perceived their sociological situations as well as the ways in which those living in nations such as Britain, Australia, and the United States were forced to view PIRA women and men. While histories often are written from the perspective of the dominant, feminist subversive intertextual reading allows scholars to not only echo the voices of the oppressed, but also to uncover the motivations and implications for their marginalization.

Through this unraveling of interviews and analytical texts, I also employ a flexible and wide-reaching method for engaging in a feminist research which does not separate the emotional experience of struggle away from the study of the struggle itself. As Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook (1991) discuss, the need for this type of analysis becomes apparent when patriarchal restraints extend from academia and research to social and political action. In this way, my research lends itself to the transformation of the research process by feminists. Through the qualitative or interpretive analysis of available past and current interviews with Republican women, I also will illuminate the forces which shaped the lives of these women while triangulating these documents and

oral narratives with the public documents and discourses about women. Consistent with these feminist authors, I will not apply a positivist approach to analyzing this interview data; instead my work is based on the methodology of interactionism, viewing these women as “experiencing subjects” who actively construct their societies (Silverman, 1993). Through the use of these interviews, these women’s “talk” also provides us a “means of access” to the meaningful social worlds and underlying epistemology of this situational and historical location (Wilkinson, 2003; Silverman, 1993). As David Silverman (1993) suggests, talk is the principal means through which we interact within these social worlds. In this way, this focus on language coupled with an interrogation of those non-verbal aspects of social interaction becomes a renewed feminist method and enlightens others to the emotional journey of both enduring these struggles and recalling them. Like many women’s studies scholars, I hope to bridge the works of sociologists and historians to create what Reinharz (1992) referred to as a hybrid or transdisciplinary field of research. As many feminist sociologists have ventured into the field of history, I hope to enlighten readers to the struggles and transformative powers of ordinary and extraordinary women and to, as Reinharz insists, explore the ways in which discourses of gender, class, ethnicity, and colonialism can be overpowered and reconstructed through feminist theory and social action in different historical locations.

Thesis Outline

Throughout this thesis, I will discuss several groups of Northern Irish women, as well as many individuals within these factions. While I consider all these women to be feminists, I feel it important to describe the efforts of each group so as to track the supportive, oppositional, and sometimes competitive forces which grew between these women as a result of patriarchy and colonialism. I will concentrate primarily on the women of the PIRA; however, I also will discuss Republican feminists who did not necessarily join the ranks of this paramilitary organization. Within chapter two in particular, I consider those Republican women who protected their households, children, and neighborhoods during organized attacks by the British military. Even as these feminists did not join the Provisionals, their work was vital to the sustainability of the organization. As I precede to chapter three and four, I will concentrate my discussion on

those PIRA women who engaged in the violent defense which has often become the defining notion of this organization and its individuals. Within chapter four, I also will present the basic theories of many mainstream Irish feminists who initially and fervently denounced those PIRA women who aligned themselves with men in opposition to colonist efforts. For the purposes of this thesis and my overall argument, I feel it vital to engage in a discussion of these specific groups of feminists in order to reconstruct the stage on which these Provisional women found themselves.

As I have discussed, chapter two of this thesis will serve as a contrast, comparison, and background for the subsequent chapters in a way that describes how Republican women retained agency throughout this war. This conversation will provide an historical perspective on the Northern Irish Troubles, supplying the necessary background for an understanding of the social problems and inequalities, colonialism, nationalism, and cloud of political conflict under which Republican women found themselves. As a contrast to my later discussion of the women who took up arms with the PIRA, this chapter also will delve into the call to action and militarized motherhood for Republican and nationalist women who did not join the Army. These discussions also explore the ways in which complex constructions of gender influence not just discourses surrounding women and men, but also sexualize dominant institutions and therefore reflect not essentialized notions of sex, but social interactions.

My third chapter will serve as a discussion of those women who joined the ranks of the Provisionals, the discourses surrounding their political action, as well as their manipulation of gender constructions and performativities. While some volunteers felt acutely scrutinized as women, others assumed a masculine affinity in order to rise within the ranks of the Army; still others voiced their equal acceptance within the Provisionals and provided for, even if only temporary, a redefined femininity which encompassed strength. This chapter also will provide the reader with an historical examination of feminine national images such as Mother-Ireland to which many women found themselves accountable, as well as the opposing reactions of several women to this feminine personification. This chapter also will explore the masculine embodiment of the

British as an affirmation of the “need” to colonize the “feminine” Irish, which by means of this construction cannot govern itself.

With chapter four, I will again concentrate on the women of the PIRA and the powerful effects of surveillance and gendered punishment, particularly when imprisoned and under the guard of British men and women. Through a discussion of their bodily protests and their organization of interaction, I also will explore the agency asserted by these Republican women and their negation of this gendered punishment and surveillance. Finally, through an investigation of feminist and Republican symbolism, I will investigate the ways in which Provisional women found solidarity both within the movement to unite Ireland and the second-wave feminist movement in Northern Ireland. As feminism continues to metamorphose, I hope this work contributes to the ideology chartered by Republican women in that feminism could not and cannot exist without an understanding of the intersections of prevailing structures of power, which in Northern Ireland were inescapably defined by gender, ethnicity, class, and colonization.

To conclude this thesis I discuss the ways in which constructions of conflict and peace become inscribed with notions of gender, as well as value of Republican women’s lives and actions in the development of viable feminist theories, practices, and movements. With this, I will move beyond the 1970s and 1980s to discuss the ways in which these particular activisms effectively expanded discourses in Northern Ireland and created a space for women to participate in larger social institutions and shape their own personal relationships. This discussion is not intended as a resolution to women’s struggles against oppressive forces, but describes the cyclical relationship between theory and practice and provides women the tools to reconstruct discourses.

Chapter Two

Republicanism, Militarized Motherhood, and Activism; Historical Perspectives and Feminist Analysis on the Irish “Troubles”

With this chapter, I will demonstrate through a feminist lens the ways in which the Troubles remained a gendered experience for Irish women and how women retained agency in the face of oppression and change. Just as British colonialism imprinted patriarchy onto the historical experiences of the Irish, growing nationalist sentiments defined womanhood in terms of motherhood and otherness in relationship to men. As war persisted, civil usefulness became defined as strength, public leadership, and willingness to face death for men, while femininity became identified and constrained into terms of sacrifice, passivity, and the dedication to family. Even as these ideals were disobeyed by Irish women, the prevailing discourses certainly became more difficult to challenge and corrupt. As I will discuss, however, the participation by Northern Irish women within public spaces helped to redefine historical concepts which confined them.

The violence of exclusion experienced by the six counties of Ulster, known after the partition of the island in 1921 as Northern Ireland, signified the birth of this land and its people as both the colonized British “other” and the internally suppressed “other” of Ireland. Utilizing the theory of Luce Irigaray (1977), the treaty between England and the leaders of the Irish War of Independence sacrificed Northern Ireland and created the *nation which is not one*. At the commencement of violence in the late 1960s and the renewal of nationalist sentiments, the people of Northern Ireland had developed their own cultures, political responses, subjectivities and “imagined communities” (Arenstaga, 1997) distinct from both those of Britain and the Republic of Ireland; even prior to the partition of Ireland, the co-existence of Catholic and Protestant⁶ communities created an identity and ethnicity for Northern Irish Catholics separate from those born in the southern

⁶ The 17th century British government sent Scottish Protestants into Northern Ireland in an attempt to control natives (Devlin, 1969).

counties (Collins, 1997). Following years of inequalities experienced by working-class Catholic communities, women and men began to organize during the 1960s in protest against enforced poverty, scarce voting rights, and low-pay factory jobs (Dooley, 1998). Despite the population majority held by Catholics, Protestants retained a political majority, signifying the intersections of oppression acutely experienced by working-class Catholics (Devlin, 1969). Then, as ethnic tensions increased and rumors circulated that the Irish Republican Army⁷ was reorganizing itself, the government of Northern Ireland under the United Kingdom introduced internment without trial, effectively warranting the acute surveillance and arrest of those individuals living in Catholic communities (Arextaga, 1997). As the public sphere and bodies of those working-class communities was forcefully contracted, locals organized space-claiming, albeit illegal marches against the internment. Rallying from the “slums” of Belfast, Derry, and other Catholic communities, women and men refused assimilation and enabled a Marxist form of resistance which restored a collective consciousness and intentional action among the working-class (Pickering, 2002).

However, on January 30, 1972 or what became known as “Bloody Sunday,” the Unionist⁸ government and its troops invaded the space of non-violent civil rights marchers in Derry, killing 13 unarmed Catholics and wounding 14 in an attempt to assert authority (McGuire, 1973). While Republicanism existed throughout Ireland, these events signified the declaration of war to many working-class Catholics and sparked a revitalized interest in this ideology to unite (through violent means if necessary) the six counties of Northern Ireland with the remaining 26 counties, creating one socialist Ireland (Weinstein, 2006). While many media outlets and journalists have constructed this time of political conflict as an internal religious or civil war between two communities, the events of Bloody Sunday place a heavy burden of responsibility on the British government (Calamati, 2002). Similar to Kate Millett’s (1970) arguments about

⁷ What has been called the Original IRA dismantled in the southern counties following the formation of the Republic of Ireland. The Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland, which assembled in 1969, saw itself as a direct continuation of the Original IRA. (Talbot, 2004)

⁸ Unionism represents those women and men (primarily Protestant) who wish to fully adhere to the institution formed by the United Kingdom, placing the government of Northern Ireland in the hands of the British (Picard, 1991).

the relationship between femininity and masculinity, while many perceived the Catholic Irish and the Protestant/British as two distinct ethnicities or races (Arextaga, 1997), the relationship between these two groups involves the endowment of one by birth to collectively control the other. In effect, the Catholic people of Northern Ireland retained this separate distinction based on their political subordination.

The symbolic use of discourse among the Northern Irish Catholic working population developed into a powerful weapon against both British colonizers and Protestant militant groups. While one might associate ‘trouble’ with bodily discomfort, inconvenience, difficulties, or even problems within a personal relationship, beginning in 1968 until the early years of the twenty-first century, Northern Irish locals euphemistically branded this violent period of political conflict as the “Troubles.” While many locals and Republican political leaders now refer to these years as a deadly “war,” the Northern Irish use of discourse during this time signified their attempt to negate the powerful presence of the Crowned forces by minimizing the effects of militarized surveillance with a seemingly benign word such as trouble.

Following years of economic, political, and ethnic inequalities experienced by the working-class Catholic communities, nostalgia arose for a pre-colonial, united Ireland. Similar to the separatist feminist arguments of Marilyn Frye (1983), this national separatist aspiration of Republicans discursively denies British colonizers access to the bodies of working-class Catholics. While Frye specifically related her theory of separatism to the need of women to detach themselves from men, the British conceptualized themselves as a masculine nation thereby defining the Irish as collectively feminine. While I will discuss these national personifications in subsequent chapters, I wish to point to this hierarchical masculine/feminine relationship between the British and Irish people. Just as many separatist feminists believe the sexual disparities between women and men are irresolvable, the Irish Republicans deemed the violent dynamics which developed between the British and Irish governments as irreconcilable. For Frye (1983), this declaration of separatism and the ability to say “no” to the oppressive relationship remains crucial in claiming power from those who oppress. In many ways, the strength of the British Empire depended on the continued subordination of the people

and countries it colonized. In effect, the British government lived in a relation of what Frye (1983) referred to as parasitism with the Irish to keep its reputation of power intact. Through the Republican aim of symbolic and violent separatism, these women and men began to redefine what it meant to “be” Northern Irish and reclaim and assert the national identity which historically had been suppressed. However, while this resistance revitalized a working-class renaissance in the Catholic-Nationalist identity, including the Gaelic language, Irish folk music, Irish dancing, and Gaelic sports, the language of violence persisted under the prevailing philosophy which assumes the powerful are never persuaded to change through reasoned argument or questions of morality (Sluka, 1992). While the revitalization of a distinctive Irish identity also prevailed during the 1919 – 1921 Irish War of Independence in the South of Ireland, the North of Ireland remained under British control. Indeed, as the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty granted Ireland independent government and, subsequently, the affirmation of their own Irish individuality, the North struggled to retain their own sense of uniqueness. However, while the women of the South organized their own military faction of Cumann na mBhan (Women’s League) during the Irish War of Independence, they did so in a way that supported the all-male IRA. While the efforts of Cumann na mBhan remained integral to the success of the Irish government, their assigned responsibility of support continued to define the women of the South for many years.

It is crucial to note that while this use of discourse amid the Troubles primarily referred to the political conflict between two nations, it also symbolized the domestic conflict produced within the household sparked by women’s active participation in the resistance. As Gayatri Gopinath (2005) theorized, the nation becomes constructed in terms of familial metaphors with women as the symbolic indicators of home and family. Through this renewed nationalism, however, women become defined by an association with the private sphere through the merging of the nation and community (Gopinath, 2005). As women became politically active through breaking curfews, organizing marches, and smuggling weapons, traditionally defined concepts of femininity and masculinity became more flexible, and in no doubt created tensions within the acceptable boundaries of nation/church/home. In effect, the political participation of women led to

the formation of a new political consciousness and to what Judith Butler (1990) described as “gender trouble”. Gender, as an unstable category of identity, transformed during this time of violence and created a deep disruption of family life. In this sense, I contend that ‘trouble’ not only referred to the unfolding of political events which shaped this time period, but perhaps also the transcendence of gender by women. While a strong motivator for women’s political action in Northern Ireland arose from the arrest of men and boys (Arextaga, 1997), the true Catholic womanhood of Church doctrine restricts all women to a biologically-determined motherly destiny, locating their agency in their active political withdrawal (Morcillo, 2000). Ex-PIRA man, Eamon Collins (1997) also placed the genealogy of Republicanism in the hands of the mother, alluding to women as the producers of generations of revolutionaries; however, while he endows his mother with a saintly quality, this also serves to remind us of the intersections of oppression felt by working-class Catholic women. Rather than this passive withdrawal, however, women resisted institutionally enforced curfews through militarized marches which broke these confinements and, as household administrators, withheld rent and payment of utilities; many times, women symbolically carried milk and bread as political protest, discursively identifying the government’s curfew as a blockade to their fulfillments as mothers (Devlin, 1969).

It should be noted that while many Northern Irish Catholic women spoke of the essentialized guilt imposed on them by the Catholic Church, many feminists highlight the responsibility of colonialism in the Church’s continued power (Fairweather et al. 1984). Because the British had long rejected Catholicism as their national religion, the Irish held steadfast to the Church as both a way to defy their colonizers and to prove their dedication to rebuilding a unique model of Irishness. As Leela Fernandes (2003) underlines, when we reject the influence and importance of religion in many women’s lives, we also miss the beliefs of a majority of the world’s women who intimately link concepts of justice with spirituality. In line with this revitalization of prideful Irishness, many women felt that to identify as a Catholic was in itself an anti-colonial act against dominant Protestant ideologies (Fairweather et al. 1984). Still some, like Provos woman Roseleen Walsh, recalls her first role model as the “Our Lady,” mother of God, to whom

she felt a very close connection; for her, Mary demonstrated immense courage and self-sacrifice (Thompson, 2005). In effect, Republican discourse also assigned the term “turning” for both the act of betraying one’s religion and subsequently one’s own family and culture, as well as to the irrevocable act of informing to the British – the ultimate act of Irish disloyalty (Toolis, 1995).

During the Troubles and through necessity, however, Christian notions of feminine shame were suspended within the local culture. As women gained provisional access to the public sphere through their political involvement while retaining their position as administrator of the private home, political violence became supported through a network of relationships sustained by women. As such, their position as women took on a specific form of social protest. Outside the home, women took to the streets banging lids and blowing whistles to warn their communities of an impending British raid (Pickering, 2002). As Republican feminist Bernadette Devlin (1969) recalls, women’s aggressive and often confrontational behavior during the Troubles often confused British men who patrolled the streets of Belfast. “I saw women who could reduce soldiers to tears . . . when soldiers were foul-mouthed to them they were foul-mouthed back” (p. 37). Women’s verbal retaliation also became sexually explicit and mimicked the insulting discourse and mannerisms utilized by the British Army (Pickering, 2002). I am reminded here of the Igbo women of Eastern Nigeria – when an Igbo woman felt her economical or customary rights were threatened by a man, women encircled the offending man’s hut in solidarity, shouting obscenities and provocatively dancing while the man cowers inside his hut (Ifeka-Moller, 1975). For Igbo women, male domination over their finances was integrally linked with their historic command over their bodies. Similarly, when British soldiers interfered with the community/bodily space of Northern Irish women, they retaliated. By performing in a way that was considered “unfeminine,” these women shrugged off the regulatory forces that unconditionally sexualized the female body and created an instability in the gender discourse. Rather than performing in a way that was sexually pleasing or submissive, these women reversed the male gaze of the colonizers by acting outside of heteronormativity and carved a space for agency and social activism through defiance and the use of their bodies as political

weapons. Subsequently, in early 1971, women began receiving six-month jail sentences for what police referred to as “riotous behaviour” (Pickering, 2002), a term which no doubt alluded to women’s active political participation and gender-bending tactics.

For these women, war incited a feminine enactment of power which peace historically did not summon; in many ways, the prevailing peace-time gender hierarchy became inverted, allowing women to engage in tasks traditionally denied to them and sometimes engaging men in inverted gender practices. As Clara Reilly told Claire Hackett (2004):

My husband was a very quiet person. He wasn’t a bit like me, he wouldn’t get involved . . . but he had to be part of it, because when I was going off taking all these statements or speaking to reporters or going to London, or going to lobby or picket or whatever, he had to take over the role as housekeeper . . . to take charge of the children and so forth (p. 155).

This reversal of the gender hierarchy also becomes evident through an analysis of what women referred to as “hen patrols,” a self-identified name given to those women who patrolled the streets from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., the hours favored by the British army for house raids, following soldiers wherever they went (Arextaga, 1997). In opposition to “duck patrols” (Pickering, 2002), a disarming name given to British patrollers, these women became the personified embodiment of “hens,” thereby creating an imaginative and theatrical scenario with the confrontation of two comparable animals. And while hens are better known as chased creatures, the reversal of gender domination becomes evident as women aggressively followed male soldiers blowing whistles and banging lids, warning their neighbors of impending raids while men stayed at home. Effectively, many women also creating a parody of military occupation by “quack-quacking” and singing *Old MacDonald had a Farm* as a way of creating humor for both themselves and at the expense of the British soldiers who invaded their streets (Hackett, 2004).

What is scarce, however, is the “authentic” voice of those men who depended on women to actively and subversively resist and their reaction to this social interaction, particularly during the first few years of the Troubles. While some spoke openly to researchers and reporters, many heeded to the prominent ideology of strategic silence. As printed in the *Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army* (1985), “loose” talk

in public bars and open gatherings draws attention from those British informants who wear the mask of friendliness. In many ways, men may have feared being tagged an “informant” or “Queen’s Evidence” (Collins, 1971) of subversive Republican wartime maneuvers, as well as the person who enlightened researchers to men’s need to rely on women. As history is written by the dominant in a way which considers their power unquestionable, however, I do not find it unusual that these narratives by men are missing. Even as Northern Irish men were subjugated by colonist efforts, their attempt to cling to patriarchal sentiments which deem men national protectors requires the erasure of narratives which prove the necessity of women’s strength.

While many women transcended traditional notions of femininity and passivity, these concepts also were manipulated by women in order to engage in the subversive activities of Republicanism. Unlike those collective groups of women who made themselves visible through tactics which defied traditional constructs of femininity, single, seemingly defenseless women utilized concepts of invisibility which subsequently placed subversive resistance in the bodies of women. Particularly during times of war, women’s bodies become opaque figures, translucent and meaningless in the eyes of soldiers – women do not translate in terms of political conflict and war. During the Troubles, women utilized this invisibility by openly walking from house to house within the sight of British soldiers with weapons beneath their coats (Arextaga, 1997). Women also walked with men to ensure men’s safety (Arextaga, 1997), using their invisibility to effectively shield the visibility of men.⁹ In order to produce this shield of invisibility, Northern Irish women adopted the perception of women as passive, subservient, and banal. Women often sheltered their eyes from British soldiers, dressed in demure and simple dresses (Arextaga, 1997), and effectively desexualized their bodies in order to become the invisible mothers who British soldiers considered incapable of revolutionary dissent. In effect, without the open display of weapons or the welcome of sexual advance, Northern Irish women obtained the ability to move undetected by their oppressors.

⁹ Men also were more susceptible to the British “shoot-to-kill” policy enacted during internment; those suspected of resisting authority – what many envisioned as the Irish man’s prerogative – were often killed by the State as an alternative to arrest (Calamati, 2002).

These social interactions and manipulations compare to Eugene Genovese's description of the ways in which black slaves engaged in processes of "daily accommodation and resistance" (Anyon, 1990). Slaves utilized the concepts of helpless femininity as a tool against a harsh public world. Like the slaves of America, Northern Irish women also used femininity in order to convince these men that, as women, they were not threatening. However, while the British saw these women as harmless, to the people of Northern Ireland, the hegemonic masculine discourse of gender identity became inverted through the use of women's bodies and homes as symbols of resistance. Men needed the help of women. Eventually, however, any Belfast woman wearing a coat became suspected of hiding ammunition and soldiers counteracted women's subversive tactics by literally uncovering the bodies of women. In this way, Belfast women became exposed to the male soldier's gaze (Arextaga, 1997). Some women refused to open their coats to the men's eyes, risking arrest, still others passed unsuspected while hiding weapons in pushcarts carrying groceries – again using symbols of motherhood as the motivation and means for opposition (Arextaga, 1997). In this way, women again manipulated ideas of conventional femininity – complying with what they were told. However, this exploitation of helpless femininity also may have produced paradoxical effects. On the one hand, it helped to delegitimize the actions of the British army against what many outside these six counties perceived as a powerless group of people – women. Conversely, this illusion of helplessness also may have undermined future feminist movements and social actions within the United Kingdom, creating the notion that women are inherently weaker and incapable of participation in the formation of policy. Inside the home, a space conventionally defined by femininity, intimate relations, caring, and protection, also became a place for constant searches by British soldiers and women again enabled resistance by hiding radicals; Britons periodically and forcefully, however, confined women and men to this private sphere by firing thousands of rounds of ammunition into neighborhoods, through the presence of the seemingly omnipotent helicopters, and seeping tear gas into Catholic communities (Arextaga, 1997). Through these acts of violation, women also saw an understandable correlation between house searches and routine prison strip searches and interpreted both as violations of their

bodies (Arextaga, 1997) – in effect, the home and the body both became intimate symbols of struggle. In retaliation when those British soldiers raided their homes in full riot gear, women employed discursively disempowering tactics; in order to retain normalcy and prevent their home from becoming what Lachlan Whalen (2007) referred to as an “imitation home,” women cooked seemingly happily in their kitchens while their children and husbands talked around the breakfast table (Pickering, 2002), effectively creating a space for gender-emphasis as agency (Crawley, Foley & Shehan, 2008).

While I have examined ways in which women’s bodies became discursively converted into vehicles of action, it also is important to note the ways in which many women’s bodies became physically transformed through violence, symbolizing the sometimes chaotic and illogical features of conflict. During the first few months of the internment, Emma Groves (1990) was hit in the face with a rubber bullet and blinded while looking out her kitchen window; “I’ve often asked why that soldier shot me. In all those 20 years I have never been able to find an answer. You see, I didn’t represent any sort of threat for those who were carrying out the arrests that August dawn” (Groves, 1990, p. 17-24). Groves (1990), however, found empowerment and agency in the fight to ban these bullets, as well as the more deadly plastic bullets which replaced them. While her body was transformed, the Republican movement also recognized, through her public work and social action, the significance of breaking through silence.

The feminized agency within the historical perspective I have described throughout this chapter primarily served those women who also maintained their position as mothers and keepers of the household – positions many believed would revert back to submissiveness once peace was restored. In effect, the arrest of men and boys served as both the strongest motivation for these Republican women’s political action (Arextaga, 1997). As I will discuss in the following chapter, however, young women without husbands and sons responded quite differently to the political turbulence sparked by the Irish Troubles.

Chapter Three
The Transformation of Discourse through the Manipulation of Gender Practices and
Bodies; Women in the Provisional Irish Republican Army

I now will move to a discussion of the women of the PIRA by first providing a discussion of the use of mural imagery by the women and men of the Army as a way to signify the discourses of change which emerged from events of Bloody Sunday. In this way, I argue for the opportunity for not only the emergence of Republican ideology, but for the unique opportunity of PIRA women to become active public participants. I then will examine the specific sexual discourses imposed on PIRA women, as well as the performances engaged in by female soldiers in order to assert themselves into this paramilitary faction. Finally, I will investigate the discourses of Celtic mythology harnessed by PIRA women in order to redefine femininity in terms of power and strength.

Images and themes of the mythical and sacred firebird the Phoenix reflect the Catholic's discursive triumph from the "ashes" of Bloody Sunday; as the symbol of hope and rebirth, the Phoenix came to represent those Provisional volunteers who were "born out of the flames of August 1969 in Belfast and Derry" (Sluka, 1992b). In many ways, as the working-class Catholics of Northern Ireland answered the British claim to violence with their own aggressive refusal and nationalist detachment, Republican women and men also employed the use of figurative discourse in order to deconstruct, demystify, and delegitimize the dominant norms, institutions, and discourses which worked to construct their subordination (Lincoln, 1989). Foucault (1979) also argued for the formation of subjectivity through the intersections of discourses and nonverbal practices or what he referred to as a microphysics of power. For Foucault, this combination of power and knowledge formulates particular forms of thinking, feeling, and desiring within the social body. In effect, Republicans utilized symbolic representations such as murals, gestures, slang, and music to signify their "legitimate" authority within their own working-class

neighborhoods. These tactics encoded sociopolitical meaning within particular communities and onto the bodies of Northern Irish people. In this way, class, religion, and national identity became intertwined within these metaphoric discourses and became a form of communication among locals.

The use of the term freedom fighters in lieu of “terrorists” to signify the Republican movement and its Provisional volunteers further reconstructed the British regime as an illegitimate authority. Although the governing power of British propaganda portrayed PIRA volunteers as apelike Communist dictators who forcefully dominated Republican communities (Aretxaga, 1997; McGuire, 1973), working-class locals envisioned these women and men as freedom fighters who defended the developing Northern Irish Republican identity and aspirations of a united nation (Fairweather et al. 1984). While the colonized minds and bodies of the Irish past (Pickering, 2002) shattered along with the introduction of internment, the British attempted to reconstruct these fragments into the formation of compliant citizens and to mystify the existence of inequalities through the use of concentrated bullying and the dissemination of international propaganda. Here, Foucault’s theory of unpossessable power becomes realized. Following this concept, dominant groups can neither preserve nor acquire power as a class privilege; instead, as Bartky (1988) suggests, power transmits through them and is resisted by those which it targets. As Foucault (1984) theorized, the body has become objectified through strict powers of prohibition and obligation. In effect, war asserts itself as the direct continuation of politics and the control of civil disorder and undisciplined masses (Foucault, 1984). While the deployment of troops in Northern Ireland represented a “real” force or extension of British politics, the use of discourse also characterized the attempt to recreate imperialist knowledge and its continued projection over the social body. Indeed, Provisionals such as Roseleen Walsh argued that the “road we are on” (Thompson, 2005) was not created by the Irish but signifies the path of colonization forcefully travelled by these locals and the necessary use of violence in the waging of war against the British. While Republican women and men recognized the historic existence of oppression and injustice, they refused recolonization by deliberately creating their own subjectivities through the recognition of agency.

Murals and folk music, in particular, expressed a “culture of resistance” which served not only to educate and elicit support from the Republican community, but also to visually and discursively assault the British government and its forces (Sluka, 1992b). Women also carved their empowerment and “legitimized” suffering into the walls of Belfast and Derry through this use of nationalist symbolism. In many ways, these discourses became just as important as the Republicans’ use of weapons and bombs in the deconstruction of oppressive colonialism and the creation of agency and empowerment. Indeed, while anthropologists such as Begoña Aretxaga (1997) argued for the triumphant power of arms or violence over the use of imagery, I argue that through this use of discourse, Republican bodies and communities became transformed into living political weapons. In effect, posters of masked paramilitaries holding weapons denote the discursive violence engaged in by working-class Catholics through the reclamation of their neighborhoods (Feldman, 1991) and symbolized an authentic threat to the British. The mask also removes the mark of individualism from this discourse, effectively empowering Republicans and invoking fear from those considered “enemies.” This symbolism utilized within communities, as well as in press conferences and funerals also challenges the hegemonic discourse of British power with that of an abstract force. During the Troubles, “political power stem[med] from the barrel of a gun” (Fairweather et al. 1984) and rationalized violence certainly became a form of war-time communication and political artifact (Feldman, 1991); however, the revitalization of a nationalist discourse effectively enabled the enduring voice of the Northern Irish Republicans as social subjects while asserting their refusal to assimilate. In effect, by highlighting these strategic uses of language and imagery, researchers also uncover the forces behind their construction and maintain the enlightenment of inequalities which these women and men sought to publicize.

Through research of the events which stemmed from the recognition of inequalities and the formation of the PIRA in Northern Ireland, I have uncovered a path of feminist discourse reconstruction by female volunteers. Although men certainly outranked women in numbers, Provisional women were crucial to the bending and molding of contemporary discourses made fragile by the culmination of violence in 1972;

as Sheila Rowbotham (1972) explains, the emancipation of women is integral to the development of a feasible socialist movement and therefore presumably fundamental to the goals of Republicans. Through their presence, PIRA women effectively queered the dominant imperialist discourse which forbade both women's and Irish men's public political participation, as well as the Irish nationalist discourse which sought to confine women to the household. While my discussion not meant to be comprehensive, I reveal the ways in which women's determined and enduring participation in this paramilitary faction helped to construct a space for women to take part in the creation of a recognized political party and the reformation of their nation. Indeed, women were and are vital to the endurance of the Republican movement in Northern Ireland and the hopeful realization of a united socialist nation.

As Republicans throughout Northern Ireland answered the violent institutional discourse employed by the British with their own violent response, many women took up arms along with Provisional men. As the army of the "people," the PIRA represented the martial prowess of the Irish-Catholic community and their refusal to be assimilated or subordinated (Mulholland, 2003). Although they were outnumbered by Crowned forces, the PIRA relied on community protection and clandestine tactics such as seizing arms, defying arrests, selective assassinations, and undermining the British administration in order to pursue their goal of uniting Ireland (Mulholland, 2003). While the Provisional predecessor in the South rejected the combining of genders in the formation of the armed struggle, Northern Irish women fought in the early 1970s to take up arms with this newly formed army (Aretxaga, 1997). During the Irish War of Independence in the Southern counties, Republican women served in the all-female Cumann na mBhan and although this supportive assembly of women continued during the Irish Troubles in Northern Ireland, many women fought to join the PIRA and to serve at all levels of the organization (Fairweather et al. 1984). As Cathleen told the authors of *Only the Rivers Run Free* (1984), many leaders of the continuing Cumann na mBhan sought to uphold the nationalist depiction of woman as iconic mothers and doctrine-abiding Catholic women:

I had thought of joining Cumann na mBhan but chose not to. . . They asked [my friend] if she was married and if not was she living with somebody, who he was,

how old she was and how many children she had. Things like that. . . They put her private life on the line and said she wasn't suitable because of it. . . Cumann na mBhan didn't take women who were living with men or who had illegitimate babies. In other words, they didn't take ordinary human beings. . . It all boils down to this romantic Mother Ireland image. The Catholic Church says "till death us do part," and I think this is the kind of image that Cumann na mBhan, Irish men and Irish society want to personify women as (Fairweather et al. 1984, p. 236).

In joining the PIRA, women like Cathleen rejected gender as a differential factor in political militancy; however, traditional patriarchal attitudes also were difficult to change within this combination of women and men. Here, the theory of de Beauvoir's notion of the other from *The Second Sex* (1949) becomes realized. As de Beauvoir argued, a man never begins by presenting himself as a member of a certain sex; heteronormative patriarchy sets man up as the universalized body, while woman becomes the "opposite". Woman, as de Beauvoir explains, becomes trapped within the essentialized peculiarities of her subjectivity. Particularly within the early years of the Republican movement in Northern Ireland, women endured the growing pains of their newly recognized presence within the Army and felt forced to assert their position in order to be treated as soldiers (Fairweather et al. 1984).

Although these women forged the expansion of discourses and realized a space for empowerment, the early years of these women's participation proved difficult and required a space for both women and men to heal from past inequalities derived from imperialism. While Northern Irish men attempted to take back their own masculine identities from that of their colonizers, issues of competition and power arose from the military participation of women. In this way, women did experience intersections of oppression more acutely than men; however, Northern Irish men were indeed marginalized through colonialism and attempted to hold firm to their male privilege. Working through this paralysis, however, requires that women manipulate existing discourses through theory in order to achieve future practice (Rowbotham, 1972). In effect, because Provisional women no longer were in secondary positions of support to both Irish men and the British government, their activism caused violent disruption to both sets of hegemonic discourses. Lingering images of the nationalized Mother Ireland

who has been raped and pillaged by colonizers and who mourns the loss of the men who protect her dictated that Provisional women remain acutely conscious of their sex and their difference from the idealization of women as mothers (Crilly, 1989). Therefore, the idea that Irish women take up arms remained unsettling to many Irish men.

Symbolic feminine images have intertwined themselves into Irish history, representing the effects of colonization, war, and suppressed identities on the Irish people. For many women, however, the notion of Mother Ireland not only restrained their national concepts of history, culture, and language, but forcefully delineated them as the weeping woman with the harp. Governed by heteronormativity and nationality, Mother Ireland offered the unmappable metaphor of woman as a signifier of an unrealized nation (Zwicker, 1999). In this way, this personification also symbolized the limitations of femininity and notions of “woman” within both imperialist and nationalist discourse. Indeed, as the nation became personified as a woman, the PIRA also utilized women to represent the organization internationally. Although Maria McGuire (1973) supported the shooting of British soldiers and “believed that the more we killed the better” (p. 3), her smiling face as the Army’s publicity officer often appeared in many conference photographs. Early regulations also stipulated that women remain socially isolated from men based on issues of sex. Ann Marie Loughran recalls the paradoxical rules of a Provisional social club which refused to serve women on Sundays – ironically, a club named for a woman (Whalen, 2007).

These issues arise in Gayatri Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), in which she recognizes the intersections of colonialism and nationalist patriarchy in the continued ideological construction of gender which keeps men dominant. However, Spivak recognizes no point at which new discourses might be created, effectively confining women and other marginalized groups within the dominant structures of representation. Scholars such as Benita Parry (1995) criticize Spivak and other post-colonial theorists for failing to acknowledge the production of alternative knowledges distinct from “colonial production”. While colonialism and nationalism have shaped contemporary discourses within nations such as Northern Ireland, perhaps researchers and activists can envision the expansion and manipulation of these existing constructions. Although past ideologies

of women cannot be erased from current thought, women's release from historical confinements remains contingent on the treatment of activist women like those in the PIRA as legitimate actors.

This declaration of organizational equality between women and men also required that many women adhere to a kind of desexualization. Within Republican circles, PIRA men acquired considerable status (Collins, 1997) and often found themselves in the company of women willing to invoke an emphasized femininity in order to provoke these men's sexual desires.¹⁰ PIRA men, however, were expected to adhere to a sense of purity in order to maintain the support of Catholic communities. Indeed, when describing an affair between herself and a Provisional man, McGuire (1973) indicates the ways in which this act of extra-marital sex could have damaged this male leader. As ex-PIRA man Collins (1997) described, Provisional courts maintained strict regulations against illicit affairs and rape in order to protect the Army's local backing. I find it interesting that both consensual sex and rape are paired within Provisional law; in this way, women's bodies and sexuality become sites of danger, intrigue, and ruin for men in power. Little is said about how women viewed the coupling of these laws. Interestingly, however, when tried in British courts, men accused of sexual indiscretions and violence against women found better chances of acquittal than in their own courts (Collins, 1997), illustrating the unique intersections of gender, sexuality, and colonization. While it cannot be argued that the Provisionals intended to protect the women which Collins described in this formation of the Army's community image, this general practice of reserved sexuality within the PIRA enabled a sentiment of safety within the local streets.

Men, however, retained their sexual idolization from the community despite their inability to act. Because the Army was defined by masculinity, men appeared sexually appealing by simply adhering to the social definitions of their gender; by looking strong, powerful, and indeed masculine, PIRA men attracted sexual attention from admirers. PIRA women, on the other hand, had to reflect a sense of desexualization from their bodies into the outside community. As Cynthia Enloe (2000) discusses, militaries

¹⁰ Emphasized femininity specifically is discussed by Crawley, Foley, and Shehan (2008) who describe it as women's excessive use of femininity as defined by the dominant culture.

typically rely on women as mothers for the reproduction of male soldiers and permit only a controlled sexuality for female soldiers reserved for heterosexual procreation which might result in future generations of fighters. However, when radical groups form paramilitary organizations not divided along lines of gender, intricate steps must be taken to insure the appearance of an overall masculinity within these armies despite the presence of women. In this way, military officials control not just women, but the very ideas of femininity. Although McGuire detailed the accounts of her affair with a PIRA man, interestingly, McGuire (1973) effectively disrupts the hegemonic discourse in her disclosure that “[the affair] meant more to Dave than it did to me” (p. 60).

Extraorganizational extramarital sexual activity was strictly forbidden. As Luce Irigaray (1977) argues, women are allowed social power as long as their bodies appear sexually impotent and unfulfilled. In this way, McGuire negates the heteronormative pigeonholing of women as more emotionally attached to the act of sex than men and counteracts the claim which attaches non-conforming women to hysteria, revenge, and uncontrollable violence (Rolston, 1989). When portrayed as villains, women often are endowed with a violent passion which exceeds that of men. Following such cinematic, literary, and media depictions, men remain rational when performing violent acts which remain as a superficial extension of his body. For women, however, the violence supposedly emits from an essentialized self which requires regulation by the cool control of men. In line with these discourses, the Provisional control of women’s sexuality also extended to the power over seemingly volatile emotions. The utilization of female sexuality, for instance, was condemned as a tool to lure British soldiers to their deaths (Weinstein, 2006). In this way, women’s sexuality was hidden from the discourse, while Provisional men, although not able to act physically, signified the only acceptable form of sexuality. Women had to discipline their bodies in order to conform to the conventional typifications of femininity (Crawley et al. 2008). It could be argued, however, that this knowledge starkly opposed that of institutionalized heterosexuality which dictates that women make themselves “object prey” for men (Bartky, 1988). As Crawley, Foley and Shehan (2008) also point out, conventional femininity parameters suggest that women make themselves “sexy but not sexual.” This ensures that women’s

bodies become objects of desire, but prevents women from enjoying or exploring their own sexualities. Within the PIRA, however, women were not allowed portrayals of sexiness or explorations of female sexuality.

Gendered discourse, however, remained intertwined with Provisional paramilitary vernacular and, in many ways, indicated the possibility for the reconstruction of contemporary concepts. For instance, as Allen Feldman (1991) discusses, the targeted male victim of PIRA violence prior to being “stuffed” (synonymous with political assassination) became known as a “cunt” and to “knock his cunt in” referred to beating someone or inflicting fatal violence. Within the working-class discourse, “giving the message” historically characterized the male role in heterosexual intercourse; however, during the Troubles this phrase now referred to the feminization and degradation of the object of violence as a “cunt” (Feldman, 1991). In effect, the “cunt” became understood as the passive bodily recipient of violence.

While research such as Feldman’s prove useful in investigations of the body’s potential as a political actor, his analysis of the Republican movement was devoted almost exclusively to male volunteers. In effect, while he dedicated only a few paragraphs to female volunteers, he perpetuated the use of gendered discourse in his discussions of the Troubles. Feldman (1991) effectively personifies the “State” as a mother and her prisons as the reproducer of docile bodies or political subjects. Subsequently, Feldman (1991) refers to underground torture rooms within the male prison, Long Kesh, as a “uterine space where the state considers and ensures its reproduction” (p. 115). Through this use of gendered discourse without the concomitant recognition of women as social agents, Feldman enabled the continuation of both the colonial and national discourse. The discursive transformations Feldman describes, however, become decidedly flipped when one considers the presence of female volunteers within the PIRA. While women were historically presumed to be the passive bodies of heterosexual encounters, these Republican female-bodied soldiers exerted power over passive male-bodied people by physically dominating them through violence. In this way, I argue that because these women literally possessed the “cunt” or female genitals, they were able to utilize the power of their physical bodies in order to triumph

over this discursive relationship between femininity and passivity. This contention becomes further supported through an investigation of the historical significance of “cunt.” As Inga Musico (2002) explains, ancient writings depict the Cunt (Cuint in Gaelic) as a powerful female priestess or goddess, particularly in pre-colonial nations such as Ireland. In effect, through Provisional women’s early political and social activism within the Republican movement, they initiated the manipulation of contemporary discourses which employed these early constructs of female power. As Butler (1990) argued, these women jammed the nationalist reconstruction of imperialist feminine notions by returning and reversing the gaze onto masculine people. In this way, Provisional women began to seize those discourses which historically confined them and initiated a social reconstruction maintained and persisted by their successors. In effect, by queering the notion of “woman,” agency became possible.

As the Troubles ensued, women rose within the ranks of the PIRA in part because of the desexualization of their bodies and their gender manipulation. As Provisional men began to conditionally accept women’s leadership and participation within the organization, however, many women now were held to a hypermasculine standard which was enacted in order to counteract the British endowment of Ireland as the feminine “Other.” British colonizers historically conjured up images of their own commanding, masculine empire by discursively constructing the women and men of Ireland as incapable of governing themselves. In order to conceptualize themselves as what de Beauvoir (1949) called the powerful, masculine “Subject,” Ireland as a nation became the Celtic “other,” whose pre-colonist history intertwined itself with paganism and the natural world. In effect, the battle between Ireland and Britain has been compared with that of the struggle between the goddess and the god (Longley, 2000). As Evelyn Fox Keller (1990) explains, nature was stripped of its intelligence and life by the beginning of the eighteenth century and those who historically identified with this soulless character were deemed irrational and distant from God. In this way, both Irish women and men became circumscribed within the limits of their own constructed “nature” and racial otherness; to the British, Irish women and men signified weakness, contempt, and effeminateness (Chatterjee, 1993). Consequently, to counteract this hypermasculinity

within imperialist ideology and to construct themselves as physically powerful, the PIRA dictated a strictly masculine presence for all its soldiers (Chatterjee, 1993). As one author stated, “The style of the IRA gave them away. This was a mixture of the surreptitious, murmuring, and consulting in the clubs, and the machismo, the confident portrayal of manliness” (Burton, 1978, p. 111).

As Butler (1991) discussed, identity categories can serve as rallying points for social movements which oppose inequalities; however, the Northern Irish attempted to reverse the regulatory regime of British colonialism with the perpetuation of their own national masculinity. In this way, these constructions led to what Crawley, Foley and Shehan (2008) refer to as vicarious masculinity; while the PIRA wielded significant numbers, those Republican men who did not volunteer with the Provisionals no doubt relied on their association with its members to elevate their own sense of masculinity and power. In effect, nationalist men attempted to reconstruct their own discourse from the ashes of Bloody Sunday which utilized those fragments of patriarchy and which opposed the emerging feminist efforts. Subsequently, these idealized binaries and the position of men as de Beauvoir’s (1949) “Subject” or the “Absolute,” left women in the subordinate position of the “other” within Republican culture. In other words, man was positioned as both the epitome of masculinity and the “Absolute” within the army and femininity became construed as a sign of weakness – a trait not valued within the confines of masculine organizations such as the Army.

Many Provisional women, however, identified British colonialists as their central oppressors; I argue that the manipulation of gender through masculine acts became necessary to join the ranks of the PIRA. Many second-wave Irish feminists accused PIRA women of wanting to “be” men. But, because Provisional women found themselves in a militarized state, these women found little choice as to how to negotiate power. For Provisional women who were young and without children, traditional concepts of the feminine nurturer became easier to discard. As Monique Wittig (1981) argues, many feminists once fought for a sexless society in alignment with de Beauvoir’s interrogation of the false consciousness and myths that socially define “woman.” Many second-wave feminists, however, found themselves entrapped in the enforced and oppositional position

of difference with men. This, however, signifies gender as the “original” and only dividing line within society; as these feminists concentrated solely on issues of gender, they often ignored the intersections of oppression involving ethnicity, religion, and class. As an anonymous female volunteer explained:

I am very conscious of being a woman volunteer. Within the army you have to assert your position to be treated equally. . . The leadership recognizes this and I honestly couldn't say that there's much discrimination at that level. It's the lower ranks mainly. . . It still shocks me that I have two battles to fight – one against the Brits and secondly with the men of my own organization. I constantly have to prove myself to them (at least in their eyes, not my own). . . In the past it did happen that some men refused to work with female volunteers, but not now. We wouldn't stand for that kind of attitude (Fairweather et al. 1984, p. 241).

This narrative demonstrates the continued transformation of discourse by Republican women, despite the attempts of nationalists to subvert their public presences. However, because women were symbols of motherhood and nurturance, and non-heteronormative sexuality within Republican culture was disavowed, these women became forced to perpetuate the feminine/masculine dichotomies by, in many ways, replicating masculinity. In doing so, however, I assert that Provisional women not only disassociated traditional femininity from the female body, questioning the definition of woman, and became less restricted by traditional concepts of the “weak” feminine body. Following Butler's performative theory of gender, these Republican women played out her argument which identifies these heterosexualized categories as “unnatural” and written on the body through gestures and expressions (McLaren, 2002). Gender, Butler (1991) argues, may produce the notion of a naturalized “original”, but remains a kind of imitation produced from a phantasmatic ideal of heterosexual identity. Compulsory heterosexuality, Butler (1991) contends, also presumes the production of a gender and sexuality through its presumed correlative sex. However, through the use of violence and by assuming and imitating this phantasmatic idealization of masculinity, PIRA women disrupted this traditional association and were conditionally accepted within the army. By “doing” masculinity (Crawley et al. 2008; West and Zimmerman, 2002) and by emulating the actions of fellow PIRA volunteers, Provisional women also followed the culturally-produced discourse that maintains the category of man and offset the illusion of an “inner

sex” or “gender core” (Butler, 1991). In this way, women began to deny the rules of power maintained by patriarchy.

Provisional women reproduced masculinity through their movements, gestures, and clothing. In effect, all PIRA soldiers dressed in uniforms which concealed their bodies and faces, thereby obscuring the sexes of both female and male-bodied people (Collins, 1997). While all militaries require uniforms, many demarcate these national symbols with gender through, for instance, the accentuation of legs for women and the appearance of muscular arms for men. Within the PIRA, however, women and men often appeared as a collective sea of blurred gender and autonomous violence and overt feminine identities were discarded. In this way, individualized identities became erased as faces and bodies were recoded with a unified Irish presence saturated with ominous violence and masculinity. With this presence, the Irish effectively neutralized the British claim to masculinity and disassociated the colonist notion that Irish was synonymous with femininity. Through the utilization of large guns, a generally phallic symbol, women also were no longer the reflectors of authority; as Butler (1990) discussed, they now “had” the phallus – the ultimate symbol of power. Again, this provided the opportunity for women to use their bodies in order to change the discourses. The phallic character of weapons, while evolved with technology, remains contingent on the masculine domination of war and violence (Goldstein, 2001). Because women now “had” the phallus, the men they targeted became discursively passive and weak. Without feminine bodily signifiers (Crawley et al. 2008), Provisional women seemed to take on a masculine confidence in the ways they walked, spoke, and interacted with other people; they were not restricted to the idealized feminine notions of passivity and inferiority (Crilly, 1989) and could use their bodies in full force. In many ways, this gender manipulation by Provisional women aligned itself with the theories of Butler (1990), as well as Crawley et al. (2008), who suggested that in order to oppose normative categories, women (and men) must engage in non-normative actions. In order to oppose constrictive gender regimes, Butler (1990) called for the conscious performance of seemingly cultural impossibilities as a way to subvert dominant gender discourses and to expose their falsities.

What is missing, however, is whether these Provisional volunteers' status as (heterosexual) woman was questioned. As discussed by Crawley, Foley, and Shehan (2008), when a woman falls outside acceptable heteronormativity on any account, her other identities such as her sexuality become uncertain and often questioned. Because PIRA women appeared physically strong, they transcended the acceptable boundaries of femininity and may have had their sexual identities questioned. These gender destabilizers did, however, cause clear disruptions in the way British soldiers and officials viewed the PIRA; because women were known as active participants within the army, dominant cultures in no doubt felt uncomfortable and increasingly threatened by these inappropriate sexual messages of ambiguous bodies (Crilly, 1989). Indeed, *The New York Times* (1988) alluded to the PIRA's "naiveté" in sending an inexperienced woman or "schoolgirl" (commanding officer Mairéad Farrell) on a "Libya-styled" plot out in the "vigilant world" of "terrorism" (1988), again stressing not only the inherent barbarianism of Republicans, but also the presumed simplicity of the female mind. News organizations also attempted to dehumanize these Irish women and men through the use of discourses such as "terminate them" (Thatcher's Vendetta, 1988). As Frye (1983) indicates, social discourses dictate that we attempt to guess the sex of every individual and compress each person into one of two distinct categories.¹¹ West and Zimmerman (2002) also approach this argument by pointing to our culturally dictated observations of two "naturally" sexed groups of people despite the masking of genitalia. In effect, when women refuse to negotiate a normalized gender, dominant groups utilize social institutions such as the media in an attempt to "unmask" what they presume to be a "natural" self.

In response to the construction of hypermasculinity within the Army, PIRA women also became accountable to their newly realized masculine performance within the social world. Because the interaction of Provisional women and men extended past their militant assignments of strategic violence and masked collective movements, PIRA women also became a product of the "social doings" of gender or their interactions with

¹¹ For Frye (1983), the second-wave insistence that the goals of feminism are not a "unisexual" society remains critical of any attempt to blur gender distinctions.

men (West and Zimmerman, 2002, p. 129). Following the work of West and Zimmerman (2002), had Provisional women reverted to a feminine performance outside the male-dominated universe of violence, their incumbency in the female sex category would have been used to discredit their activities within the Army. In this way, PIRA women also were held responsible for protecting the working-class neighborhoods of Northern Ireland – like men, their bodies also became tools of protection. With this, gender depictions become not an essentialized outcome of sex, but a performance of gender (West and Zimmerman, 2002). Therefore, PIRA women utilized gestures and dress in order to convey confident and powerful masculinity as a way to counteract any questioning of their Army membership from locals. Gender as a learned performance which can be “done” either “right” or “wrong,” displays gender discourses on the body. Consequently, women like Farrell resisted gender and disrupted its messages by wearing ties and other clothing culturally manufactured for men (Crilly, 1989); in this way, Farrell participated in both collective and personal gender resistance actions. This again contrasted with the expectations of gendered bodies; with these masculine tools, women also appeared less constrained and more powerful – during war, women’s bodies physically became transformed (Crawley et al. 2008). In alignment with West and Zimmerman’s (2002) notion of accountability, Provisional women chose not to participate in normative gender performances; however, their performance of self often was responded to in negative ways by second-wave feminists who criticized their use of violence (Crawley et al. 2008). For West and Zimmerman (2002), accountability follows the successful displaying of gender applicable to specific situations and modified depending on the occasion demands. “Doing gender” is marked by this management of occasions and the individual’s gender-appropriate response to each – that is, the individual’s accountability to act in accordance with her/his perceived gender. However, for Farrell and other women of the PIRA, I argue that this dressing in “drag” (Butler, 1993) was not only their attempt to resist conformity for social change, but also an effort to survive and succeed within this masculine social structure. For Judith /Jack Halberstam (1997), female-bodied people who dress in drag or “drag kings” act as performers who exploit the “theatricality” of masculinity. Essentially, Halberstam’s contributions to queer theory question the

historical ownership of masculinity by men. It is important also to note that Butler, West and Zimmerman, and Frye all agree that “cross-dressing” is not reserved for women who wear “men’s” clothing or men who wear “women’s”. For these theorists, all gendered displays are a form of “drag” which manipulates and produces gender discourses.

Throughout this chapter I have described the ways in which Provisional women asserted their position within this Northern Irish revolution thereby harnessing power and transforming discourse. While Irish nationalism attempted to replace imperialist discourses on female passivity, Republican women manipulated gender discourses and, as the Troubles persisted, ultimately interjected a new definition of femininity reminiscent of women’s strength in Celtic mythology. As women refused to adhere to a supportive position within the Republican movement, the discourses moved from that in which PIRA women felt acutely scrutinized because of sexual difference, to that in which women were forcefully desexualized, and finally to a place within the movement in which women reclaimed their own strength from a Celtic past. In effect, women and men enacted what Crawley, Foley, and Shehan (2008) referred to as “gender combinations” or the grouping of women and men working together, not under the hierarchy of masculinity and femininity, but as Republicans working to achieve a common goal. While nationalist discourse certainly persists, Provisional women interrupted its formation with their enduring presence within the war. The fourth chapter of this thesis will highlight specific maneuvers, namely prison and bodily protests, which helped to rediscover those pre-colonial discourses which seemed lost amid those of imperialism and nationalism. First, however, I feel it necessary to discuss some of the Celtic images which Republican women specifically summoned in order to counteract those nationalist images which appeared more confining.

If Republicanism aspires for a united Ireland through separatism and the invocation of Gaelic traditions, then it stands to reason that women should find the power and necessary discourses they once possessed. In effect, the images I will discuss were specifically cited by those Republican women interviewed by Anne Crilly in her 1988

interview for the documentary, *Mother Ireland*.¹² While this film was the first to be censored by the 1988 broadcasting ban put in effect by the Margaret Thatcher administration, the images depicted reveal the perceived “danger” in revealing the existence of alternative femininities prior to that of colonialism.

Butler (1993) suggests there is an opportunity for empowerment and agency through the attachment of new meanings to specific signifiers. In this way, Provisional women heralded the eruption of a powerful feminine experience which was historically suppressed in language and manipulated by colonialism and nationalism in adherence to the rules of patriarchy. As PIRA soldiers, both female and male volunteers assumed the responsibility of protecting the idealized national image of Mother Ireland developed in the eighteenth century as British colonialism became increasingly oppressive (Weinstein, 2006). However, Republican activists like Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey recognized these feminine images as an opportunity for feminist action and a signifier of women’s historical oppression (Crilly, 1989). For Devlin-McAliskey, Mother Ireland possessed the voice which many women were denied and spoke of the historical injustices inflicted upon women through patriarchy, colonialism, and nationalism. While Mother Ireland became of symbol utilized by the nationalist cause, women like Devlin-McAliskey sought to reclaim Mother Ireland as her own figure of feminist struggle. Just as Devlin-McAliskey refused the silencing of her own voice, she also saw Mother Ireland as a way to voice the oppression of Irish women and an opportunity to recognize the pain and begin to heal. However, as PIRA commanding officer Mairéad Farrell told Crilly, many Provisional women developed the discursive command of “Mother Ireland, get off our backs!” when approached with these romanticized images of the submissive woman. Indeed, women like Farrell questioned the contemporary relevance of Mother Ireland and interpreted these concepts as a way to continue the subordination of women. Still other women such as Republican journalist, Nell McAffrey, highlight the powerful pre-colonist female images of Celtic Ireland such as the fearsome warrior, Queen Medb (Gaelic for

¹² Mother Ireland was targeted because of its images of Emma Groves, Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey, and Mairéad Farrell who was shot in the face and killed in Gibraltar by British Special Air Service (SAS) officers shortly after the film’s production. Farrell was unarmed (Whalen, 2007). While media outlets such as *The Times* (London) supported the British government’s “anti-terrorist efforts,” the *United Press International* (1988) called the shootings a “frenzied” attack in which one PIRA man was “riddled” with bullets.

Maeve). This iconic goddess proclaimed not only military skill, but offset the modern Catholic idolization of the Virgin by proudly proclaiming to have engaged in sex with hundreds of people and leading an triumphant army of 1,500 soldiers in war (Crilly, 1989; Goldstein, 2001). Goddesses in Celtic mythology stalk the land, ride their chargers, drive chariots, and fight victoriously in battle (Fraser, 1989). These mythic narratives of female empowerment also translated into historical texts. Roman historians claimed that Celtic women were endowed with the ability to “rain blows” and “kicks of amazing strength” upon invaders of their land; wives often were observed as stronger and more aggressive than their husbands (Aretxaga, 1997). This agency manifests itself within many narratives:

We all get basic training in all areas, both men and women. It's been embarrassing for me at times walking into a room full of men to teach them about explosives. You can hear a pin drop when they see it's a woman. They're so shocked at first – they don't expect a woman. But once you put them at their ease and make *them* feel equal . . . I think it is true to say, however, that a woman has to be better than a man initially to prove herself. After that, though, there's no obstacles. Whoever's most skilled is in charge, be it a woman or a man (Fairweather et al. 1984).

This particular PIRA woman offers her professed strength and equality with men, while indicating the existence of lingering nationalist and sexist discourses embedded within the expectations of men. However, the leadership of women within the Army and this volunteer's need to make *men* feel equal certainly indicates the reconstruction of discourses in an increasingly feminist way. During her interview with Crilly (1988), McAffrey also invokes images of the unembarrassed and overtly sexual Sheela-na-Gig as her preferred national icon in female form (Crilly, 1989). Squatting to reveal the vulva of the goddess, this carved figure of a naked women adorned archways and corners of Celtic churches and waysides built before the sixteenth century (Walker, 1983). Symbolizing birth, death, and sex and incorporating both feminine and masculine attributes, the Sheela-na-Gig demonstrates the fluidity of gender and the full range of human potential (Crilly, 1989; Walker, 1983). In effect, PIRA women could reflect either and both transformed concepts of femininity or masculinity. In this way, Republican women's activism and public presence has worked to transform national images like Mother

Ireland into a more power feminine and masculine personification of an Ireland united through the its borders and in the fluidity of gender.

Chapter Four

Surveillance and the Use of the Body as a Means of Protest

Silence or Cell?

I choose cell.

My words were quiet

But I was not silent

I did not want the cell;

It came – because

I could not bare the Silence.

(Walsh, Taken from *To My Silent Church*, 1973)

While the interaction, accountability, and performance tactics experienced and used by women of the PIRA were initially structured by Republican masculinity, when imprisoned, female soldiers found themselves not only separated from the men of the army, but also experiencing differential treatment from male prisoners. Even as all prisoners experience surveillance, this surveillance can also be a gendered experience. Ex-Republican POW Roseleen Walsh wrote *To My Silent Church* in 1973 when interned in Armagh women's prison during the prohibition of correspondence with outside Republican supporters and those male internees imprisoned at Long Kesh. While prisoners were not allowed to write anything on the walls, Walsh covered her cell walls and ceiling with poetry as political voice was silenced. Even though British guards were instructed not to allow prisoners to exchange letters, thereby forcing women to smuggle their stories from prison on bits of toilet paper, women were permitted creative expression (Thompson, 2005). Even though poetry was not deemed politically significant, Walsh's words have helped Republicans realize the discursive transformation obtained within the movement as a result of women's imprisonment. "Poetry is not a luxury," Audre Lorde (1977) explains, it illuminates those places that remain dark, hidden, and suppressed. Poetry allows women to remain strong through the darkness and

to give a name to their hopes and fears . . . to realize freedom, even when imprisoned both physically and discursively.

As the Troubles ensued, the British government attempted to negate any “street” training or political camaraderie invoked by Republican women and men through the arrest of children. As Martina Anderson explains, Republican teenagers often were arrested out of their homes by the age of 16; in this way, institutionalized punishment and surveillance was enacted to produce both docile bodies and, therefore, complacent minds (Thompson, 2005).¹³ Just as surveillance through security cameras within the streets of Belfast and Derry enacted a heightened presence of security within Northern Irish communities (Thompson, 2005), the surveillance sanctioned within the walls of prisons acutely intensified the discipline of bodies. As Foucault (1984) describes, systems of punishment utilized by regimes or institutions situate a certain “political economy” in the body through confinement, discipline, and, in particular, hierarchized surveillance in order to force the body into submission. Foucault (1984) prioritizes the body as inseparable from consciousness and subjectivity and developed his theory of panoptical surveillance, which placed the eyes of watchers everywhere. For him, questions about subjectivity become temporally and ontologically secondary to questions about the body (Foucault, 1984). For Foucault (1984), politics continued directly from war and, in the case of the Irish Troubles, the military model imposed by the British internment was enacted to prevent civil disorder and to create a disciplined mass of docile bodies. Consistent with Foucault’s theory, the imprisonment of PIRA women and men also mimicked public execution, utilized to symbolically transfer violent domination from one body to that of many. As Foucault (1984) theorized, the penitentiary became the sum total existence of these prisoners and a “theater” in which their lives could be examined from top to bottom. With stringent rules such as restricted communication between inmates and constant surveillance by guards, the British prison system not only regulated the behaviors of the prisoners, but altered the contact and modality of volunteers from subversive, undetected movements to continual supervision.

¹³ By 1988, the rate of imprisonment in Northern Ireland was higher than any other member state of the Council of Europe at 125 per 100,000 of the population. In 1986, the average length of a long-term sentence was over 10 years (Pickering, 2002).

While gender-specific disciplinary practices were not discussed by Foucault, the bodies of Armagh women became the strategic targets of such actions (McLaren, 2002) and their deprivation of liberty uncharacteristically for women, branded PIRA women as delinquents who challenged British control. Unlike their invisibility within the streets of Derry and Belfast and in the eyes of those British soldiers who deemed them harmless, PIRA women now became visible and their bodies intensely scrutinized. For Foucault (1984), when the body endures constant sight or examination through domination and power, it becomes selectively objectified. As with the Irish Troubles, women's bodies were selected for this objectification and symbolized not only their individual bodies, but also the social and political bodies inhabited by Republican women and men. Women's bodies were entangled with discourses of gender, religion, nation, and ethnicity. However, as PIRA women began to recognize the attempted demolition of Republican discourse by their British captors, women began to organize themselves much in the way they did on the outside (Pickering, 2002). As one female prisoner describes, "We ran our own wings, we had a command structure, we disciplined ourselves, we did our own washing, our own cleaning, and in later years actually did our own cooking" (p. 83). In this way, women reenacted the sense of solidarity they experienced outside prison walls, effectively deflecting the attempted control of British guards. Unlike the "discipline" imposed by British authorities, however, the order ratified by female prisoners was derived from consultation and agreement. In a way, liberty was provisionally regained by the enactment of structure by PIRA women within prisons. Yet, the colonizers also enacted gendered surveillance on them.

Inside prison walls, gender was regarded as the dividing line upon which women and men became imprisoned and surveyed; in effect, these gendered incarcerations separated 30 women in Armagh prison from nearly 400 men in Long Kesh (Scruton, Sim & Skidmore, 1991). British attempted to sexualize the bodies of PIRA women by guarding women with male warders, presiding over them by a male governor, and by attending to them by a male doctor (McCafferty, 1980). As loyal Republicans and orchestrators of violence, female prisoners also were alienated from mainstream Northern Irish feminists who criticized PIRA women's appropriation of masculinity. Mainstream

Irish feminists attempted to disprove Provisional women's dedication to feminism by maintaining the surveillance of PIRA women and their use of violence. In effect, mainstream feminists pushed for the equal recognition of women within legislation, but did not adhere to the Republican notion of separating from the British government. Indeed, mainstream feminists also held strict notions about the qualifications of "feminist" which also encompassed notions about appropriate gender displays and practices. In effect, these walls ascribed symbols of disobedience on female prisoners not just because of their "terrorist" actions, but also because they were deviating from gender; unlike the invisible women walking the streets of Belfast smuggling weapons, these women now were visible and in need of discipline (Scruton et al. 1991). While physical bodily force was employed to enforce passivity, British guards also made comments such as "Oh you've put on weight" (Thompson, 2005) to female prisoners in order to create a form of effective self-surveillance. Sandra Bartky (1988) also relates the Foucauldian ideas of surveillance and disciplined bodies to women by recognizing that they are constantly watched by both women and men and eventually by themselves. However, unlike the practice of femininity encouraged by many women, these Republicans initially continued their enforcement of masculine behavior dictated by the Army even within the gender-segregated walls of Armagh. Just as all PIRA soldiers were obliged to behave in masculine ways within the streets of Belfast and Derry, Provisional women demanded prison guards treat them just as they would their male comrades in Long Kesh. In this way, PIRA women refuted gender difference.

While many feminists have adopted theories which analyze the power of discourse over bodies, scholars such as Bartky also have been critical of Foucault's rejection of individual and communal agency. Within his theories of surveillance and discipline, Foucault talks less about the points at which body discipline fails to produce docile subjects, either because the subjects refuse to be controlled, even at the cost of death, or because the punishment becomes excessive and irrational (Aretxaga, 1995). Without community safe houses or the weapons which, in many cases, gave Irish women and men a voice, those PIRA volunteers arrested by the British and charged with "terrorist" acts resorted to the only weapon left to them – their bodies and their lives

(Aretxaga, 1997). In effect, the prisoner exchanges her body for silence; she sends it out into the space of interrogation detached from herself in order to emotionally protect herself from political punishment and surveillance and to enact her own agency (Feldman, 1991). During questioning, women often maintained their silence, laughed, or fell asleep in order to refute the unjust political order of hegemonic masculinity and sexual overtones within the interrogation room (Pickering, 2002). As PIRA woman Liz told Sharon Pickering (2002):

Two [men were] sitting in front of you, you were sitting in the middle of the room in a chair, and two [men were] sitting behind you. And then you had the nice RUC officer and then you had the one that was scaring you. But at one stage there was actually seven of them. There was three of them behind me with their chairs really close up tight to me, you know, and actual body contact (p. 80).

In Northern Ireland, women in Armagh and men in Long Kesh considered themselves political prisoners and first won this special status by holding their bodies ransom during the hunger strike¹⁴ of 1972. Despite the Catholic Church's condemnation of the hunger strike as suicide, the prisoners and their supporters within the Catholic ghettos believed these volunteers were fighting for their dignity. By hunger striking, the protestors re-inscribed the cause of Irish Republicanism into their starving flesh through a performance of turning their bodies into a spectacle (Ellman, 1993). Self-starvation, in this sense, captured the sympathies of co-Republicans; their bodies became a ransom or a bargaining chip when no other alternatives were available. Indeed, the act of violence invested women's bodies with agency; the body, altered by violence, developed its own political discourses which altered the movement of history (Feldman, 1991). When considering violence in this way, as a powerful tool utilized by marginalized, oppressed, and socially abused groups, it can repair as much as it hurts. While starvation certainly destroys the individual body, it sends powerful political messages of dissent to the oppressor, as well as awareness to those who are similarly subjugated. However, despite the international attention received by the hunger-striking men, who are typically viewed as strong and powerful, the PIRA women, who are many times portrayed as frail, weak,

¹⁴ The practice of hunger striking predates Christianity in Ireland and often was used as a way to procure justice (Chatterjee, 1993).

and invisible, received very little recognition (Ellman, 1993). As Bartky (1988) points out, women in patriarchy are expected to make themselves small, narrow, and harmless, while men are expected to make themselves bigger. As she explains, to succeed in the provision of a thin body does not gain women respect or any social power. In effect, these women's efforts to engage in social protest lacked importance because these starving women were effectively mastering a socially constructed feminine body discipline (Bartky, 1988). As Farrell¹⁵ describes:

When I went on hunger-strike I knew I'd have to mentally cut off my own feelings and stand outside it all. Yes, I had thought about dying and whether I could go through with it before starting . . . We were only on it for 19 days before it was called off. We kept on thinking about the men and that they must have been going through, which made our situation pall by comparison. (Fairweather et al, 1984, p. 227).

Heteronormativity dictates that women ignore the significance of their own suffering and emotionally disconnect from their bodies in order to effectively “support” the campaign of men. While women starved themselves for the cause of a united Ireland, only men's suffering was validated – even by the women themselves. In effect, the women of Armagh suspended their hunger strike after 19 days in order to refocus the media attention and support of the community back onto the men. In this way, men's suffering was inscribed in their own bodies through their fighting. Indeed, upon seeing their naked and beaten bodies, visitors to Long Kesh during the hunger-strikes connected Republican male bodies to that of Jesus Christ, discursively elevating the starving men to martyrdom status. Women's suffering, on the other hand, remained invisible or inscribed in the bodies of others: fathers, sons, brothers, and husbands. Because Armagh women were neither seen as political or maternal subjects by outsiders nor identified as mothers, their suffering remained unknown and their bodies unimportant (Aretxaga, 1997). Unlike the connections men received to that of Christ, PIRA women were demoted to a sub-human class. As Farrell explains, “Some of them [screws] used to shout in, ‘Why don't you

¹⁵ Farrell was sentenced in the mid-seventies for 14 years in Armagh women's prison for causing three explosions, possessing two firearms, and being a member of the PIRA. Farrell was released after 10 years, which is the minimum sentence for being a member of the PIRA (Mulholland, 2003).

hurry up and die, you bastards?’” (Fairweather et al, 1984, p. 228).¹⁶ There is, however, no written evidence of prison guards asking this of the men in Long Kesh.

After four years of recognized political positioning, however, PIRA prisoners once again resorted to the use of their bodies as ransom when the British government withdrew the “special category” status from Republican prisoners – these women and men now were considered and treated as Ordinary Decent Criminals in British legal parlance (Aretxaga, 1995). After the withdrawal of political status from prisoners in 1976, the Republican women in Armagh went on a work strike, refusing to sew prison uniforms or do laundry – the mandatory jobs for regular inmates. The protest carried with it the loss of usual privileges: remission of sentences, visits, parcels, hours for free association, and education (Aretxaga, 1997). What was central to prisoners’ lives – personal relationships and their freedom – thus became governed and determined by a series of rules, regulations, and standing orders. Visits were tightly controlled, although notes and instructions to families and fellow PIRA members often were smuggled out. From the start, however, gendered forms of discipline obscured political visibility; men, unlike the women, could not wear their own clothes which, again, constructed a more severe and personalized degree of suffering for prisoners in Long Kesh. Interestingly, without uniforms and the built-in hiding places for paraphernalia provided by clothes, the male body became more prized for its interiorities rather than for the physical protuberances typically valued within society (Ellman, 1993). Rather than length, depth became the measure of body superiority and in this way, bodily discourses and hierarchies became (if only briefly) inverted. While social power often is judged and valued based on the length and size (or lack) of the penis, the imprisoned Irish Republican body became esteemed for its potential to hide paraphernalia. Indeed, the female body became appreciated for its “pockets” and capacity to act subversively against the British (Ellman, 1993).

To British guards, however, female prisoners exemplified the notion of female hysteria. Indeed, as Elaine Showalter (1985) points out, the term hysterical itself has

¹⁶ ‘Screw’ was discursively applied to represent British guards (Feldman, 1991).. Interestingly, ‘screw’ also is used to signify heterosexual sex and denotes violence within the act.

become almost interchangeable with the term feminine. While PIRA women cried within their cells, often refused to eat, and even attempted suicide (Thompson, 2005), the infliction of pain, isolation, and confinement in no doubt triggered the buried emotionality not permitted within the hypermasculine ranks of the Provisionals. While emotionality often has been deemed epistemologically irrelevant (Pickering, 2001), attention to the importance of emotions disrupts the taboo status of feelings within the research process. Even as the emotions of female prisoners were scrutinized, disparaged, and presumed irrational, if the emotionality of the male prisoners were integrated into research, the dichotomy of female hysteria and male strength would be shattered. With these binaries in place and despite the harshness of prison conditions, however, women initially attempted to assert gender sameness with the men of Long Kesh by improvising PIRA uniforms with their own clothing – uniforms which negated gender difference. In effect, if Armagh women dressed in the same uniforms as other female prisoners, PIRA women would be accepting those gender binaries which attempted to create a sea of women undefined by political affiliation or belief. By wearing crude PIRA uniforms which consisted of the same berets, belts, shoes, etc. which also were worn by the men outside prison walls, Provisional women attempted to maintain their equality with Long Kesh men in spite of their separation.

Despite this assertion of gender equality, however, British male guards often imposed sexual power in order to imply difference through physical violence and strip searching or sexual bullying PIRA women (Scruton et al. 1991). While PIRA women were allowed to wear their own clothing, they did not resort to hiding paraphernalia in their genitals as it was unnecessary. However, male British guards continued to utilize strip searching as a form of intimidation and humiliation. Within the walls of Armagh prison, more than 2,000 strip searches were carried out by British men, with an account of one woman being subjected to 240 strip searches during her incarceration (Loughran, 1986). In this way, the body becomes a stage on which the state imposed material force or what many women referred to as legalized rape (Pickering, 2002); the state effectively others particular bodies in order to reproduce its own masculinity (Feldman, 1991). As Catherine MacKinnon (1989) explains, sexuality under patriarchy becomes socially

constructed by male power, defined by men, forced on women, and constitutes the meaning of gender.

For MacKinnon (1989), the meaning or practice of sexual violence cannot be categorized away as violence. Sexual acts of dominance, MacKinnon writes, are as sexually arousing as sex itself. For her, to say that rape is violence and not sex preserves the “sex is good” norm by simply distinguishing forced sex as “not sex” (p. 164). Rather than “accepting” this sexual objectification, however, PIRA women fought physically and discursively to prevent it. As power diminished, women actively sought the need to control at least some aspects of their bodies. Women physically protected their bodies from forced searches and exposure barricading themselves within their cells or physically fighting back (Pickering, 2002). In this way, women sought to protect the non-conforming bodies which were not allowed cultural articulation amid heteronormativity (Butler, 1993). As West and Zimmerman (2002) discuss, many assume that gender equates to one’s membership in a particular sex category. In this sense, I argue that Armagh guards attempted to hold the incarcerated women accountable to femininity by penalizing them for stepping outside the conventional constructs of gender. Despite these women’s political intentions, gender was an inescapable dimension of their incarceration and when gender became “visible,” power was maintained by the punishment of their bodies (Aretxaga, 1997). These institutionalized sexual forms of discipline also aimed to not only subdue the individual prisoners, but also the community to which they belonged. If the women defending the streets of Republican communities became a metaphor of people’s resistance, the officers’ assault on incarcerated women was an affirmation of the masculine British power over the feminine Irish (Aretxaga, 1997). At their breaking point, these systematic series of punishments and abuses culminated in 1980 when British military men entered the cells of PIRA Armagh prisoners, kicking and punching women. In this way, the guards invaded not only the women’s bodies, but their cells which had become an extension of their body and political home. According to prisoners, it was these violent events followed by a two-day lock up in their cells that sparked the women’s participation in the “dirty protest” (Aretxaga, 1995).

While the British prison authorities perhaps initiated the infliction of filth on the prisoners by locking women in their cells, they did not anticipate that the women would turn their punishment into a means of protest by seizing control of the filth and inflicting it on the sensory spaces of the guards. Following their two-day lock up, the women of Armagh demanded a protected political prisoner status by refusing to leave their cells except to go to mass and visits. In a sense and as Foucault illustrated, “The prison makes possible, even encourages, the organization of a milieu of delinquents, loyal to one another, hierarchized, ready to aid and abet any future criminal act” (Foucault, 1984, p. 228). In coordinated actions, the women first emptied the chamber pots through windows and peepholes of the doors, recognizing that they were being subjected to the male gaze of the guards. When these officers boarded up their means of surveillance, the prisoners then began to dispose of feces by leaving it in a corner of their cells; however, this allowed the guards to befoul the mattresses and blankets of prisoners with feces during cell searches. In turn, the prisoners began to smear their feces on the walls of their cells (Aretxaga, 1995). While the men of Long Kesh initiated the dirty protest in 1978 after attacks by guards on their way to the lavatories and showers (Corcoran, 2004), PIRA men did not consider this type of protest appropriate for female soldiers even under similarly dehumanizing and humiliating circumstances. Provisional women were strictly prohibited by PIRA men from engaging in these activities which the dominant culture considered “unladylike.” Even as PIRA women managed to reconstruct themselves under somewhat masculine terms outside prison walls, the idea of women taking full control of their bodies without the command of men seemed incomprehensible. However, what remained unfathomable by the men of Long Kesh was the sexualization of women’s bodies through strip-searching. Men were not subjected to the unwanted gazes of male British guards in the ways suffered by Armagh women. In this way, women considered no other choice but to engage in the dirty protests which would protect their bodies from this violence and sexualization. In effect, I contend that Armagh women recognized the power of strip-searching in producing Foucault’s docile bodies and attempted to negate the use of gendered punishment and surveillance by reclaiming their bodies in holding them for ransom. Armagh’s dirty protest also challenged the models of femininity embedded in the

idealized Catholic mother and elaborated in the discourse surrounding the image of Mother Ireland. Their participation in the dirty protest was for these PIRA women an attempt to erase gender difference introduced by the penal institution and to thus reassert their political visibility as part of the masculine army. The visibility of urine and feces once again desexualized these women and counteracted the image of Irish women as passive victims. However, despite these women's persistence in the dirty protest for 13 months, the greater number of Long Kesh prisoners and the longer duration of the men's protest garnered all the attention of both the media and the Republican movement. At its start, many other Irish feminists also considered the Armagh protest a mimicry of Long Kesh's and initially withheld their support due to their opposition to Republican violence (Aretxaga, 1997). Without the initial support of many women in Northern Irish communities, these women alone were left to protest their violent treatment from within the prison system.

This reasserted political legitimacy despite special prison status also was largely resisted by the British parliament and, in particular, its prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. As leader of the patriarchal government, Thatcher condemned the women's actions. She also perpetuated the idea of a "need" for Irish colonization by emphasizing these prisoners' self-inflicted filth. Thatcher did not see these women's actions as a dispute over the humanity of prison conditions and a call for political status, but the legitimacy of PIRA violence. She responded determinedly that, "There is no such thing as political murder, political bombing, or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing, and criminal violence. We will not compromise on this. There will be no political status" (Mulholland, 2003, p. 109). Consequently, the prisoners' dirtiness also emphasized the metaphor of barbarianism often associated with the Irish in popular British discourse. From Elizabethian writings to Victorian accounts of Ireland, there have been recurrent descriptions of the dirtiness, misery, and primitiveness of the country and its people (Dooley, 1998). In effect, the Irish became racially othered so that "Irish" and "primitive" soon became interchangeable. The image of the primal Irish became highlighted through English jokes, cartoons, and other popular forms of representation (Dooley, 1998). Such images have predominantly multiplied during times

of political turmoil in Ireland, with the Irish frequently depicted with pig-like features (Aretxaga, 1995).

During the Troubles, British televisions also were banned from broadcasting the PIRA's comments directly; this perpetuated the British constructions of Irishness as equivalent to savagery (Thompson, 2005) and women were not immune to these analogies. A British headline posted in *The Mirror* read, "IRA's top girl bombers free; Women plotted terror blitz across Britain" (1998), while *The Sunday Times* (London) categorically sexualized the body of commanding officer Farrell by sexually linking her to a British SAS officer (1997). While these allegations were refuted by Farrell's family and *The Irish Times* (1997), Britain's international influence no doubt prevailed. Aretxaga (1995) also notes that "prison officers felt defiled coming into contact with prisoners. As the women looked increasingly dirty, the [female] guards tried to counteract defilement by increasing their care in making themselves up and having their hair done." The presence of feces and urine clearly emphasized this "dirtiness;" however, what made 30 women even more revolting than 400 men was the exposure of menstrual blood.

While Republican women began their dirty protest under the context of sameness with the imprisoned men – the struggle undertaken by equal comrades for equal political recognition – the presence of menstrual blood inadvertently transformed the Armagh prisoners' dirty, asexual bodies into the sexualized bodies of women. While the excrement initially reemphasized their political standing within the PIRA, their menstrual blood smeared on the walls of their cells threatened this uniformity of gender. In Catholic ideology, menstrual blood also becomes a sign of the uncontrollability of women's bodies – a danger that only the mother of god escaped. For this reason, culture dictates that it always must be hidden from sight and particularly hidden from men (Laws, 1990). Consequently, the Catholic backbone of the PIRA initially deemed the women's participation in the dirty protest as inappropriate even for those Republicans convicted of "terrorism" and indicated the "weeping of a disappointed uterus" (Laws, 1990, p. 137). One of the protesting prisoners recounted:

They didn't say that; they said that we were women, that we were different. But we knew it was because of our periods. These were men who had killed, had been imprisoned and they couldn't say the word 'period!' (Aretxaga, 1997, p. 127)

Blood, however, eventually became an emblem of pain and violence used by the women in Armagh as a weapon against the British penal institution. In this way, the women utilized the very instruments of oppression intended to keep them subordinate and began to highlight their oppression not just as colonized people, but also as women. As Butler (1991) writes, identity categories used by regulatory establishments can take on alternative meanings by becoming rallying points for liberation against oppression. Rather than being kept hidden, the blood became a signifier of violence and central to the building of a discursive protest. While the social taboo of discussing female bodily functions historically has played a part in silencing women's struggles, the Armagh women were forced to overcome this shame, thereby denying the totalizing power of the patriarchal social order. In this sense, I contend that the Armagh women effectively eluded the discipline and punishment which Foucault intimately joined. For Foucault, the prison system must uphold a series of conditions in order to effectively realize the goals of imprisonment. In line with his theory, the imprisoned subject must not only be constantly visible, but also must be trainable. The PIRA Armagh women challenged both grounds of control through the concealment of the male "peep" holes and by resisting the training that demanded the use of the chamber pots. In the words of a former prison officer: "You could see the dirty protest as virtually resistance to toilet training" (Neti, 2003, p. 88). In this resistance to training, the prisoners called into question the prison's capacity to govern them by refusing the shame associated with women's uncontrollable bodies and their functions (Neti, 2003). The presence of blood also connected the discourses of prison and sexual violence with colonization in a way that the men could not. Unlike the transformation provoked by the women as mothers, the political effects of the Armagh dirty protest tapped into an experience of femaleness typically excluded from public discourse (Aretxaga, 1997). This visibility of menstruation effectively justified the Armagh prisoner's oppression as *women* within mainstream Irish feminism and discursively separated a woman's suffering from the nurturance of a mother. In this way,

the dirty protests also transformed mainstream feminism into a movement which began to accept difference of political belief and redefined the constructs of gender accepted by mainstream feminists. Indeed, the competition which patriarchy and colonialism provoked within these separate factions of women began to melt. Rather than discounting or othering difference, many feminists began to unite not in despite of difference, but in acceptance of it.

The dirty protest also enacted those lost discourses of Celtic Ireland which recognized women's bodies as powerful. For instance, the name of Celtic Fairy Queen Mab signified "mead" or a red drink representing sovereignty and which mythologized as a concoction of the Queen's own menstrual blood as the feminine wine of wisdom (Walker, 1983). Menstrual blood symbolized the sacred spirit and, when consumed, enabled Celtic kings to transform into gods (Walker, 1983). In Irish tradition, red also symbolizes the sacred Phoenix which possesses the ability to live forever and signifies apotheosis after death (Walker, 1983). The Phoenix, while symbolizing the Irish people's ability to "rise" from the ashes of Bloody Sunday, also signifies Republican women's ability to conquer the discursive hold colonialism and patriarchy possessed over this bodily function. In effect, menstrual blood transformed from its patriarchal meaning of draining and weakness to that which typically defines the blood of kinship, meaning strength and power (Laws, 1990). Indeed, PIRA women themselves began to recognize their own suffering in relationship to the Republican cause; as one Republican POW of Maghaberry prison told Mary Corcoran (2004):

It's even harder being a woman. The men are always OK in the Blocks because there was a bigger number, over 300 prisoners . . . [but the screws] weren't getting results and they weren't breaking the women. We had to be stronger because there was a smaller number of us. There was just constant fighting all of the time, and we just had to be stronger (p. 130).

With their protest of sexual assault and the realization of women's suffering within Armagh prison, the PIRA's dirty protest officially became a woman's issue. As journalist McCafferty (1980) argued in *The Irish Times*, the "menstrual blood on the walls of Armagh prison smells to high heaven. Shall we (feminists) turn our noses up?" (p. 19). In McCafferty's eyes, women had been denied one of the fundamental rights of

women – the right to bodily integrity. In turn, PIRA commanding officer Farrell became the new model of a feminist Republican hero and, following her death, achieved Republican martyrdom on the same level as those men who died in the hunger strikes at Long Kesh. As a child caught in the riots of the previous decade and through this power of witnessing, women like Farrell refused intimidation as an adult by seeking membership in this Republican paramilitary faction. She not only openly rejected feminine images of passivity, but also proved her leadership qualities within a male-dominated organization. In a letter smuggled out of prison, Farrell wrote:

[The dirty protest] is a feminist issue in so far as we are women, even though we are treated like criminals. It is a feminist issue when the network of this jail is completely geared to male domination. The governor, the assistant governor, and the doctor are all males . . . If this is not a feminist issue, then we feel that the word feminist needs to be redefined to suit these people who feel that “feminist” applies to a certain section of women rather than encompassing women everywhere, regardless of politically held views (Weinstein, 2006, p. 26).

These words provoked many other groups of feminists to picket outside the prison against sexual abuse both in the interrogation and imprisonment of PIRA soldiers (Loughran, 1986). Where they once were divided along the lines of violence and its use to advocate for social justice, many feminists now rallied around Republican feminists as symbols of their struggle against patriarchy; together, many women believed that Republicanism and feminism could destroy and kill *Mother Ireland*.

As I discussed in chapter three of this thesis, the discursive transformation enabled by women’s participation in the PIRA signified the journey from intolerance, to the acceptance of women and the proven fluidity of gender, to the recognition of women and their bodies as sexualized beings. In many ways, the dirty protests of Armagh women’s prison helped to facilitate this acceptance and the integration of Republicanism and feminism on a wider level. While feminism historically provided the basis for agency and tangible change, many Northern Irish feminists began to question the ability of conventional feminism to address the needs of all women. In effect, women’s participation not only helped to deconstruct the meaning of nationalism, but also the applicability of a feminism that does not encompass the needs and identities of women

(and men) living outside the “mainstream.” As a male paramilitary prisoner reflected, “. . . the question for us is to challenge our own sexism and the ideas and structures which give us privilege . . . there is no point in putting a coat of paint called feminism over our thinking – we have to change that thinking” (Talbot, 2004, p. 138). As the discourse transformed, many Republican men also began to accept women as legitimate political subjects and even began to study feminist issues, which validated the women’s suffering within the Republican community (Weinstein, 2006). The strategy of “raising Armagh” and feminist consciousness on these issues also paid off through the recognition of women by the PIRA’s political arm, Sinn Féin, in which women began to and still serve in equal numbers with men, and through the inclusion of women as heroes of the Republican past (Loughran, 1986). Most importantly, these protests also promoted the ideology of many Republican women that feminism could not exist outside prevailing structures of power, which in Northern Ireland were inescapably defined by gender, ethnicity, class, and colonization. While this transformation of discourse faced the challenge of institutionalized patriarchy introduced during the peace process, the reclamation of Celtic female strength by PIRA women enabled the building of a political foundation by women not duplicated in many other nations.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Reflection

Symbolic imagery, strategic violence, and bodily protests erupted from the suppression and erasure of the “Irish” identity¹⁷, providing the women and men of Northern Ireland the space to develop their own subjectivity amid the omnipresent and institutionalized forces of the British Empire. By joining the Provisionals and through the eventual recognition of women’s collectivity, Republican feminists also reconstructed their own discourses which better illustrated the intersectionalities that affected their lives within this troubled nation. Through women’s transcendence of traditional feminine norms, PIRA women effectively diverted the patriarchal and imperialist discourses which dictated their political and social subordination. While the Irish separatism advocated by Republicanism enabled the overt celebration of the Irish language, culture, music, and the country itself, PIRA women prompted the distinctive recognition of activist women within colonized countries. Indeed, motherhood does not have to be the only symbolic representation of the women’s experiences, nor is a mother’s pain the only legitimate site of women’s suffering. As author Paula Meehan expresses in “The Pattern” (1994):

We might have made a new start
As women without tags like mother, wife,
Sister, daughter, taken our chances from there.

Female camaraderie and acknowledgment also translated into physical imagery along the streets of Belfast during the 1980s with the unapologetic mural entitled, “Solidarity Between Women in Armed Struggle” (Aretxaga, 1997). Now expunged, this mural depicted a PIRA woman alongside women militants from the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Southwest African People’s Organization of Namibia encircled by the feminist symbol. In this way, the image emphasizes not the suffering of the mother or

¹⁷ With this thesis, I chose to focus primarily on the construction of gender within the Irish Troubles rather than the construction of ethnicity.

motherland, but the transnational solidarity of active women. In line with Butler's (1993) theory of collective disidentification, once feminists recognize the infused overriding norms, we can initiate the reconceptualization of which bodies count as critical beings. Through this disidentification, feminists also can work to eradicate these forcible norms which dictate the lives and sculpt the bodies of women; if we envision these norms as constructed and not as essential, then as a collective we have the greater power to change it. In effect, discourses reconstructed by women such as those in Northern Ireland emphasize the necessity of a feminism that does not allow one type of woman to stand alone in the demand of liberation for all others and also intimately connect this awakened consciousness with a practical political agenda.

Silence, in this way, must be vehemently challenged within political and social practices in order to ensure that individual voices and faces cannot be erased. While Northern Irish women found silence intolerable and resisted by raising their voices in the most demanding and uncompromising ways, contemporary scholars must not allow these feminist declarations to become stifled. Just as theory allows the potential for healing and empowered feminist resistance, unsanitized accounts of women's struggles remind us of historical paths endured in order to oppose and expand dominant discourses. In effect, these voices and accounts ensure that others do not fall into the same dangerous and fatal silence and create the possibility of alternative paths. As Sinn Féin member, Mary Nelis, explains, "[We] were to be, on the one hand, Mary, the Virgin, and on the other, Eve. You know, the Seducer and the Producer, almost in that order. I followed that road, because I couldn't see any other road for me to follow, and because we were very much under the control of men" (Thompson, 2005). Through their collective struggles, however, women like Nelis have become actively involved in the formation of the public sphere. In this way, theory and the sounding of women's voices become intimately joined in the creation of spaces within which women can heal and become empowered. In Northern Ireland, dissent remains threatening to the State and female dissent in particular disrupts the discourses of patriarchy and colonialism which expect passive domesticity. With the expression of social grief through theory and the voicing of women's words, however, the creation of feminist resistances, whether mass-based or within everyday

disturbances, becomes inevitable. Past struggles and triumphs cannot be ignored; as Republican woman, Monica Culbert explains, “We lost a lot, but we learned a lot. You can’t let those years be lost. They have to count somewhere. Maybe this history will be that reckoning.” (Hackett, 2004, p. 145).

After more than a decade in prison, PIRA woman Ella O’Dwyer¹⁸ was released from the Maghaberry British prison. Upon her release, her only words to the media were the traditional Provisional war cry, *Tiocfaidh r 1* (It’s our day)! (Thompson, 2005). In this way, O’Dwyer alluded to what many Provisionals hoped would be the equal recognition of the Republican Party within Northern Ireland. Beyond the “visibility” women demanded within the Republican and feminist movements, however, PIRA women became overshadowed outside these realms by the male-dominated politicians who initiated the 1994 Northern Irish peace talks. Because the attitudes and actions of Republican feminists seemed to run against governing discourses which associate women with peace and men with war, women were not recognized as socially relevant in a peaceful Ireland. While Republicans often celebrate PIRA women such as Mairéad Farrell on International Women’s Day, other political parties within Northern Ireland looked upon this celebration as a legitimization of violence against the State. Indeed, Ian Paisley, leader of the Unionist party, shouted to Sinn Féin member Nelis “Put her back to the kitchen!” While Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams challenged Paisley, this demeaning attitude toward women outside the Republican movement indicated the beginning and not the end of the struggle for feminist recognition within Northern Ireland.

Within the popular media and following the PIRA cease-fire, there also was no mention of women in the multiple declarations and news reports about peace; as one Republican feminist noted, “There is no peace yet, only deals made by male politicians behind closed doors; it’s all very confusing” (Aretxaga, 1997, p. 3). Sinn Féin also became excluded in all political talks and, in 1996 the PIRA forced their inclusion

¹⁸ O’Dwyer was dubbed one of the “most notorious bombers” within the PIRA of the 1980’s. In 1985, she was arrested in Scotland and charged with conspiracy to cause explosions. Many PIRA women and men faced these charges and often sentenced to life in prison. With the 1998 Belfast (or Good Friday) Agreement, however, Irish prisoners were released. Paramilitary members who refused to accept the terms of the agreement, however, remain in imprisoned. The Belfast Agreement initiated in 1998 and finalized as the Comprehensive Agreement in 2005 signified the complete decommissioning of the PIRA in Northern Ireland. The current government consists of the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin, which hold equal power in the Northern Ireland Assembly government (Mulholland, 2003).

through a breakdown of the cease-fire. For Republican feminists, a lasting peace only could coalesce through an open discussion involving all parts of every community within Northern Ireland and these exclusive discussions signified that feminist actions were needed more than ever. As a preemptive move to the dismissal of women, Republican women also formed the *Clar na mBan* (Women's Agenda), whose central goal was to formulate and advance a "women's agenda for peace" (Aretxaga, 1997). In effect, gender power systems and political culture cannot be understood in isolation from the intersections of colonial and nationalist relations. Likewise, both the constructions of conflict and peace remained inscribed with gender.

With this thesis, I have sought to retrace the feminist path enabled by the PIRA women of Northern Ireland and the ways in which women made possible the reconstruction of discourses splintered by the violence of Bloody Sunday. I contend that through the use of their bodies and the manipulation of gender, PIRA women effectively stabilized their positions within the Republican movement and became accepted as women who did not need to conform to traditional notions of femininity. Provisional women effectively transcended oppressive gender discourses by reclaiming their bodies and became crucial to the local organization of the conflict, Republican culture, and the reconfiguration of the Northern Irish feminist movement. I also have shown how gender can become uncoupled from women's perceived sex categories and how Republican women utilized agency in order to question the prison system's ability to effectively create "docile" bodies through surveillance and discipline. These women and their complex social practices also challenge the assumption that women are the passive bystanders of a war and act solely as the supporters of men.

Through the use of feminist and queer theory, I also sought to highlight the ways in which gender is constructed in relationship to ethnicity/race, class, religion, and colonialism, and therefore flexible. In this way, my research approach can be utilized to analyze and highlight other women within distinctive historical and situational spaces who have surpassed traditional gender discourses to become legitimate actors within national movements. While Ireland remains fragmented and enduring political discord between Northern Irish political parties has complicated feminist progress, the

perseverance of PIRA women within the Troubles, facilitated conversations between Republican women and men and enabled women's acceptance within their own party. Even as antifeminist sentiments still remain, Republican women have begun to redefine those discourses which historically seemed immovable and continue to work alongside men in opposition to imperialist institutions.

While it was not my attempt to canonize these women among either Republican or feminist movements, I feel the contest in which these women found themselves and the ways in which they chose to fight oppression must be valued and understood. Amid political and social violence imposed by colonizers, it is not surprising that women respond to the seduction of nationalist visions – visions which, despite their dichotomies, seem to accord them more agency in the creation of culture systems than did any of the visions of their colonizers (Narayan, 1997). Following negotiations of peace, however, it is my contention that women should not abandon these tactics when it appears that the hegemonic discourse attempts to overshadow their political and social progresses, dictating that they resume their submissive, domestic positions within the home and family. While the end of pervasive warfare becomes attractive to those people who have endured years of violent conflict, “peace” does not necessarily entail the end of oppression for all people; for women, these cease-fires often can heighten it. Indeed, this study is not the end of the story; I intentionally leave it open as a call to action.

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