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*For he sings of the Bold Fenian Men
And the Boys of the Old Brigade.
What about the women who stood there too
“When history was made” ...?
Ireland, Mother Ireland, with your freedom-loving sons,
Did your daughters run and hide at the sound of guns?
(Brian Moore, Invisible Women)*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. Women in 19th and 20th Century Irish History	4
2.1. The Ladies' Land League	4
2.2. Inghinidhe na hEireann	7
2.3. Cumann na mBan	11
2.3.1. The Easter Rising and its Aftermath	12
2.3.2. Partition, Civil War and the Free State	15
2.3.3. De Valera's Ireland	19
2.4. A Note on the North	21
3. Nationalism in the Irish Context	24
3.1. Community	25
3.1.1. Culture and Narrative	26
3.2. Struggle for Independence	27
3.3. Power	30
3.4. "The Troubles" – A Religious Conflict or a Clash of Cultures?	31
3.4.1. Political and Religious Affiliations	32
3.5. A Nation Once Again?	34
4. A Brief History of "the Troubles"	36
4.1. Before "the Troubles"	36
4.2. The North and the Civil Rights Movement	37
4.2.1. The Battle of the Bogside	38
4.3. The 1970s: Operation Demetrius, Bloody Sunday and Sunningdale	40
4.4. The 1980s: Trials, Agreements and the End of Abstentionism	43
4.5. The 1990s: Ceasefires, Dissenters and the Peace Process	44
4.6. The Aftermath: Reform, Compromise and Power-Sharing	45
5. The Prison Struggle	46
5.1. Internment	48
5.2. The Fight for Political Status	49
5.3. Political Status	50
5.4. The Loss of Special Category	51
5.4.1. The Conveyor Belt System	53
5.4.2. The Birth of the Blanket Protest	57
5.4.3. The Armagh Dirty Protest	59
5.4.4. The Hungerstrikes	62
5.5. Strip Searching	65
5.6. Prison Morale	66

6. The Larger Prison Struggle	69
6.1. Everyday Life	69
6.2. Domestic Violence, Structural Violence and Bodily Autonomy	74
6.3. Collective Action – Resistance Against the Status Quo	79
6.3.1. Peace Initiatives	80
6.3.1.1. The Derry Peace Women	81
6.3.1.2. The Peace People	82
6.3.2. The Women’s Movement	84
6.3.2.1. The Northern Ireland Women’s Rights Movement	84
6.3.2.2. Armagh – Feminist Issue or Nationalist Struggle?	86
6.3.2.3. The Thatcher Years	89
7. Protestant Women during “the Troubles”	91
7.1. Women and the Paramilitaries	93
7.2. Women and Religion: Ulster Protestantism	97
7.3. Women and Party Politics: Ann Dickson	99
8. Conclusion	102
9. Outlook and Perspectives	104
10. Bibliography	106
11. English Abstract	114
12. German Abstract	115
13. Curriculum Vitae	116

1. Introduction

This thesis aims primarily to illustrate the various fates of women during “the Troubles” in the North of Ireland. It will therefore explore the stories and experiences of women from diverse backgrounds, allowing them to speak in their own voice rather than turning them into muted objects of an abstract historiography. In her book *The Serpent and the Goddess* Mary Condren addresses a crucial problem of history: “Up until recently, not only has history been written by men, usually about men, and for men, but men have also taken upon themselves the interpretation of the sources in ways that traditionally have guaranteed their own supremacy.” (xxi) Adrienne Rich takes the same line when she analyses how

[t]he entire history of women’s struggle for self-determination has been muffled in silence over and over. One serious cultural obstacle encountered by any feminist writer is that each feminist work has tended to be received as if it emerged out of nowhere; as if each of us had lived, thought, and worked without any historical past or contextual present. This is one of the ways in which women’s work and thinking has been made to seem sporadic, errant, orphaned of any tradition of its own. (qtd. in Ward, “Unmanageable Revolutionaries” 1)

Methodologically, this thesis is therefore based on the feminist standpoint theory as defined by Nancy Hartsock, who argues that “[a]t bottom feminism is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women.” (qtd. in Hekman 342f) The feminist standpoint “expresses female experience at a particular time and place, located within a particular set of social relations.” (qtd. in Hekman 344) The thesis at hand will focus on women from a Catholic background and concentrate on the first fifteen years of “the Troubles”. This period was the densest with regard to developments, both politically and in terms of awareness-raising and the generation of a culture of female agency. However, at the beginning some general introduction is required for a better understanding.

The second chapter of this thesis will explore the roles women have played in the long and painful history of the Emerald Isle. The statelet of Northern Ireland did not exist before 1920 and its contested history cannot be understood without knowledge of the narrative leading up to its foundation. The contributions of the first women on the

political stage had paved the way for their descendants, who were then confronted with surprisingly similar challenges many decades later. The question of whether to prioritise national liberation or women's liberation continued to preoccupy activists of all generations. Margaret Ward is an expert on women in Irish history and has undertaken much indispensable research in this field. As a political activist in the years of “the Troubles”, she will also be of interest in later chapters.

Chapter Three examines the concept of nationalism with a special focus on the situation in the North of Ireland. Richard English’s theorization of nationalism in the Irish context is underpinned with concrete examples taken from everyday life in the six counties and beyond. As the political/public domain is traditionally linked to male interests, however, the distinct role of women is paid only little attention to.

Chapter Four aims to give a brief overview of “the Troubles”. This attempt most certainly raises no claim to completeness and must remain fragmentary by its very nature. Timelines of “the Troubles” are an excellent example of the narrativity of history and the boundedness of its annalists. Philip Roth captures this sentiment when he describes how “the relentless unforeseen was what we schoolchildren studied as “History”, harmless history, where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable. The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic.” (qtd. in English 448) The timeline at hand will put an emphasis on the nationalist narrative.

Chapter Five will focus on the struggle inside Northern Irish prisons, the (temporary) home of many Irish nationalists during the Troubles. With the introduction of interment in 1971, prison became an important battleground for Republicans, who continuously challenged the authorities. While the stories of male paramilitary members such as Bobby Sands and Francis Hughes have long turned into legend, female figures still lack representation. This chapter will explore the roles and experiences of the women captives as well as of the prisoners’ relatives. It will use first-hand accounts of witnesses and those affected to illustrate their standpoints and also draw from archival sources such as pamphlets, newspapers, letters and various publications.

Chapter Six will subsequently explore the struggle in what Tim Pat Coogan calls ‘The Larger Prison’ (“On the Blanket” 68), namely the Northern Irish statelet itself. Living conditions in the six counties of Ulster ranked among the worst in the whole of Western Europe and many women felt like they were stuck in a prison with no escape from. The poverty-ridden working-class ghettos offered no perspective and issues such as domestic violence, anxiety and depression were high on the agenda. Bodily autonomy was virtually non-existent in the North, where religion and ultra-conservative politicians set the agenda. Women were nonetheless tirelessly involved in creating a better future for themselves and their fellow beings by getting organised on their own accord or joining the women’s movement.

Although the thesis at hand focuses on women from a nationalist/Catholic background, it will also briefly examine experiences of Protestant women in Chapter Seven. While their fates differ from their Catholic counterparts in certain aspects, overall their stories are rather similar. As women, they were oppressed by the patriarchal structures of their state and even though Protestantism was regarded as much more liberal than Catholicism, the Ulster kind of Protestantism was fundamentalist rather than anything else. The case of the female politician Ann Dickson illustrates, how successful women in public positions were opposed and even attacked by their own constituency if they refused to serve reactionary male interests.

This thesis aims at providing an overview of female experiences in a time of unrest and is by no means exhaustive. Each chapter in itself offers sufficient material for a thesis of its own and prompts questions worthy of further research. For the interested reader the bibliography at the end offers a starting point for additional study.

2. Women in 19th and 20th Century Irish History

2.1. The Ladies' Land League

The Irish National Land League was formed in late 1879 as a means to prevent a catastrophe like the Great Famine of 1845 from ever happening again. By then, only 800 landlords owned half the country and many people were dependent on the harvest of a small piece of land. The Land League wanted to reduce the number of these dependents, whose survival often hinged on the potato yield. When the potato harvest turned out badly in 1879, taking action was of utmost importance. The Fenians¹ and Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the Irish Party in Westminster, thus forged an alliance to provide relief for their starving countrymen. When the Irish National Land League with Charles Parnell as its president was formed on October 21st 1879, its declared objectives were “the reduction of rack rents and the ownership of the soil by the occupiers of the soil.” (qtd. in Ward, “Unmanageable Revolutionaries” 10)

The Land League called upon tenants not to pay their rents and actively supported resistance at evictions. Consequently, the government decided to charge its leaders for conspiracy, but the 1881 trial resulted in an acquittal. When the Protection of Person and Property (Ireland) Bill became law, it handed the “absolute power of arbitrary and preventative arrest” (qtd. in Ward 11) to the executive forces. The leadership now had two options: either disband the Land League due to a lack of leadership or enlist women in their ranks as a stopgap solution. They chose to do the latter and thus in 1881 the Ladies' Land League was found under the aegis of Anna Parnell, Charles Parnell's sister.

Anna was a stout nationalist and in her analysis of the Irish situation she went some steps further than her brother. In humorous scribbles called ‘Notes from the Ladies' Cage’, which were published in the Celtic Monthly, she commented on the disenfranchisement of Irish women from politics. She was aware of the social issues arising from class distinctions and although coming from a moderately wealthy

¹ The term used to refer to members of the Fenian Brotherhood and the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), whose goal was the establishment of an independent Irish Republic by the means of physical force/violence.

Protestant family background herself, she did not go easy on either her class or the patriarchal structure of her own family. She was convinced that “if the Irish landlords had not deserved extinction for anything else, they would have deserved it for the treatment of their own women.” (qtd. in Ward 7)

Anna’s sister Fanny was equally popular for her political convictions as well as for her writing. Her poem ‘Hold the Harvest’, which is sometimes called the ‘Marseillaise of the Irish peasant’, reflects her unrelenting spirit with regard to the land question:

Oh by the God who made us all, the master and the serf
Rise up and swear to hold this day your own green Irish turf!
Rise up! And plant your feet as men where now you crawl as slaves
And make your harvest fields your camps, or make of them your graves!²

The Ladies’ Land League was highly successful and did a lot more than merely substitute its predecessor on paper. The women were very active and Anna understood it well to motivate her colleagues and inspire them with self-confidence. Not before long the Ladies’ Land League faced the same problems as the men and its members were frequently harassed by the executive forces. The Protestant Belfast News-Letter attacked the endeavours of the female activists, claiming that “[s]ensible people in the North of Ireland dislike to see women out of the place she is gifted to occupy, and at no time is woman further from her natural position than when she appears on a political platform.” (qtd. in Ward 23)

Those in need of the League’s support nonetheless cherished the women and their tireless work, which encouraged women all over the country to step forward and stand up for their demands. Women took part in public political discourse and were not afraid of voicing their opinions in strong words. For the first time, the public-private dichotomy became blurred and women realised the potential of organisation and cooperation. In December 1881, the Ladies’ Land League was legally suppressed and many of its more prominent activists were arrested. As there was no precedent for female activists, the women were not treated as political prisoners but prosecuted according to laws designed to curb prostitution. When the men returned from prison, they urged the Ladies’ Land League to disband, which the women refused at first. By means of bureaucratic trickery the men eventually managed to force the Ladies’ League

²http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/songs/cmc/miss_fanny_parnell_jbaker.htm (03.08.2015).

out of business. However, their manoeuvring left deep divisions between the male and female activists of the organisation and Anna Parnell never spoke to her brother Charles again.

As the League dissolved, women did not have an organisation of their own any longer. The public-private dichotomy was largely reinstated and while many women remained politically active, it was on an individual basis rather than on an organised one. The only association which allowed women to participate in its activities was the Gaelic League, an organisation aimed at the promotion and revival of the Gaelic language and culture. The Catholic Church was naturally opposed to these events such as *ceilidhs*³, which encouraged socialising between the sexes.

One of the Gaelic League's biggest shortcomings was its declared apoliticality, which led critical and more politically aware people to seek alternatives. A number of clubs was founded in this time of the Celtic Revival, however, membership for women was once again barred as the discourse shifted back onto the political stage. In 1896 several women activists initiated the Belfast-based literary magazine *Shan Van Vocht*⁴. Although decidedly non-socialist, the paper published many articles by James Connolly and soon also Maud Gonne, a nationalist taken with the Irish struggle, started writing for the paper and became involved with the editors. As the magazine tried to remain as neutral and non-sectarian as possible it soon lacked funding and had to fold after only three years in April 1899.

In 1900, Maud Gonne approached Tim Harrington, the secretary of the National League, and expressed her desire to get active for the Irish cause. In her autobiography, she recalls a conversation they had:

‘The Constitution of the National League does not allow lady members.’
‘But there used to be a Ladies’ Land League and they did splendid work.’ [...]
‘We disbanded the Ladies’ Land League when we came out,’ said Harrington, I thought a little bitterly. ‘They did too good work, and some of us found they could not be controlled.’(qtd. in Ward, “In Their Own Voice” 6)

³ Gaelic term for a traditional social gathering involving music, dance and folklore - <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ceilidh> (15.11.2015).

⁴ A phonetic transcription of the Irish ‘Poor Old Woman’.

Maud Gonne realised that if women wanted to actively participate in the struggle for Irish freedom, they would need to organise themselves. The notion of ‘a woman’s place being in the home’ was still too strong among the all-male republican activists of the time to be challenged. Therefore she founded the Inghinidhe na hEireann, the Daughters of Ireland, in 1900.

2.2. Inghinidhe na hEireann

In April 1900, Queen Victoria visited Ireland on a mission to recruit men for the British Army. In a Dublin park a ceremony for 5.000 children was organised in her honour, an event which inspired Maud Gonne and some fellow activists to set up a counter-event a couple of months later. This event organised by The Patriotic Children’s Treat Committee was a huge success and more than 25.000 children took part in it. It resonated greatly with the Irish people and boosted the morale of the citizens as well as the activists. On the occasion of the Queen’s visit, Maud Gonne had composed a bitter polemic against ‘The Famine Queen’, which the authorities tried to prevent from publication. Gonne’s polemic targeted the queen not merely as a monarch but also as a woman, who must “tremble as death approaches when she thinks of the countless Irish mothers who, shelterless under the cloudy Irish sky, watching their starving little ones, have cursed her before they died.” (qtd. in Ward 13) It also appeals to the Irish men to turn their backs on her plea:

Taking the Shamrock in her withered hand she dares to ask Ireland for soldiers – for soldiers to protect the extermination of their race. And the reply of Ireland comes sadly but proudly, not through the lips of the miserable little politicians who are touched by the English canker but through the lips of the Irish people:

‘Queen, return to your own land; you will find no more Irishmen ready to wear the red shame of your livery. [...] As to those who today enter your service to help in your criminal wars, I deny them! If they die, if they live, it matters not to me, they are no longer Irishmen! (qtd. in Ward 13f)

As the event had been such a great success, the Committee decided to continue its work. They agreed that history classes for girls should be one focus of the group and in October 1900 the first official meeting of the Inghinidhe na hEireann took place. Most

of its members were independent women who earned their own living and did not have to rely on men for their financial security. Their objectives were clear and ambitious:

- The Re-Establishment of the complete independence of Ireland.
- To encourage the study of Gaelic, of Irish literature, History, Music and Art, especially among the young, by the organising and teaching of classes for the above objects.
- To support and popularise Irish manufacture.
- To discourage the reading and circulation of low English literature, the singing of English songs, the attending of vulgar English entertainments at the theatres and music hall, and to combat in every way English influence, which is doing so much injury to the artistic taste and refinement of the Irish people.
- To form a fund called the National Purposes Fund, for the furtherance of the above objects. (qtd. in Ward 20)

Like the Ladies' Land League, the Daughters' preferred *modus operandi* was direct action. On certain occasions the women of the *Inghinidhe* would roam the streets of Dublin, handing out leaflets to girls and warning them against the consequences of getting involved with British soldiers. Anti-recruitment propaganda was an integral part of their activities and their often unconventional implementation was a great source of motivation for the members. Also with regard to culture and theatre the group offered lots of inspiration. With the support of W.B. Yeats they organised theatre evenings and other cultural events, leaving the people longing for more. Out of their initiative a theatre group was born, which would later on set the course for the foundation of the famous Abbey Theatre. A columnist in the *United Irishman*⁵ was so impressed by the organisation's first annual report that he paid them tribute in an article: "[W]oman rushes in where man fears to tread and makes him look foolish and fall back on the apple story to save himself. [...] I am weary living in a world ruled by men with mouse-hearts and monkey-brains, and I want a change." (qtd. in Ward, "Unmanageable Revolutionaries" 58f)

In late 1902, the *Inghinidhe* agreed to join the *Cumann na Gaedheal*, a loose federation of nationalist societies with Maud Gonne as its vice-president. The plan was to reconcile the various nationalist groups, leagues and associations to generate more firepower. In 1907 the *Cumann na Gaedheal* merged with the *Dungannon Clubs*⁶ and they renamed themselves the *Sinn Féin League*. When the League joined forces with the

⁵ Weekly Nationalist newspaper, first founded in 1848, then re-founded in 1899.

⁶ Group founded in commemoration of the 1782 Volunteer Convention at Dungannon.

National Council in the following year, they regrouped as Sinn Féin. The suggestion for the name came from Máire de Bhuitéir, a member of the Inghinidhe na hEireann. In an essay, she recalls the moment of epiphany:

I shall be asked: From what source did you derive this title? It is hard to say, so vague and uncertain are the tricks of memory. But the early motto of the Gaelic League was: ‘Sinn féin, sinn féin, amhain’ – (Ourselves, ourselves alone). [...]

That day in Fownes Street, when once more Arthur Griffith expounded to my sister and me his doctrine of self-sufficiency, passive resistance and abstention from the British Parliament, and so on, I suddenly remarked: ‘The policy of Sinn Féin, in fact!’

And Griffith pounced upon the saying with delight. ‘Sinn Féin’, he cried, ‘are exactly the two words which express my meaning.’ (qtd. in Ward, “In Their Own Voice” 15)

Some members of the Inghinidhe wished to publish their own journal and their first meeting was joined by Countess Markievicz, a nationalist as well as a socialist. Markievicz became an important contributor to the *Bean na hEireann* (Woman of Ireland), which first featured in late 1908. The journal was in favour of socialist ideas and the republican physical-force tradition. The members of the Inghinidhe and the editors of the *Bean* put an emphasis on the nationalist question over the women’s question. In their view, all the issues of gender discrimination would be resolved once Ireland was a republic and until that day, greater representation of women in the various nationalist organisations and institutions would be the key to success. Their analysis and dismissal of the suffragette campaign attracted the criticism of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, the co-founder of the militant Irishwomen’s Franchise League. In the April 1909 issue, the *Bean na hEireann* stated that “we decline to join with Parliamentarians and Unionists in trying to force a bill through Westminster. We prefer to try and organise a woman’s movement on Sinn Féin lines or on lines broader still. Freedom for our nation and the complete removal of all disabilities to our sex will be our battle cry.” (qtd. in Ward 31)

In Sheehy Skeffington’s opinion it was illusionary to think that once the oppressive system had been abolished, things would fall into place more or less automatically. To her, voting was the key:

Until the Parliamentarian and the Sinn Féin woman alike possess the vote, the keystone of citizenship, she will count but little for either party, for it is through the medium of the vote alone that either party can achieve any

measure of success. This is a fact of which we Parliamentarians have long been aware to our cost, but which Sinn Féin women have yet to learn. (qtd. in Ward 38)

To prevent splits, Sinn Féin-leader Arthur Griffith announced that joining the suffragette movement would not collide with the principles of the group. However, when Home Rule became an important point on the political agenda, Griffith renounced the suffragette movement “until Ireland has some kind of government of its own – then, so far as our opinion will go, Irishwomen, if they desire their vote, shall have it.” (qtd. in Ward 84) It is noteworthy that up until 1917 Sinn Féin was no distinct republican organisation but indeed called for a dual monarchy.

In 1910 the Inghinidhe started providing free school meals for pupils to force the authorities to meet their obligations regarding the welfare of children. Only a few Catholic schools picked up on the women’s offer as they had a notorious reputation. When their campaign started, it was women like Maud Gonne, Constance Markievicz and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington who distributed meals to pupils, whole-heartedly supported by the Irishwomen’s Franchise League and James Connolly.

Over the years, many members of the Inghinidhe became active in the Sinn Féin structures, paying only little attention to the endeavours of their former organisation. Whenever they felt the need to undertake actions too radical for Sinn Féin, however, they did use to fall back onto their old group. Margaret Ward is convinced that the Inghinidhe played a pivotal role in the development of a female political culture in Ireland and that the group’s achievements cannot be overemphasized. Before their formation,

nationalist groups had been disorganised, consisting of like-minded people without any structure to bring some cohesion to the movement, and the Inghinidhe had contributed life and colour to the endless rounds of meetings and campaigns, imparting an enthusiasm and freshness which revitalised older, more jaded spirits and drew many more people into nationalist politics. [...] Had Inghinidhe not existed, a whole generation of women would not have developed the self-confidence, which eventually enabled them to hold their own in organisations composed of both sexes. (85f)

Moreover, the Inghinidhe served as a stepping stone for many women who later became involved in the structures of Cumann na mBan.

2.3 Cumann na mBan

The 1913 formation of the Irish Volunteers was an important milestone in the Irish nationalist struggle. The Volunteers were a project of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which aimed at generating a movement suitable for the masses to destabilise the Irish Party in Westminster. When Cumann na mBan was launched in April 1914, the women happily accepted their assistance role as prescribed by the men. They were supposed to assist the volunteers by taking care of funding and various administrative tasks. The organisation did not appeal to working or revolutionary women but mainly to relatives of the Volunteers, who were financially safeguarded. Agnes O'Farrelly, first president of Cumann na mBan, held very traditional views, not attempting to breach the public-private dichotomy but rather extending the private matters into the public sphere: "Each rifle we put in their [the men's] hands will represent to us a bolt fastened behind the door of some Irish home to keep out the hostile stranger. Each cartridge will be a watchdog to fight for the sanctity of the hearth." (qtd. in Ward 93) Thus were also the aims of the Council:

1. To advance the cause of Irish liberty
2. To organise Irishwomen in furtherance of this object.
3. To assist in arming and equipping a body of Irishmen for the defence of Ireland.
4. To form a fund for these purposes to be called the 'Defence of Ireland Fund'.
(qtd. in Ward 93)

In 1914 the leader of the Irish Party, John Redmond, urged the Volunteers to accept 25 of his nominees into their executive committee, which they eventually agreed to. Cumann na mBan failed to voice their opposition to this manoeuvre, however, when Redmond offered the British government the services of the Volunteers at the dawn of war, they took a distinct stand. After an emergency meeting the Volunteers split and the big majority left to form the National Volunteers – many of whom eventually joined the British Army. Far less than a tenth of the original number remained with the Irish Volunteers resisting conscription, among them the women. Although the split marked an immense loss in numbers, most of the constitutional and more conservative members were flushed out, thus leaving only the more revolutionary-minded nationalists behind.

Cumann na mBan still seemed happy enough with its subordinate role to the Volunteers, which angered Constance Markievicz who felt that “[t]hese Ladies’ Auxiliaries demoralise women, set them up in separate camps, and deprive them of all initiative and independence.” (qtd. in Ward 98) After negotiations led by the Countess, Inghinidhe na hEireann became a branch of Cumann na mBan in 1915, albeit retaining much of its autonomy.

The early activities of Cumann na mBan stretched from fund-raising over first aid and signalling. By the end of 1915, a more militaristic spirit found its way into the organisation. A military-routine was introduced, including squads and commanders. While most branches restricted their exercise to off-field activities, the Belfast branch picked up on the rifle-training suggestion and held regular practices. The women even challenged their male comrades from the Volunteers to compete with them and Winifred Carney, later to be James Connolly’s assistant during the Easter Rising, made a name for herself. In August 1915, the women of Cumann na mBan marched with their male comrades at the funeral of O’Donovan Rossa⁷, which was a symbol of great importance. For the first time, the women were just as much a part of a nationalist event as their male counterparts and this initiation did not go unnoticed. Soon there would come a time when every politically active woman would be thought of as a member of Cumann na mBan.

2.3.1 The Easter Rising and its Aftermath

Prior to the Easter Rising, two nationalist organisations dominated the political landscape: the Irish Volunteers, which accepted the Cumann na mBan women as auxiliaries, and the Irish Citizen’s Army, in which women enjoyed maximum equality. The Easter Rising itself was characterised by much confusion and disarray. Eoin MacNeill, Chief-of-Staff of the Volunteers, tried to cancel the joint events of Easter 1916 last-minute by issuing an order in the papers. Yet the leadership decided to overrule him and called for a postponing of the happenings for a day. Most of the

⁷ Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa, Fenian leader and member of IRB; known best for his graveside oration at Pádraig Pearse’s funeral – “Ireland unfree shall never be at peace”.

courier-work was done by women, who could move around with greater ease than the men.

When the rebels occupied Dublin's General Post Office, they read out the famous Poblacht na h-Eireann, the Proclamation of the Irish Republic. James Connolly had insisted that the part about equality was to be found in the signed document:

[...] The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past...⁸

During the Rising, a number of problems ensued for the women of Cumann na mBan. They wanted to support their male comrades, however, many of the Volunteers' commanders refused their help and sent them home. Frustrated with this turnout, some women complained to the leaders at the General Post Office, who in turn called on their comrades to accept the women's aid. Only one commander kept refusing to admit women to his squad, a man by the name of Eamon de Valera.

The experience of the Citizen's Army women was rather different. Their roles had been clear already before the rising and they had taken part in all the meetings leading up to the rebellion. When James Connolly swore in his men and women, he told them that from now on they were all equal members of the Irish Republican Army (111).

When the rebels at the GPO eventually surrendered, it was a woman who took their message to the next army barracks and alongside with the other rebels also Constance Markievicz was arrested and court-martialled for being an officer: "Countess Markievicz of course surrendered as she had fought: with great panache. As she and Mallin⁹ led their forces out [...] in order to surrender to Major Wheeler, she shook hands with her troops and kissed her revolver affectionately before handing it over." (115) Because of her sex she was not executed as her male comrades were, but her punishment was commuted to life in prison. It remains unclear exactly how many women took part in the Easter Rising: While Margaret Ward names around 90 women,

⁸ <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/pir24416.htm> (15.11.2015).

⁹ Michael Mallin, Irish rebel, 2nd in command of the ICA during the Easter Rising.

other sources claim that 180 or more women participated in the rebellion. Over 70 women were arrested in its aftermath. (Ryan 258)

As most of the men were imprisoned after the Easter 1916 events, it was again the women's task to re-organise and take care of the bereft families. Kathleen Clarke's husband Tom, who was executed as one of the leaders, had left his wife some money, which she used to set up the Irish Volunteer Dependents' Fund. Kathleen was looking for a full-time organiser for the fund which had been run by volunteers for over a year. After an interview process she chose IRB-member Michael Collins for the position, who had impressed her with his aptitude and leadership skills. Also in 1917, Sinn Féin eventually redefined itself as a Republican movement. They supported the suffragettes' demands, however, as women over 30 were given the right to vote in February 1918 they never actually had to act upon their words.

One of the biggest issues at the time was the fight against conscription, which was in place in Britain but not yet extended to Ireland. Loyalist employers in Ireland often sacked employees legible for army service so their economic necessities would force them to join the army. In the 1918 elections Sinn Féin won 73 out of 103 seats. Sticking to their principle of abstentionism, they refused to take their places in the Westminster Parliament and set up their own parliament, Dáil Eireann. The first session of the Dáil in early 1919 was presided over by Cathal Brugha. As 36 of the Sinn Féin MPs were still in prison, the cabinet could not be elected before March, when Eamon de Valera became President and Countess Markievicz was elected to be Minister of Labour. After Alexandra Kollontai in the Soviet Union she became the second woman ever to enter government. Courts were set up all over Ireland as powerful symbols that no longer the conqueror was executing the laws in the country. They largely remained symbols though and failed to become instruments of social change and actual justice.

By the end of the year, the British government declared the Dáil an illegal assembly and sessions could not continue any more. The Irish Republican Army, Sinn Féin and Cumann na mBan were proscribed and as the actions taken by the IRA increased steadily, the Royal Irish Constabulary¹⁰ was incapable of maintaining law and order. In March 1920 another security force was thus brought into Ireland, the Blacks and Tans.

¹⁰ Armed police force of the Crown in Ireland from the early 19th century until 1922.

They were paid mercenaries and their reign of horror and arbitrariness radicalised the situation even further. The concept of flying columns¹¹ was expanded and numerous women supported the IRA by hiding its members and providing food and shelter.

2.3.2. Partition, Civil War and the Free State

The 1920 Government of Ireland Act called for the establishment of two parliaments on the island, the 26 counties of Leinster, Munster and Connacht plus three of Ulster and the six North-Eastern counties of Ulster with a Protestant majority. Sinn Féin refused to accept this proposal and the northern Sinn Féin MPs abstained from parliament.

The Cumann na mBan convention of 1921 proved just how much the organisation was different from its 1914 version. It transformed into an organisation with a military basis and re-structured itself along the lines of the IRA. As they were in onto the secrets and plans of their respective IRA branches, members had to take a pledge of secrecy. As an activist recalls, the cooperation between the army and the women went smoothly and was based on mutual respect and appreciation:

The men didn't order us. I mean, if they did, they might get a crack over the face – we got no orders, but we were asked – would you mind taking these guns to such and such a place , or would you get a safe house for us... we didn't mind because that was part of our programme. [...] We were always at them, and after them. Even up to the last, we were always making plans for certain things that we thought should be done. And they co-operated. (qtd. in Ward, "Unmanageable Revolutionaries" 162)

When Michael Collins and his comrades accepted the Truce under the threat of 'immediate and terrible war', many Republicans felt betrayed. The issue of partition lost its urgency as the majority of nationalists focused on the inacceptability of the oath of allegiance to the British Crown. Many women felt that if stout female activists such as Mary MacSwiney had been given a place in the negotiations, the outcome would have been very different. When the Dáil ratified the Treaty in January 1922 with 64 to 57 votes, Mary MacSwiney publicly stated that she would have "neither hand, act, nor part in helping the Irish Free State to carry this nation of ours, this glorious nation that has been betrayed here tonight, into the British Empire." (qtd. in Ward 169)

¹¹ A small, highly mobile military land unit with minimal equipment; hard to locate.

While the IRA was split over the Treaty, Cumann na mBan was the first national organisation to reject it. The women lost no time in mobilising actions against it. Whenever the tricolor was abused by pro-treaty activists, they would tear it down and they would hold many a protest so that journalists could not report from any events without having to show voices of dissent. In February 1922, Cumann na mBan accepted a resolution which was suggested by MacSwiney:

- (a) Reaffirming allegiance to the Republic and calling upon the Women of Ireland to support at the forthcoming elections only those candidates who stood true to the existing Republic proclaimed Easter Week, 1916.
- (b) Asking the women to join in the re-imposition of the Belfast Boycott unless the prisoners in Northern Jails for political offences were at once released. (qtd. in Ward 172)

419 representatives supported the motion, only 63 were opposed. However, while the opinion of Cumann na mBan on the matter was quite homogeneous, the rest of the movement was in pieces. Whole families were torn apart over the issue and many women took their husbands' pro-treaty stance reluctantly rather than out of conviction. Many families disintegrated over the treaty-question and sometimes fathers and sons or brothers would find themselves fighting on different sides and ultimately against each other. The pro-treaty women established their own organisation called Cumann na Saoirse, Society of Freedom. They were very different from their counter-part though and represented the interests of an emerging political elite and social upper-class rather than being a grass-roots movement.

In the meantime, the anti-treaty faction of the IRA, led by Eamon de Valera and Liam Lynch, occupied the Four Courts in Dublin as a headquarter. An escalation of the conflict seemed more likely by the minute but still men on both sides would try to find a compromise to avoid bloodshed. While pro-treaty leader Arthur Griffith steadfastly refused to talk to anti-treaty IRA representatives, de Valera and Michael Collins agreed upon an electoral pact to determine the strength of both factions through democratic process. The British government deemed this solution unacceptable and although the election eventually took place, it was redundant and could not prevent the outbreak of civil war.

When Fieldmarshall Sir Henry Wilson was shot by the IRA in London in June 1922, the British government under Churchill decided it was time to intervene. They called for an

immediate end of the Four Courts Occupation and when the pro-treaty forces – the National Army – moved in, fighting erupted. The IRA decided to remain in their respective sections instead of focusing on the Four Courts. The women of Cumann na mBan stood with their comrades and provided medical aid and other support where needed. Maud Gonne tried to stop the fighting by forming a peace delegation and demanded word with the leaders of all factions because “as women, on whom the misery of civil war would fall, [...] we had a right to be heard.” (qtd. in Ward 184), however, her undertaking was in vain. The fighting continued and ultimately focused on Dublin’s O’Connell Street. Cathal Brugha refused to surrender and died after eight days of fighting – with his death, the battle ceased. As the IRA men were on the run once again, it was the women who had to bury the dead.

The IRA was forced to fall back on guerilla tactics as their main locations were the rural areas of the South, where support and anti-treaty sentiment were the strongest. The leadership restructured and the new chief-of-staff, Ernie O’Malley, prioritised an efficient communication system. Sean Lemass was appointed Director of Communications and was strongly aided by the women in his position. They were the only ones who could move around the country unobtrusively and deliver messages without drawing too much attention onto them.

Shortly after the assassination of Michael Collins in August 1922, the Free State government introduced military courts and started executing opponents. Many republicans were imprisoned by late 1922 and such was Mary MacSwiney, who went on hunger strike in Kilmainham Gaol. Maud Gonne had been rallying around Dublin before she was arrested in early 1923. She was reunited with old comrades like Mary and Nora Connolly in jail, where they kept protesting the prison conditions.

Outside, things gradually worsened for the Republican movement. Without Liam Lynch as their leader, a ceasefire seemed likelier by the minute. De Valera tried to come up with suggestions for negotiations, however, the British government made it clear that the only thing they would accept was unconditional surrender. Cumann na mBan was not involved in any negotiations albeit they had been promised not to be left out this time.

In August 1923 the British government launched another election. They were confident that the treaty would win an unambiguous mandate as most of its staunchest opponents were either dead or in jail. Nonetheless the spirit of resistance remained strong and won the Republicans 44 out of 153 seats. The government won 63, the remaining seats went to Labour, Farmers and Independents. The Free State government tried to repress any kind of dissident spirit. Due to the oath of allegiance, republicans were unable to work for the state and doctors and teachers like Hanna Sheehy Skeffington could not return to their old jobs.

Meanwhile, de Valera tried to come up with a possibility for republicans to enter parliament without compromising their beliefs by taking the oath. The Sinn Féin policy of abstentionism did not resound too well with him and so in 1926 he eventually left the organisation to form his own party – Fianna Fáil, Warriors of Fal¹². Countess Markievicz followed him into the new party and thus had to leave Cumann na mBan, as its members were sworn to work with the IRA. She died soon after because of appendicitis and could therefore not influence the party's further direction. Very much to the anger of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, who also followed de Valera into Fianna Fáil, in the obituary he painted the deceased Countess as a philanthropist, thereby belittling her political achievements and revolutionary spirit. Referring to the Boland's Mill incident during the Easter Rising, she called him out on his repeated chauvinism and illustrated the biggest difference between de Valera, the constitutionalist, and James Connolly, the revolutionary: "To the one, woman was an equal, a comrade; to the other, a sheltered being, withdrawn to the domestic hearth, shrinking from public life." (qtd. in Ward 203) Much of her criticism would later be proven painfully true by de Valera's Constitution.

While Fianna Fáil was going for the parliamentary way and Sinn Féin indulged in abstentionism, the IRA secretly restructured. There was little Cumann na mBan could do, so they decided to launch a campaign aimed at jury members in court. They sent out letters and targeted members individually to inform them of the mechanisms at work. Indeed the campaign proved successful as people grew more and more weary to be on a jury or convict dissident republicans. Later, Cumann na mBan attempted to organise a

¹² Fál = Irish legend name for Ireland; Fianna Fáil is often translated as "Soldiers of Destiny".

boycott of British goods. They argued that the consumption of Irish sweets would help generate thousands of jobs and used catchy slogans such as “every British sweet you eat deprives an Irish mouth of meat!” (209) Their ideas did not resonate too greatly with the wider public though, as Cumann na mBan had lost a lot of its footing in the working class. While the women of the organisation would talk about the Russian Revolution or Lenin’s theses, the big majority of Irish women would still struggle with poverty. Their boycott campaign also earned them criticism from left-wing groups, which argued that the exchange of British capitalists for Irish capitalists would change nothing about the Irish situation whatsoever.

Several people within the Cumann na mBan and IRA ranks acknowledged the need for a shift towards the left and a more socialist approach. Saor Eire was their attempt to create a markedly left-wing movement to combine the idea of republicanism with the need for a new political system. Mary MacSwiney was a stout opponent of these attempts as she felt Saor Eire would “[seek] to divide the people of Ireland on a class basis.” (qtd. in Ward 214) Church and state denounced the ‘red smear’ and Saor Eire was suppressed together with eleven other organisations such as Cumann na mBan and the IRA. When the next election date was set for February 1932, the Republican groups reluctantly decided to support Fianna Fáil, which indeed managed to surpass the pro-treaty faction Cumann na nGaedheal by 15 seats and thus won the elections.

2.3.3. De Valera’s Ireland

The new government started by releasing all the remaining political prisoners. Although Cumann na mBan attempted to focus more on the fate of Irishmen and women in the North, there was little they could do. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington did her best to ensure that the fate of the Northerners was not forgotten, publicly claiming that “I would be ashamed of my own race, I would be ashamed of my own murdered husband if I admitted that I was an alien in Armagh, Down, Derry or any of the 32 counties.” (qtd. in Ward 222) Nonetheless there was little she could do against the partition. The new Republican government in the 26 counties was too self-absorbed to pay too much attention to the occupied six counties. With the men taking over the public sphere of politics, women’s role was once again refined to the private. Nora Connolly pointed out

that although women had “won the right to share in the dangers of war”, they had “relinquished their right to share in the dangers of peace.” (qtd. in Ward 224)

Before de Valera could establish his reactionary policies, some more progressive elements within the movement unsuccessfully tried to incorporate a social critical and distinctly left-wing approach. De Valera’s 1937 Constitution was the last straw for many men and women alike, as it was not based on the 1916 Poblacht na hEireann but on the reactionary and conservative writings of various popes. Especially articles 40 and 41 angered feminists as – in the disguise of welfare and goodwill – women were clearly confined to the home:

Article 40

1 All citizens shall, as human persons, be held equal before the law. This shall not be held to mean that the State shall not in its enactments have due regard to differences of capacity, physical and moral, and of social function.

Article 41

2-1 In particular, the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2-2 The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

They called for the complete abolition of these articles but de Valera refused. Before the referendum took place, women from various groups launched a campaign to persuade women to vote against this patriarchal document. Women like Maud Gonne went about to remind men and women alike of the 1916 Declaration and the promise of equality. The members of Cumann na mBan remained silent throughout and ultimately put the needs of the Republic above the needs of women. They thereby made way for the acceptance of the constitution, in whose referendum 31 % of the electorates did not cast their vote – had Cumann na mBan campaigned against it, the outcome might have been very different.

Gradually, Cumann na mBan began to fade away. They still existed on the paper but there was little they could do. When the IRA, marginalised itself, started focusing on mainland Britain, the women members in their auxiliary functions could do nothing to help. As the fight for freedom was over, at least in the 26 Southern counties,

membership of Cumann na mBan bore no relevance for many young women in the rural areas. The organisation remained but an afterthought and with the death of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington in 1946 the women lost their perhaps most distinct and consistent voice in the jungle of male interests. She had always refused to join the ranks of Cumann na mBan as she profoundly disliked the attribute 'auxiliary' and would not content herself with the voluntary subordination to men.

When the Civil Rights Movement emerged in the North of Ireland – a consequence of the decade-long oppression of and pogroms against the Catholic minority – military action and intervention was once again called for. As usual, the IRA could not agree on a common strategy and split in the late 1960s. While the Official IRA, which took a more socialist approach to the conflict, disbanded 'their' Cumann na mBan and accepted women into its ranks equitably, the Provisional IRA kept their branch of Cumann na mBan. Drawing on their rich past, Cumann na mBan still made it clear that they saw themselves as the only reasonable women's organisation, however, thereby abandoning any claim for real equality as stated in the 1916 Declaration:

Cumann na mBan will remain as the organisation to which Irish women will want to belong... We see ourselves as the women of Ireland, the mothers of future generations of Irish men and women and we consider this no mean role in life. We consider the family as the basic unit of society and it is as the defenders of all that is good in society that we have acted. (261)

2.4. A Note on the North

Although the Northern Irish statelet was not officially founded until 1920, the economic and political situations in the North and South had always been rather different. Sectarian tensions had been dwelling in the background and due to the dominance of industry over agriculture in most parts of Ulster, many Southern issues were not that pressing up North. As Belfast had a big linen industry, women were used to working and thus out in the public sphere a lot more than their Southern counterparts. The isolation of the North and its different challenges ensured that women participated in the various Nationalist groups and organisations a lot more naturally.

The Ladies' Land League hardly played a role in the six counties. Due to the Ulster plantation, most of the land was in the hand of Protestants. They set up their own

organisation, the tenant-right movement and – inspired by the success of Anna Parnell in the South – considered founding a Ladies tenant-right association. The editor of the Protestant Belfast Newsletter was horrified by this perspective and declared that “[t]here is not the slightest chance of the County Down sending out a party of amazons in the land fray and we are glad of it.” (Ward, “Ulster Was Different?” 223)

When the Gaelic League was formed in Dublin in 1893, the chairman doubted that “Belfast could be considered to be in Ireland at all.” (qtd. in Ward 224) This infuriated Alice Milligan, a Northern methodist, so much that she helped to found the Henry Joy McCracken Literary Society in Belfast in 1895. They wanted to provide a ‘national education’ for men and women alike through various social and political events. While it was only natural for this Belfast organisation to consider both men and women alike, Maud Gonne would only just start challenging the Dublin patriachs several years later.

The Fianna Éireann, a nationalist boy scout with a focus on military training, never allowed any girls in their ranks. In Belfast, however, both sexes were welcome to join, after Nora and Ina Connolly, daughters of James, had successfully insisted on their right to become members. As sectarian tensions ran deep in the North, it was especially hard to find people willing to collaborate over the divide. The Partition of 1920 made things a lot harder on the Northern side of the border. Northern Ireland was carved out to be a “Protestant State for a Protestant people”¹³ and Catholics were soon to feel what this entailed. While women in the South got involved into politics at least on a local level, this was impossible in the six counties, where local governments were “an arena where sectarian antagonisms were writ largest of all. Women from the Unionist side who became involved had a very definitive sectarian motive. Keeping nationalists out of their neighbourhood was part of their tasks – a malign interpretation of the traditional housewifely concern for home and family.” (235)

What both states had in common was their stout anti-woman politics, as the unionist state as well as the Nationalist Party had clear notions of the right place for a woman. For a long time, the women in the North quietly did what was expected from them – work, take care of their families and keep their heads down. Only when the unionist

¹³ The words of Sir James Craig, leader of the Ulster Unionist party and first prime minister of Northern Ireland.

government failed to provide adequate housing for the Catholic population, the women started protesting in the mid-60s. It was indeed their actions and demands that laid the basis for the upcoming Civil Rights Movement.

3. Nationalism in the Irish Context

It is impossible to analyse the history of the Irish struggle for freedom without taking a closer look at the concepts of nationhood and nationalism. Nationalism, as Richard English observes, is “a term more frequently used than defined” (English, “Irish Freedom” 431) and while dictionaries naturally tend to oversimplify its meaning, it is possible to approach it. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* describes nationalism as an “ideology based on the premise that the individual’s loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests.”¹⁴ Likewise, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) describes nationalism as the

[a]dvocacy of or support for the interests of one's own nation, esp. to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations. Also: advocacy of or support for national independence or self-determination. Whereas patriotism usually refers to a general sentiment, nationalism now usually refers to a specific ideology, esp. one expressed through political activism. In earlier use, however, the two appear to have been more or less interchangeable.¹⁵

For English, too, political activism is a pivotal and constituting element of nationalism. For him nationalist ideology and activity are interrelated phenomena (433) emanating from a person’s social desire to take a stand for their community. He criticises that all too often the focus of analysis lies merely with the materialist circumstances of a given situation and ignores biological aspects such as underlying human needs and nature. Nationalism rewards its supporters on an emotional as well as on a materialist level (435) and is thus appealing. However, shared common histories and narratives are indeed the product of discursive construction and do not reflect essentialist realities, as English is aware. Nonetheless they are “necessary as ways of creating and sustaining and giving meaning and coherence to the communities which we all (in some form) require if we are practically and emotionally and psychologically to survive.” (436)

According to George Boyce, the politics in the six counties “exhibit the extreme end of the spectrum ‘Britishness’ (chauvinist Union flag waving) and ‘Irishness’ (chauvinist Tricolor waving)” (24), making the North to be perceived as ‘a place apart’. While the

¹⁴ (<http://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism>) (8.9.2015).

¹⁵ (<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/125289?redirectedFrom=nationalism#eid>) (8.9.2015).

objectives of the political players in Northern Ireland seem rather different, however, they effectively are not. For English, nationalism is based on the three concepts of community, struggle and power, which also clearly determine the mechanisms at work in the North of Ireland. These concepts are interwoven to a certain degree and they all constitute pivotal principles of nationalist endeavours.

3.1. Community

Human beings are inherently social and need to belong to some group which provides them with a sense of security. Often a certain set of shared features is presumed as a prerequisite for nationalist thought, however, there are many examples which show that this assumption is not always applicable: In the context of nationalism a group is not necessarily bound to a factual land as the big diaspora of Irish or Jewish people illustrate. Jewish nationalism had existed long before the state of Israel was founded and was – even if ultimately aimed at the creation of a Jewish state – not entirely teleological. Nationalism does not merely resonate with concrete matters but rather appeals to the emotional essence of people. Also, nationalism does not necessarily draw its legitimacy from a shared descent, as the case of the United States of America shows. It is at least as much about a shared outlook on the future as it is about the collective remembrance of things past.

That said, for (Northern) Irish nationalists the ultimate goal of a (re-)united Ireland most certainly is fuelled by the injustices and events of the past and an idealised version of how things were before the English conquest. In Ireland, nationalist allegiance often lay with a ‘particular territory’: “to the land from which survival is to be guaranteed (in the late nineteenth-century Land War, for example); to the locality which is lyrically or sentimentally celebrated [...]; and to the territory of the whole island, imagined and claimed for the nation (as in the 1937 Constitution).” (438) Even today, 1916 is still very much alive in their minds and the years of the Troubles have renewed and intensified the conviction that “[t]he tide of history is with Irish nationalists.” (447) However, while the United States have overcome most of their past obstacles, Northern Ireland has yet to come to grips with its troubled yesterdays.

One unique feature of Irish nationalism is the intimacy of its protagonists or what English – both literally and metaphorically – calls the ‘politics of family’ (438). Many of the important agents in the course of Irish history were related, close friends or had strong bonds on a metaphysical level. One of these familial bonds is created by the hungerstrikes, which are indeed a recurring trope throughout Irish history. From the hunger rituals in Celtic times up to Terence McSwiney and Bobby Sands, self-chosen starvation has helped to unify the ancestors and their descendants in a community of fate which goes way beyond conventional genealogies.

There is indeed a big discrepancy between an actual community and the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson in English 439), which is needed to convey common goals and aspirations. While the latter “has been evident in the inclusive claim to all of Ireland’s people – and to their unity – made by the United Irishmen in the 1790s, the Young Irelanders in the 1840s, the 1916 Proclamation, or de Valera’s Fianna Fáil [...]” (439), the actual community of course is a lot less homogeneous. They do interact, however, and their perceived needs and desires are fuelled by their respective counter-part.

3.1.1. Culture and Narrative

Communities are bound by shared values and desires, which are expressed through cultural traditions and practices. Culture as the sum of shared “habitual preferences, assumptions, customs, values, beliefs, behaviours and understandings” (441) is a pivotal factor in the making of a nation. It enables the individual to take part in social communication and integration as well as in the generation of a shared identity. ‘British culture’ in the North often defines itself over being ‘not-Irish’ and is therefore constructed in a way alien to the British on the mainland. The notion of superiority of their own culture as opposed to ‘the other’ constitutes the foundation of the fight for its recognition.

In the Irish context, the role of the old Gaelic society and the highly progressive Brehon Laws are often mentioned to illustrate just how much damage and regression the English conquest had done and meant. In his song ‘Colony’ the Irish singer Damien Dempsey extols how “we [the Irish] had a civilisation/when they [the conquerors] were

still neanderthal nations”¹⁶ and equates the Irish colonial history with the fate of many other conquered people around the world up to date. English finds that “[t]o the nationalist, the assumed future can be as vital as the imagined past: history as read through nationalist lenses often possesses a direction or purpose, a destiny or a mission, and at times an inevitable progression towards a determined end-point.” (445) Indeed Dempsey’s song is not an elegy bemoaning the lost past but makes it unmistakably clear that the Irish have never lost their spirit of rebellion and belief in a happy ending: “You’ll never kill our will to be free, to be free/Inside our minds we hold, hold the key.”

The unyielding Irish spirit is not only celebrated in popular song and folk music but also enshrined in the vast body of Irish literature and poetry, which are often intertwined with political history. Poems from Emmett to Sands and autobiographies galore from (male!) Republican activists during various stages of the struggle keep the timeless image of the rebellious Gael alive. History is omnipresent in Ireland, where the culture of commemoration plays an important role: memorials, gardens of remembrance, parades and murals make it possible to relive the days of past glories. History is ritually told and retold frequently, such as during the annual commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising.

3.2 Struggle

Activism is an integral part of the nationalist ideology and must as such involve some kind of struggle:

The term ‘nationalist’ should not be restricted purely to describing organizations, but nationalism does involve movement and activity and collective mobilization; in its most powerful, mass moments it has been a phenomenon with goals, characterized by a programmatic striving; it means more to its adherents than identification with a community, but calls for action, for change, or for the creation of momentum. It is, in short, political. (454)

The struggle for freedom and independence itself is driven by the desire to make the political and the national overlap. While the congruency of the two is the struggle’s declared aim, the road to success will be multifarious and various means to achieve this goal may be implemented at the same time. English distinguishes between three approaches, namely war, (constitutional) politics and cultural means (462).

¹⁶ http://lyrics.wikia.com/wiki/Damien_Dempsey:Colony (8.9.2015).

Along these lines the various means of the (Northern) Irish struggle may be analysed. Be it the campaigns of the IRA or the policies of Sinn Féin, domestic actions or the support by emigrant or foreign allies such as Gadhafi, they all served the goal of driving the British out of Northern Ireland. The worshipping of martyrs and political leaders as well as the reinforcement of cultural practices support and strengthen the collective consciousness and remind the people every day of what it is that they are fighting and hoping for. The same is true of the ‘other side’ also: the deployment of the British army, the installment of the UDA and loyalist paramilitaries, Stormont elections and direct rule as well as Union flags and pictures of the Queen covering whole quarters of Belfast are but attempts to counter – or forestall – the Irish nationalists’ attacks.

In his play *Translations*, Brian Friel outlines the concept of ‘colonising the mind’, another practice implemented by the British conquerors. With the anglicisation of Irish place names and villages and the introduction of their own school system, little by little the British made the Irish language – and with it parts of its culture – disappear. The performative act of naming and renaming established colonial power over the island, questioning and diminishing the natives’ identity.

Frantz Fanon was a keen and hands-on observer of the process of decolonisation in Algeria and while the nature of colonialism in the African countries in many aspects differed from the Irish case, strikingly many of his observations are true of the island also. In the opening paragraph of *The Wretched of the Earth* he states that “[n]ational liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon.” (35) Indeed for many activists in the six counties their political agency – and, at times, violence – was fuelled by what was perceived an unjust conquest of native land. “In the colonies, the foreigner coming from another country imposed his rule by means of guns and machines. In defiance of his successful transplantation, in spite of his appropriation, the settler still remains a foreigner.” (40) Thus is the perception of the Ulster Protestants by many Republicans – they are artificial byproducts of the Ulster plantation and not original to the island itself. English has also identified this problem and its perpetuating reciprocity due to bigotted exclusivism: “Just as unionists in the north have at times dismissed the

legitimacy of nationalist argument and grievance, so too the legitimacy of unionism has been largely dismissed by most nationalist observers throughout our story. It has been (wrongly) assumed that unionists are effectively descended from early-modern planters and that their British version of Irishness is therefore necessarily unauthentic.” (453) According to him, the problem of nationalism(s) in the North is not its polarity but rather its similarity: “[I]t’s difficult to read the now vast literature on unionist Ulster and still to deny the depth, sincerity, and long-rootedness of this political tradition, in just the same kinds of area in which nationalism itself has found its legitimacy (territory, people, myth of descent, attachment to culture and history, and so on).” (453) However, it must not be forgotten that Ireland was a British colony nonetheless and that natives and planters had never been equal in the centuries of strife.

Nationalism in colonised counties was often a means of resistance, which fell back on and arose out of binary oppositions as constituting elements. Postcolonial theory knows of many phenomena emerging from cultural contacts, many of which may be applied to the situation in the North of Ireland. For onlookers from the outside the ‘chauvinist flag-waving’ (Boyce 24) might appear paradox, for the flag wavers on the other hand it is their contribution to the struggle of reinforcing identity. Eagleton claims that the fundamental irony of the concept of nationalism cannot be resolved as “[t]he metaphysics of nationalism speak of the entry in full self-realisation of a unitary subject known as the people.” (Eagleton 9) Fanon already realised that “[d]ecolonisation unifies [a] people by the radical decision to remove from it its heterogeneity, and by unifying it on a national, sometimes racial, basis.” (Fanon, “The Wretched of the Earth” 46) In this process, “[i]ndividualism is the first to disappear.” (47) Otherwise they would be unable to express their needs and desires in the face of oppression.

Drawing on the psychological dimension of the struggle, English outlines the benefits found in the very act of struggling itself:

The struggle could be attractive not just for what it promised as an end-result, but for its value in itself: nationalist struggle can be explained partly by its intrinsic, inherent worth. It need not merely be that struggle will move your community from unacceptable Point A to desirable Point B; the process of struggle, and what it reflects and creates in the form of national character and attitude might in itself be of profound attraction and value in nationalists’ view. (English, “Irish Freedom” 458)

Another important concept for understanding the persistence of nationalism and nationalist struggle is outlined in the idea of ‘relative deprivation’ (460). It holds that people become actively involved for a cause when they experience perpetual disadvantage and discrimination compared to another group at hand. This undoubtedly applied to the situation in the troubled six counties, where despotism was on the daily agenda and ‘one man, one vote’ sounded like a threat to the ears of the establishment.

3.3 Power

In the end, the struggle for freedom is about gaining power. The ultimate empowerment is reflected in the trinity of state, sovereignty and self-determination, which builds the foundation of the traditional Republican notion of nationhood:

The birth of nationalism in Ireland coincided with the eighteenth-century emergence of the idea at the very heart of nationalism itself: that equality, sovereignty and freedom were interlinked in the democratic nation, in which power now rested with the sovereign people. [...] Once embedded in Irish nationalist thinking, this central notion – the welding together of sovereignty, equality and liberty – then became seemingly ineradicable, evident in epochal moments such as the 1919 Declaration of Independence. (476f)

The great thinkers of early Irish Republicanism were influenced by the works of Locke and Rousseau and the notion of equality as well as the expression of the self. Terry Eagleton illustrates the underlying irony of universal equality as propagated by Enlightenment – “for the only point of enjoying such universal abstract equality is to discover and live one’s own particular difference. The telos of the entire process is not, as the Enlightenment believed, universal truth, right and identity, but concrete particularity.” (Eagleton 11)

When the Union flag was taken down from the Belfast city hall in late 2012, several days of heavy rioting erupted in the streets. Other than in the rest of the United Kingdom, in Northern Ireland the Union flag was not merely flown during designated holidays but each and every day. Loyalists felt that the take-down of the flag was a symbol for a much deeper change in their state – the stripping away of their rights as British citizens: “We are the United Kingdom, it's our flag. For it to be taken down is removing British rights. Equality has gone out the window for Protestants in this city a

long time ago. [...] They [Sinn Féin] are trying to take away everything that is British in this society.”¹⁷

While English in his analysis focuses on psychological aspects of nationalism, Todd and Ruane concentrate on the material dimension of the phenomenon. They conclude that ultimately the conflict in the North is not rooted in romantic notions of nationalism or indeed 16th century theology “but concerns with equality, security and the distribution of power.” (39) These concerns are the same as in the rest of Europe, and therefore do not set the North ‘a place apart’ but in fact condense global struggles on a more archaic stage.

3.4. “The Troubles” – A Religious Conflict or a Clash of Cultures?

“The Troubles” in Northern Ireland have often been called a ‘religious conflict’, an attribution which is wrong on many levels. Religion is an important social marker to draw a line between ‘them’ and ‘us’, however, it is a formal marker rather than a substantial one. Religion offers a powerful means of socialisation and identification, especially with the many forms it takes in Northern Ireland, such as educative and parochial networks. English therefore holds that Catholicism had always been an important marker of Irishness and that Irish nationalism relies on its distinctly Catholic nature:

From the vibrant AOH¹⁸ [...] to interwar Northern Irish nationalists, to the Republican hunger-strikers of 1981, Catholic religion has been a meaningful and profound part of the Irish national story. In overwhelming composition, in terms of many of the goals pursued, in terms of the vision what made the nation special, and in terms of identifying what you were not (Protestant, atheistic) – in all these ways, and despite rhetorical non-sectarianism, Irish nationalism has been deeply Catholic. (442)

Terry Eagleton refines English’s stance and points out the correlation between the religious identities in the North and the absurdity of their stalling dialectic: “Catholicism itself already contains a certain Protestantism – *ecclesia semper reformanda* – without which constant deviating from itself it would not be truly itself; and Protestantism cannot exist as such without its historical antagonist. All that remains

¹⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jan/13/belfast-protest-flag-young-loyalists> (8.9.2015).

¹⁸ Ancient Order of Hibernians, an Irish Catholic fraternity.

is now to explain this on the Falls and Shankill Roads¹⁹.” (Eagleton 6) Another fundamental irony is to be found in the fact that Catholicism itself is not Irish at all if the prototype of an Irish society is to be seen in the old Gaelic tradition.

The deep divisions between the communities in the North are, according to Todd and Ruane, “the product of multiple historical processes which have left Protestants in a minority on the island of Ireland, and in a position of structural dominance (economic, political, cultural) in Northern Ireland”, locking the two communities in conflict. (qtd. in Callaghan 35) And indeed whatever happens in the six counties needs to be analysed with regard to the whole island of Ireland:

[B]oth communities in Northern Ireland are in a ‘structural bind’ in which the (converging) fundamental interests of Protestants – their need for control in Northern Ireland to ensure its survival – conflict with the (converging) fundamental interests of Catholics – the achievement of full equality with Protestants in Northern Ireland. That bind is maintained and its pressures intensified by the internal structures of the British state – which offer Catholics little hope of equality in Northern Ireland – and the Irish state – which offer Northern Protestants little prospect of being other than a marginalised minority in a united Ireland. (qtd. in Callaghan 35)

3.4.1. Political and Religious Affiliations

Vinny, a Northern Catholic, comments on the almost paradox entanglement of politics and religion in her state: “[They] are so confused in Northern Ireland... someone who plays rugby or hockey by nature is stereotyped as a Protestant, and that is a religion, whereas someone who plays Gaelic [football] is a Catholic, and that is a religion. [...] I suppose that comes from divided communities.” (Mitchell 59) And indeed it can be seen that terms such as Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist are used almost interchangeably. While these terms may be used to express certain affiliations without connotations of physical force, the terms Republican and Loyalist do ring certain bells in this respect. Irish republicans aspire to a united Ireland based on the republic as form of governance, however, the Republican movement as such is a lot less monolithic and much harder to define: “[It] has always been an eclectic, noncohesive body. Within its ranks have been found, in a far from exhaustive list, militant Nationalists,

¹⁹ Belfast’s two main roads associated with the political views of their residents (Falls Road – Republican; Shankill Road – Loyalist).

unreconstructed militarists, romantic Fenians, Gaelic Republicans, Catholic sectarians, northern defenders, international marxists, socialists, libertarians and liberal Protestants.” (Tonge, “They Haven’t Gone Away You Know” 672)

By contrast, O’Dowd defines loyalists in terms of ‘Protestant ultras’ (O’Dowd 164) and Sarah Nelson illustrates the ironic discrepancy between what they claim they want and their efforts to achieve it: “They [the loyalists] are loyal to Britain, yet ready to disobey her; they reject clerical tyranny, yet oppose secularism, they proclaim an ideology of freedom and equality, except for Catholics; they revere law and authority, then break the law. And they refuse to do the rational obvious thing.” (Nelson qtd. in O’Dowd 164) The material circumstances of the two communities locked in conflict make it impossible for them to achieve their goals without sacrificing them at least partially ‘for the cause’. The annual disputes during the Northern Irish marching season are almost as much part of the culture as the parades themselves. It presents what Edwards and McGrattan dubbed “a culture of almost ritualised rioting” (Edwards and McGrattan 149) and indeed the riots may be understood as enactments of the perceived struggle on a much smaller scale. They are directed at the ‘others’ as well as against the establishment in the form of police.

Similar to the term nationalism, the word ‘culture’ is often used as if it were essentially self-explaining. Eagleton points out the constructed nature of the term and how the concept is used to oppress just as much as to express certain sets of values:

Imagination and enlightened liberal reason are still being offered to us in Ireland today as the antithesis of sectarianism; and like all such idealised values they forget their own roots in a social class and history not unnoted for its own virulent sectarianism, then and now. [...] The liberal humanist notion of Culture was constituted, among other things, to marginalise such peoples as the Irish, so that it is particularly intriguing to find this sectarian gesture being rehearsed by a few of the Irish themselves. (13)

The initial colonisation of Ireland had geopolitical reasons. The Irish were not oppressed for being Irish but quite simply for being there. Unlike women they were not oppressed for the attributes assigned to them but for their occupation of the land the Crown needed for its endeavours. The Us/Them-trope did therefore not stand at the beginning of the colonisation process but emerged from it as an instrument of justification.

The Northern Irish Troubles were neither a clash of distinct cultures. Ruane and Todd argue that the conflict has structural roots rather than cultural ones and that the conflict is ultimately – and maybe originally – “about conflicting interests, not conflicting ideas” (Ruane and Todd, “Why Can’t You Get Along With Each Other” 40) This resonates with English’s argument of people wishing to belong to a community for the sense of security that comes with it. As the religious divide in the six counties coincides with the cultural/political and national/ethnic divide, they all are aggravated by each other. The nationalist claim for equality would therefore mean that the Unionist majority would have to give up their hegemonial rights – after all Northern Ireland was created as a Protestant state for a Protestant people. In the end, they would have to share power and space with those who have perceivedly entirely different aspirations and interests. While the Unionists would have to cede privileges, the nationalists would gain power – an equalisation which is deemed unjust. However, there is no way to equality without an alteration of the status quo.

3.5. A Nation Once Again?

When speaking of a united Ireland, nationalists have different notions of what this actually entails. While geographically it quite simply means that the natural borders of the island correspond with the political ones, the question of governance is not as easy to solve. Some republicans still view the Republic as an abomination, as a state forced upon the Southern Irish by the British. They object to the institutions of the Republic and still wish to see a united Ireland based on the 1916 Declaration and the First Dáil. In his famous essay in the *Shan Van Vocht* from 1897, James Connolly emphasises the importance of not merely removing the British from the island but more importantly rebuilding the very foundation on which a united Ireland is to be based. Frantz Fanon described decolonisation “quite simply [as] the replacing of a certain “species” of men by another “species” of men” (Fanon 35), a view James Connolly wishes to forestall through the radicality of change:

If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain.

England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists,

through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs.

England would still rule you to your ruin, even while your lips offered hypocritical homage at the shrine of that Freedom whose cause you had betrayed.²⁰

Also for nationalist women, the issue of a united Ireland is not an easy one. Despite Northern Ireland being the most conservative of the four British countries, British legislation overall is more favourable to women than the Irish one. Abortion is still a big issue in the Republic and even though the Marie Stopes Abortion Clinic in Belfast is much protested – by both Protestants and Catholics – at least it exists. Nationalist parties and organisations such as Sinn Féin and Republican Sinn Féin have different opinions on the makings of a united Ireland and so do the active IRA splinter groups. There is no master plan or blueprint on how to achieve a united Ireland, however, the large majority of the proponents have agreed on a non-violent and constitutional way to achieve their goal.

²⁰ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1897/01/socnat.htm> (05.08.2015).

4. A Brief History of “the Troubles”

The term “Troubles” describes a 30-years period of bloody conflict and civil unrest in the six North-Eastern counties of Ireland, known as Northern Ireland. Historiography sets its outbreak in 1968 and its end point in 1998, when the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was signed. In these 30 years, the conflict claimed the lives of more than 3.600 people in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, mainland Britain and mainland Europe. Thousands more were injured in the course of “the Troubles”, which have left their distinct mark on the psyche of the people in the North of the island.²¹

4.1. Before “the Troubles”

Together with Scotland and North West England, Northern Ireland was part of an industrial triangle of engineering, shipbuilding and textiles. Because of the expansion of the city in the late 19th century, many poor Catholic families from rural Ulster such as Donegal moved into the city. The number of inhabitants grew from roughly 20.000 to 350.000, the number of Catholics rose from 4.000 to 100.000. (Rae 40) In the early years of the 20th century the linen industry was the major source of income for most Catholic families in the ghettos of the Falls Road area in Belfast. The majority of the mills-workers were women and children, with 10% of the girls being under the age of 13.

Education was very poor, especially in the Catholic areas. In 1900, St. Vincent’s Primary School in West Belfast opened its doors to provide part-time education for girls to give them a chance of a better future. These half-timers worked in the Mills on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and attended school on Tuesday and Thursday. Working conditions in the mills were dreadful and many women did not live to be fifty. Apart from work and education, the women were also responsible for the household, their families and husbands. It was hard for men to find jobs to support their families, so many women would find themselves with unemployed husbands trying to

²¹ Cf. Mulholland 55-124.
Cf. Pašeta 102-127.

escape the bitter realities of life. When the Northern Irish statelet was born in 1921, many Catholics had to flee communal violence at the hand of Protestants and found a safe harbour in the Belfast Falls Road-area. Sister Vincent, the nun who was in charge of the half-timers' education in these latter years, admired the "extraordinary resilience and willpower of the women of West-Belfast." (48)

Although the concept of half-timers phased out around 1920 and most of the mills had closed down by the mid-20th century, the linen manufactures remained powerful symbols of this harrowing chapter of West Belfast: "When the latest round of the Troubles started in 1969, twenty-year-old Gerry Adams watched the mill building in Northumberland Street go up in flames and knew why the petrol bombers had chosen that target. His grandmother, too, had been a half-timer." (40)

4.2. The North and the Civil Rights' Movement

It came as no surprise that the spirit of '68 and the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) found its way into the North of Ireland. The Catholic population faced discrimination on almost every level of society. Houses were preferably given to Protestants, work was scarce and especially Catholic men were often unemployed. Due to gerrymandering the votes of Catholics were hardly taken into account and even when they were they were outnumbered by Protestant votes. The Sunday Times Insight Team recalls that

[t]he most dazzling gerrymander was the rigging of the Londonderry Borough Council. In 1966 the city itself had 14,325 Catholic voters to 9,235 Protestant. But by corralling all the Catholics of the Bogside area into one huge Catholic ward, and contriving one small Protestant ward with the same number of councillors... it was found possible to produce a body with eight councillors on the Catholic side and twelve on the Protestant side. (qtd. in Target 124)

Business men and land owners were granted more votes than average people, which again favoured the generally better-off Protestants. While Catholics were in no way protected by the Law, they felt its full force. Seeing how Northern Ireland in general was the most deprived and worst-off part of the United Kingdom, the differences between people from a Catholic and a Protestant background were tremendous. People's Democracy observed that "[t]he CRM began as a campaign for modest democratic demands. But the Catholic minority, which was thoroughly fed up with the make-

believe ‘representation’ at Stormont, soon found the CRM to be a vehicle through which it could express its anger and discontent.” (Prisoners of Partition 14)

During a peaceful Civil Rights march in Derry in October 1968, troubles erupted as the police dispersed the crowd by using batons and water-cannons. As it had not been the first CR march in Northern Ireland and the movement had gathered momentum, media interest was big and the pictures of police violence went around the world. More rioting broke out in the streets of Derry and as more and more people got involved one way or the other, many more marches were to take place over the next months. As each protest was ambushed either by the police or other pro-government forces, riots were high on the agenda. The Northern Irish government came under pressure from its own people calling for decisive action.

4.2.1. The Battle of the Bogside

The Battle of the Bogside is widely regarded as the actual escalation of the Troubles. During the traditional Orange marching season in 1969, an Apprentice Boy Parade in Derry passed close the Bogside area of the city, a Catholic working-class neighbourhood. G.W. Target describes it as “[a]n area of about nine hundred acres, mostly slums and tenements, with a population of over 25,000, all Roman Catholics, half the total population of the City, encircled by equally poor Protestant areas... where, as John Bayley and Peter Loizos put it in one telling sentence, ‘The Catholics feel surrounded and the Protestants at the same time feel outnumbered.’” (Target 229) The Parade aimed at commemorating the Siege of Derry, when the Protestant forces defeated Catholic King James’ attempts to take the city, and was seen as pure provocation by many Catholics. Rioting ensued and was to last for three days, during which hundreds of people were injured. As most of the police forces were drawn into Derry, violent clashes broke out all across the Six Counties. The deputy minister of Home Affairs mobilised 11,000 B Specials²² onto the streets to regain control of the situation. In the meantime, loyalist mobs burned down houses in Nationalist areas, leaving 3,500 predominantly Catholic families homeless. The Catholic population was

²² Ulster Special Constabulary, a quasi-military reserve police force made up of Protestants.

afraid of a massacre and was relieved to see the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic step up. He sent troops to the border to provide relief, declaring that he would “not stand idly by and see innocent people injured.” (Brady i.a. 30) One of the driving forces of the Battle of the Bogside was Bernadette Devlin, a young Cookstown resident with stout Republican views. As an Independent Unity candidate between the Nationalist and Republican supporters, she was elected into Westminster parliament in 1969, with only 21 years of age. In the House of Commons, she always made her true allegiances known: “When one is forced to take sides, while I have my criticisms of the IRA, this House takes side with the British Army, and I, without any apology, take mine with the IRA.” (Target 73)

As the Northern security forces were overwhelmed with the situation, the British government deployed troops on the streets of Belfast and Derry – it was their first direct intervention since partition. At first most Catholics were glad at the prospect of this seemingly ‘neutral’ force to protect them against violent assaults, however, soon they realised that the army was but another force of oppression. After his deployment to the North, an ex-soldier told the West London Observer in 1973 that “[t]he large majority [of soldiers] do not realize they are there to carry out a peace-keeping role. They think the Catholic community is the enemy and should be treated as such. How often I heard the remarks from troops – Fenian B-----s, Papist B-----s – never would one hear anything about Protestant B-----s.” (Fairweather i.a. 20) Operation Banner – the deployment of the British troops in Northern Ireland – was meant to be a temporary intervention, however, effectively it lasted until July 2007. During their peak times in the 1970s, more than 20.000 troops were deployed.

By the end of 1969, no-go areas were established in both Belfast and Derry and dozens of walls – ironically called ‘peace lines’ – were erected in the cities to keep Catholic and Protestant communities apart. With the state incapable of keeping up the public order, in both communities paramilitary groups began to reassemble. In December of the same year, the IRA leadership in Dublin split over internal differences. While the Official IRA fell back on a Marxist analysis of the situation, the Provisional IRA stuck to its more traditional Republican views and launched their armed campaign. The Provisional

IRA upheld its allegiance to the First Dáil, the Officials voted to enter a partitionist parliament.

4.3. The 1970s: Operation Demetrius, Bloody Sunday and Sunningdale

Much to the dismay of the Catholic population, the fundamentalist Protestant preacher Ian Paisley and his Democratic Ulster Party were highly successful in the April 1970 Stormont elections. Three months later, the British Army called a curfew on the Nationalist Falls Road and carried out violent searches for weapons. On the third day of the curfew, Máire Drumm, later to become vice president of Sinn Féin, led a large group of women from other Nationalist areas to the Falls Road in a big show of support. They passed the dumbstruck soldiers with their prams full of milk and groceries for the deprived Falls population. Unbeknownst to the soldiers, they also managed to smuggle out some weapons hidden in their prams. At the end of the day the curfew was broken and the Army campaign had come to a halt.

The introduction of internment without trial on August 9th 1971 marks a watershed in the course of the Troubles. 350 men were arrested in Operation Demetrius the same night and detained under Section 12 of the Special Powers Act, none of them a Loyalist. While in 1970 25 people had died as a result of the Troubles, in 1971 it was 174, 140 of whom were killed only after the introduction of Internment. In his autobiography *Before the Dawn*, Gerry Adams recalls the first nights after its introduction in the Ballymurphy neighbourhood of Belfast and the horrors associated with it. Within three nights, the British Parachute regiment had shot eleven unarmed civilians in the area, among them a priest and a mother of eight:

Many of the killings on the night of 9 August had taken place in the vicinity of the Taggart, including and close to Divismore Park and our house. This area around the base had obviously been designated a killing zone. As we registered the information coming in and assessed it, we could see no reason for all those deaths other than that soldiers had been told to shoot whoever entered that zone.
(Adams 160f)

About six months later, on January 30th 1972, during a Human Rights March against Internment in Derry, the British Parachute Regiment opened fire on its participants,

killing 13 civilians and injuring 13 more, one of them fatally. G.W. Target recalls the events of the day:

Singing all the old and new Green and Red songs, chanting all the slogans anybody could think of, cheering at anything to catch their fancy, the march grew in numbers as it passed along the Lecky Road towards the Bogside, fifteen, twenty thousand.

“In Lower William Street the front ranks came in sight of a formidable Army barricade which blocked the street from wall to wall...”

“Let us through!” shouted the marchers. “It’s our City!”

Stones and bottles were thrown at the troops...

The Army replied with rubber bullets, CS-gas, and a water-cannon spraying blue dye...

“Ah well,” said a local Irish Times journalist, “another friendly wee Derry riot.”

In less than fifteen minutes, give or take a minute or a death, the Army shot and killed thirteen Roman Catholic men and boys, and wounded thirteen other and a woman. (Target 246f)

Claims of the army that they had come under the attack of paramilitaries were later proven to be false, however, their actions went unpunished. In Dublin, tens of thousands of people took to the streets and marched to the British embassy, which was set ablaze in the course of the protest. Many young men who were witness to the uncalled-for violence of the British joined the ranks of the IRA to protect their families and neighbourhoods. In the Houses of Parliament the events were not even discussed, which caused Bernadette Devlin to physically attack then Secretary-of-State Reginald Maudling. It was indeed not until 2010 that David Cameron in his role as Prime Minister of the British people apologised for what became to be known as Bloody Sunday, however, at the same time denying any form of collusion between the forces.

1972 was the worst year of the Troubles with 497 people killed and roughly 5.000 injured. More than 2.000 explosions and 10.000 shootings were reported; the IRA killed 100 soldiers, wounding 500. (Brady i.a. 78) In March 1972, the Northern Irish Stormont government was disbanded and Direct Rule from London implemented. At a Convention in Monaghan in autumn, the IRA Army Council drew up a list of points as a basis of negotiation with the British. As the introduction of internment had gained them support rather than weakened their ranks, they felt they were acting from a position of strength. The IRA statement began with a plea to the British Prime Minister to end “the agony of our people” and asked the people in charge to

1. End its campaign of violence against the Irish people;
 2. Abolish Stormont;
 3. Hold free elections to establish a regional parliament for the Province of Ulster as a first step towards a new government for the Thirty-two Counties;
 4. Release all Irish political prisoners, tried or untried, in England and Ireland;
 5. Compensate all those who had suffered as a result of British violence.
- (McGuire 30f)

As their demands were not met, the IRA intensified their campaign, which was extended to mainland Britain. In 1973, two of four car bombs planted by the IRA in London outside of the Old Bailey, Scotland Yard, Whitehall and the Westend went off, injuring 180 people and causing one to die of a heart attack. Nine of the ten volunteers were arrested at Heathrow airport and eight of them consequently sentenced to life in prison. Four of them embarked on a hunger strike immediately, demanding to be incarcerated in Northern Ireland.

The Sunningdale Agreement of December 1973 arranged for a power-sharing executive and a cross-border Council of Ireland. While the nationalist population was happy enough with the terms of the agreement, the majority of Unionists was appalled by the perspective of having the Republic of Ireland have a say in its agenda. The Ulster Workers Council strike in May 1974 brought economy in the North to a halt and succeeded in its aims of bringing the power-sharing executive down and overthrowing the Sunningdale Agreement. Also in 1974, English pubs were bombed by the IRA in Guildhall and Birmingham, causing more than 20 deaths. Those arrested for the IRA's actions turned out to be innocent many years later and films like 'In the Name of the Father' and songs like 'Streets of Sorrow' have enshrined the memory of their crime of "being Irish at the wrong place and at the wrong time"²³ in popular culture.

While the bombing campaign of the Provisional IRA regularly claimed casualties in the six counties as well as on British soil, the Official IRA stuck to its truce called in 1972. Members of the OIRA who were frustrated by its inactivity, thus founded the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) in late 1974. Their militant wing, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) was to play an important role in the further course of the Troubles as well as in the prison struggle. The loss of Special Category in March 1976 marked the beginning of this dramatic as well as traumatic period for Northern

²³ <http://www.pogues.com/Releases/Lyrics/LPs/IfIShould/Sorrow.html> (8.9.2015).

nationalists. Between late 1976 up to 1982, the focus of the fight for independence shifted to the Northern prisons. The blanket protest in Long Kesh, the dirty protests in the H-Block and Armagh Gaol, the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981 – resulting in the death of ten devout Republicans – left their distinct mark on the psyche of the people in the six counties. Chapter 5 of this thesis shall explore the prison struggle in more detail.

4.4. The 1980s: Trials, Agreements and the End of Abstentionism

The early 1980s saw the onset of the supergrass trials. Persons arrested were not prosecuted if they agreed to become informers and tell on their fellow comrades. This procedure was hotly debated as the accusations were highly arbitrary. In a conversation with Kevin Toolis, Pat Finucane, a well-known Belfast lawyer, explained the faultiness of this approach:

The standard of evidence the cops are using is akin to me and you having this conversation and then in the morning the police breaking your door down at 5 am and charging you with conspiracy to murder the Lord Chief Justice on the basis that I said you did that. It's all verbal. There is no material evidence, no proof, to back up these claims. But that doesn't seem to stop the cops arresting dozens of people. (Toolis 92)

Finucane, who defended many alleged Republican terrorists and saw the court of law as his battleground, was assassinated by Loyalists in early 1989. Because of his dedication to legal justice, the RUC saw him as being “worse than an IRA man”.²⁴ Finucane's family was one of the 1.500 Catholic families that were burnt out of their houses during the 1969 riots.

In 1982, Sinn Féin decided to test its range of electoral support and ran for the Northern Ireland Assembly election. Due to their policy of abstentionism they did not take their seats, however, the result convinced them to take the constitutional way into account. In this context the then-publicity director of the organisation famously described their strategy as one “with an armalite in one hand and the ballot box in the other”. (Brady i.a. 238)

The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 was another attempt to bring a power-sharing executive to the Six Counties. Unionists were once again appalled by the fact that the

²⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/jul/09/northern-ireland-terror-shoot-to-kill> (8.9.2015).

Irish government should have a say in the North's issues. For many of them, the Republic was the breeding ground of terrorism and they refused to enter in any form of cooperation. A big campaign with the slogan 'Ulster says No!' succeeded in rendering the agreement ineffective.

In 1986 Sinn Féin decided to end their abstentionism and henceforth take their seats in the Dáil Éireann, the Irish Parliament. Some members saw this as a betrayal of the traditional Republican analysis, which did not recognise the authority of the Dáil but saw it as an institution enforced by the British. They split off the party and reconstituted in a group named Republican Sinn Féin. As the Provisional IRA was the militant wing of Sinn Féin, the change of policy also had to be discussed within its ranks. Those who did not agree with the rejection of abstentionism split off and called themselves the Continuity IRA, however, they did not get active until the 1994 ceasefire. Naturally, Republican Sinn Féin and the Continuity IRA had close links as they were recruited from an overlapping pool of members. While the rejection of abstentionism caused quite some trouble within Sinn Féin/IRA ranks, it did pave the way for real constitutional power-sharing in the Six Counties.

4.5. The 1990s: Ceasefires, Dissenters and the Peace Process

On August 31st 1994, the Provisional IRA announced a complete cessation of its military operations, which was followed by the ceasefire of the loyalist paramilitaries in October. The IRA ended their truce in February 1996, however, they called a new one only five months later. On April 10th 1998 the Belfast Agreement/Good Friday Agreement was signed and came into force in December 1999, thus ending Direct Rule after 28 years. Ian Paisley's DUP was the only big Unionist party to oppose the treaty. In October 1998, the Omagh bombing claimed the lives of 29 people, injuring more than 300. It was carried out by the Real IRA, which split off the Provisionals in 1997 after their ceasefire announcement. The Real IRA – also referred to as the New IRA – clings to the Irish Republican physical force-tradition and renounces the constitutional path. The Omagh bombing was the single worst attack within the history of the Troubles and had been regarded as especially vicious since it occurred so briefly after

the signing of the Agreement. The perpetrators were not prosecuted, however, as the attack was carried out in the six counties but planned and prepared in the Republic. The relatives of the victims kept fighting for justice and indeed, over a decade later, finally won their civil case against the main suspects. They managed to establish a precedent: A ruling in the Belfast High Court named the RIRA godfathers as responsible for the atrocity and made them liable for civic claims. (Smith 284) Between 1998 and 2003, the RIRA claimed the lives of 31 people, injuring 369. (Tonge, “They Haven’t Gone Away You Know” 685)

The 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement marks the end of the Troubles. In the same year, the Irish Republic abolished their constitutional claim to Northern Ireland, thereby contributing to the delegitimation of the armed struggle for the wider public.

4.6. The Aftermath: Reform, Compromise and Power-Sharing

In 2001, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) was established, which should allow both communities to feel well represented and protected. In mid-2005 the Provisionals ended their armed struggle once and for all and decommissioned their weapons. The St. Andrews Agreement of 2006 arranged for the devolution of power in the six counties and was accepted by the DUP and Sinn Féin respectively, which in turn recognised the PSNI. The Northern Ireland Assembly was restored and by 2007 Ian Paisley was elected First Minister with Martin McGuinness as his deputy.²⁵

²⁵ Cf. Mulholland 125-151.
Cf. Pašeta 102-127.

5. The Prison Struggle

*So I'll wear no convict's uniform
Nor meekly serve my time
That Britain might brand Ireland's fight
Eighthundred years of crime.*²⁶

In the history of Irish Republicanism prison has always played an important role, especially in the cultivation of martyrs. The willingness to sacrifice everything for the greater good – the freedom of the Irish people and the unity of the island – has made it hard for the British colonisers to resolve the Irish issue. The Belfast IRA leader William McKee once stated that “[t]his war will be won in the prisons” (Coogan, “On the Blanket” 14) and indeed a big part of the Troubles is inevitably linked to the gaol experience. Prison naturally came as a battleground to the Republican paramilitary groups as “the place where society makes its sanctions stick – if it can”. (14) It was the place in which the very nature of the Troubles was negotiated and in which the authorities’ sanctions were challenged by the dirty protests and various hungerstrikes.

For many people Bobby Sands is the prototypical Irish hungerstriker but the tradition of starvation in Irish history is long and profound. Before the Normans invaded Ireland and before the island fell under British rule, Ireland had a comparatively progressive legislation. This collection of Laws, the Brehon Laws, were based upon principles such as justice and equality and abstained from vengeance. One way of retaliation was for the wronged party to starve themselves outside the house of the person who committed the crime. (Condren xy) The history of self-chosen starvation on an island which lost large numbers of its population due to a famine appears ironic. However, perhaps in the very act of starvation itself a grain of solidarity is contained, which represents the collective trauma unifying the Irish people beyond time and space.

²⁶ F. Brollie: The H Block song - <http://www.irishhungerstrike.com/hblocksong.html> (8.9.2015).

Giving up their freedom or even their lives for the cause of Ireland was seen as a noble and honourable thing to do and put in poetic words by many an Irishman, such as Padraig Pearse:

Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations. The Defenders of this realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think that they have pacified Ireland. [...] but the fools, the fools, the fools! They have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace. (qtd. in Coogan, "On the Blanket" 17)

Sinn Féin Lord Mayor Terence MacSwiney from Cork is fondly commemorated in the Nationalist narrative for his sacrifice during the Anglo-Irish war: in 1920 he died in Brixton prison after 74 days of hungerstrike, drawing the limelight of international press on the Irish struggle. He remains in the collective mind as the man who put into words the sentiment of the fighting men and women: "... the contest on our side is not one of rivalry or vengeance but of endurance. It is not those who can inflict the most but those who can suffer the most who will conquer... [...] Those whose faith is strong will endure to the end in triumph." (qtd. in Coogan 15)

Endurance presents a strong trope also in the Catholic doctrine, in which suffering is relativised in the face of paradise, which will compensate the sufferer for all the pain encountered. Whether inside prison or out, the fighters will never lose their roles as agents though: it is them who decide their fates and who will claim their bodily integrity until the very end if must be.

Before the escalation of the Troubles, Northern Ireland had two prisons: the Crumlin Road Jail for men in Belfast and Armagh Gaol for women. When internment was introduced in 1971, a new temporary prison was built at Long Kesh, later often referred to as the H Blocks. While Republicans referred to it as 'The Kesh' or 'The Cages', it was later officially renamed in Her Majesty's Maze Prison. Depending on whose opinion you would ask, the conditions of the prison were described as "'worse than Saigon in 1986' (Hamilton Fish; House of Representatives); 'Inhuman. One would hardly allow an animal to live in such conditions. The nearest approach to it that I have seen was the hundreds of homeless people living in sewer-pipes in the slums of Calcutta' (Tomas O'Fiaich, Archbishop of Armagh); and as 'among the best prison

conditions in the United Kingdom' (Northern Ireland Office)." (Fairweather i.a. 49)
Another temporary jail was established in Magilligan.

5.1. Internment

When the British government introduced internment on August 9th 1971 they hoped it would put a halt to the increasing activity of Republican paramilitaries. Today, it is widely regarded as one of the biggest mistakes the British government made in the North. As army documents show, the British leadership introduced internment despite the warnings of Lieutenant General Sir Harry Tuzo, then head of the Army in the Six Counties, who warned against potential "harmful effects".²⁷ The arbitrariness of internment alienated members of the Catholic communities further and helped the IRA to recruit new members. In late 1972 the Diplock Report was presented to the British authorities and should set the tone for the future struggles of Republicans inside prison and out. The Detention of Terrorists (Northern Ireland) Order, 1972 aimed at giving the highly deliberate practice of internment a legal coating by re-naming it 'detention', however, it remained an extra-judicial process irreconcilable with basic human rights:

Deprivation of liberty as a result of an extra-judicial process we call "detention", following the nomenclature of The Detention of Terrorists (Northern Ireland) Order, 1972. [...] We use it to describe depriving a man of his liberty as a result of an investigation of the facts which inculcate the detainee by an impartial person or tribunal by making use of a procedure which, however fair to him, is inappropriate to a court of law because it does not comply with Article 6 of the European Convention. (Coogan, "On the Blanket" 53)

Felonies such as murder, grievous bodily harm, explosive charges and possession of arms were listed as 'scheduled offences' and trials of these offences were to follow a certain set-up, in which a judge without jury decided on the fate of the accused. Therefore, the fundamental legal principle of 'in dubio pro reo' was abolished as defendants had to effectively prove their innocence: "The onus of proof as to the possession of firearms and explosives should be altered as to require a person found in certain circumstances to prove on the balance of probabilities that he did not know and had no reason to suspect that arms or explosives were where they were found." (55)

²⁷ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/1737078.stm (14.9.2015).

Lord Diplock argued against juries as he anticipated that Catholic jurors and witnesses would be intimidated by the IRA and that juries would thus be largely Protestant. However, as Peoples' Democracy concluded, he was not afraid that these juries might act too leniently but rather the exact opposite: "Protestant juries would be so enthusiastic in convicting republicans they would outrage the Catholic community and expose the political roots of the violence in the Six Counties." (Prisoners of Partition 5)

The practice of having these court trials without jury and witnesses was widely criticised, therefore so-called Special Tribunals were introduced to give the procedure an appearance of rule of law. Ann O'Neill, who was interned at Armagh Gaol in 1973, recalls the modus operandi of these courts:

I remember that soon after my internment kangaroo courts, described as 'Special Tribunals' by the British government, were brought in to try and convince the outside world that internment without trial no longer existed and that the internees were being given a fair trial in the form of an appearance before a 'Commissioner'. At these tribunals 'evidence' was given from behind the safety of a curtain by the infamous Special Branch as well as from police touts and paid informers and British soldiers. So called witnesses were addressed as 'Officer A, B, C', etc. (Brady i.a. 34)

The Detention of Terrorists (Northern Ireland) Order, 1972 was very open to interpretation and many men and women were lifted on little more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Biased security forces were given executive rights, further radicalising the situation in the North.

5.2. The Fight for Political Status

Prisoners convicted of political offences had to follow a rigid prison routine and were frequently harassed and humiliated by their wardens. Thus on May 15th 1972 the Republican prisoner Billy McKee embarked on a hungerstrike with 41 fellow inmates in Crumlin Road Jail, demanding political status for prisoners sentenced for Troubles-related crimes. Some weeks later several women from Armagh joined their male comrades on the strike. Susan Loughran, one of the hungerstrikers from Armagh, recalls her contribution:

I believe that it was several weeks later that we, the Republican women in Armagh, embarked on a hunger strike in support of the men and also for our own status. We were allowed to drink water and, thankfully, after 21 days I was

called in the Governor's office and told that Special Category status had been granted. This meant we were allowed weekly visits, food parcels and daily letters and allowed to make handicrafts. We were also allowed greater access to books. In effect political status had been won. It made a huge difference.

(Brady i.a. 88)

Following the introduction of Special Category status in July 1972, the prisoners were de-facto treated as Prisoners of War (POWs) and could enjoy certain privileges, such as free association, extra visits and food parcels and the right to not wear a prison uniform. They were accommodated away from the ordinary criminals, either in their own wings, such as in Armagh and Crumlin, or in their own Nissen Huts, such as in Long Kesh. This privilege also facilitated the implementation of their own command structure along the lines of the IRA and paved the way for powerful political agitation and activism even from within the walls.

5.3. Political Status

Many of the young women who were sent to Armagh Gaol had never been away from their families before. To facilitate settling into jail routine, the Republican prisoners had set up strict paramilitary-style command structures. Each wing had their own Officer in Command (O.C.), a board containing an intelligence officer, quarter master, training officer and press release officer. They were in charge of coordinating meetings, cell inspections, drills and the maintenance of cleanliness. The women even had their own timetables including physical activities and Irish classes. Violations of the set rules were punished by the O.C., who would also serve as communicator with the wardens. Most women who were interned in Armagh during Special Category status did not interact with the prison officials at all and would not accept any orders from them. For special occasions such as the Easter commemoration the women would parade in the prison yard to honour their dead. Eileen Hickey, former O.C. in Armagh, recalls these parades and how important they were for the morale of the young women:

Songs of 1916 were sung and the National Anthem was sung at the end of the parade. On Easter Sunday night céilithe would be held. The dance, songs and craic was always good but the sense of achievement we felt was always the best. We were all in Armagh Gaol for the same cause, Ireland's freedom, and that's what gave us our strength and united us all. (103)

When the men in Long Kesh set the camp on fire in 1974 to protest against their treatment and conditions, the women were horrified at the retaliation their comrades would have to suffer consequently. In her role as O.C. Hickey decided to take the governor of Armagh Gaol hostage to ensure their male comrades would receive proper medical treatment and that the events would not be hushed up. The then-governor Mr Cunningham was appreciated for his sense of justice and humanity and did not put up any resistance. When the women were reassured that their comrades were alright, they allowed the governor to leave and were not punished for their action.

In 1975, Marian and Dolours Price were to be transferred to Armagh from English jails. They were part of the Old Bailey bombing mission to London in 1973 and had been on a hunger strike for over 200 days to demand their repatriation. Out of these 200 days they were force-fed by prison officials 167 days. In a letter to her family, Marian Price recalls the tortures of being force-fed in England:

I was pulled of my bed and carried bodily by the arms and legs from my cell to the room where it takes place. I was put in a chair, my legs were held and my arms put behind my back and held tightly. [...] I was then blindfolded and a metal clamp was used to force my teeth apart. This was screwed in place; the wooden gag was inserted and the blue tube pushed in my stomach. After the liquid had been poured in, the clamp and the gag were removed, and then the blindfold and I was then practically carried back to my cell. I needn't tell you I was nearly in hysterics [...] (129)

Her sister Dolours also shared her harrowing experience with their family:

She's [Marian] not taking this force-feeding well at all, vomits a lot more than I do but then we both seem to have up weeks and down weeks. I'd a bit of trouble myself today, got an awful pain in my chest when the tube went down first. I felt as though it was curling up inside me and not go straight towards my stomach. [...] Mar seems worse than me now but for the last few times she's not been as sick during it but she gets pain in her stomach. The doctor tells us that the calories have been increased now and now we get 1,516 calories pumped into us each time; still the same menu of milk, complan²⁸, raw eggs and orange juice; thank God I don't taste it! (126)

5.4. The Loss of Special Category

Before the Civil Rights movement took hold in the Six Counties only 727 prisoners had been incarcerated in the North, a number which rose up to 2,848 by the mid-1970s. In

²⁸ Powdered milk energy drink.

these years a new approach to break resistance in the Six Counties was implemented. The aim of the “Ulsterisation, Criminalisation and Normalisation” policy was to bring Northern Ireland back to relative peace by implementing various strategies strengthening the hegemony of Protestant and Unionist forces. The ‘Containment and Normalisation’ policy arranged for the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) to take on security tasks again and thus rendered the B Specials redundant. As the mid-70s saw internal feuds between the Republican paramilitary groups, the British seized the opportunity of implementing their criminalisation policy against a seemingly weakened Republican movement. The policy was aimed at the IRA/INLA volunteers, who – by delegitimising their efforts in the public opinion – should henceforth not be seen as political prisoners anymore but as mere criminals. It was decided on the basis of the Gardiner Report that from March 1976 onwards prisoners convicted of scheduled offenses should not have political status any more:

Although recognizing the pressures on those responsible at the time, we have come to the conclusion that the introduction of Special Category Status was a serious mistake... It should be made absolutely clear that Special Category prisoners can expect no amnesty and will have to serve their sentences... we recommend that the earliest practicable opportunity should be taken to end the Special Category. (Coogan, “On the Blanket” 56)

The IRA promptly reacted to this scheme and came forward with their own policy statement, dismantling the criminalisation purposes within:

We have no doubt that there will now be a hysterical campaign mounted by the NIO²⁹ which will claim that the prisoners are thugs and criminals. So be it. We are confident that the people to whom the propaganda is directed are capable of recognizing just who the real thugs are. The present actions of the British Army in working class areas of the North will be the yardstick by which people will judge the propaganda of the NIO. The result of that is a foregone conclusion.

It is not the para-militaries who are in a state of disarray as recently claimed by Merlyn Rees³⁰. The only disarray is in the carefully fostered plans of the NIO and the British Government. We are prepared to die for the right to retain political status. Those who try to take it away must be fully prepared to pay the same price. (66)

²⁹ Northern Ireland Office: representation of Northern Irish interests within the UK government.

³⁰ Secretary of State for Northern Ireland 1974-1976.

The Special Air Service (SAS) were officially deployed in January 1976. They were to operate in infamous Republican and Nationalist areas and allegedly worked on a 'shoot-to-kill'-policy. In his 1983 study with the SAS still active, Dermot Walsh claims that "[a]lthough it entails going well outside the ambit of the information supplied by the court and interview surveys recent events call for some comments on the use of deadly force by the security forces." (104) While the normalisation and criminalisation policy rendered the courts the primary means to 'dispose' of suspected terrorists, the shoot-to-kill policy was another way to achieve this end.

5.4.1. The Conveyor Belt System

The procedure of criminalisation became to be known as 'conveyor belt system' and describes the different stations the arrested party will have to go through: harassment, interrogation, detention, trial and incarceration. (Trade Unions 4) Interrogations often took place in the Castlereagh RUC station, which became infamous for repeated mental and physical torture. In their book "The Castlereagh File", members of the Association for Legal Justice (ALJ) and Fathers Denis Faul and Raymond Murray collected statements of people interrogated on-site and compiled a list of methods used by the forces to make the arrestees talk. These included

- Hair pulling.
- Heavy slaps across face and head.
- Strangling neck. Chops to the throat.
- Punches and kicks to stomach, buttocks, kidneys, spine.
- Wrestling holds until prisoner vomits.
- Made to lie centre back across a table or chair face upwards. Interrogators then jump on legs causing intense pain to back.
- Simulated execution by clicking gun behind the head simulated electrocution by putting plug into mouth and putting on switch.
- Degradations: making prisoners lick water or vomit off floor, behave like a dog; spitting in face; stripping prisoners naked and making obscene remarks about his body, wife and children. (6)

The Belfast Women's Collective compiled the experiences of women arrestees in Castlereagh and found that five main strategies were used to torture and intimidate them:

1. Before interrogation fingerprints and photographs were taken, often several times. Sometimes the women were made to undress down to their underwear for photographs and body searches.

2. During interrogation most women were subjected to a barrage of allegations about their alleged involvement in paramilitary activities.
3. Interrogation methods altered between a ‘hard’ and a ‘soft’ approach. Sometimes the interrogators appeared as friendly and offered to give the women money, or not to press charges, if they cooperated in supplying information about their friends and neighbours. This approach would be suddenly interrupted by bursts of aggressive behaviour from other police officers who would shout and scream in the women’s faces, push, kick and hit them, and threaten them with 20 years in Armagh prison.
4. Sexual abuse (mainly verbal) and innuendo were used to undermine the women’s confidence and make them feel degraded and humiliated. They were called “whores”, “dirty sluts” etc. and sometimes threatened with rape. Women who had their menstrual period while in detention were subjected to obscene remarks about this and refused sanitary towels.
5. Some women were released after a few hours, others [sic!] were detained for several days and subjected to lengthy periods of interrogation. When not being questioned they were held in solitary confinement. Many were unable to sleep because they were so upset by the treatment, or were kept awake by sounds of banging, screaming and moaning which seemed to come from the interrogations going on in nearby rooms. Over a period of a few days in these conditions women became disoriented and unable to concentrate on what was being said to them and their replied during interrogation. (Women’s Action 7)

The complaints against forces of the RUC skyrocketed after the introduction of the Ulsterisation policy and more than tripled in the years between 1975 and 1977:

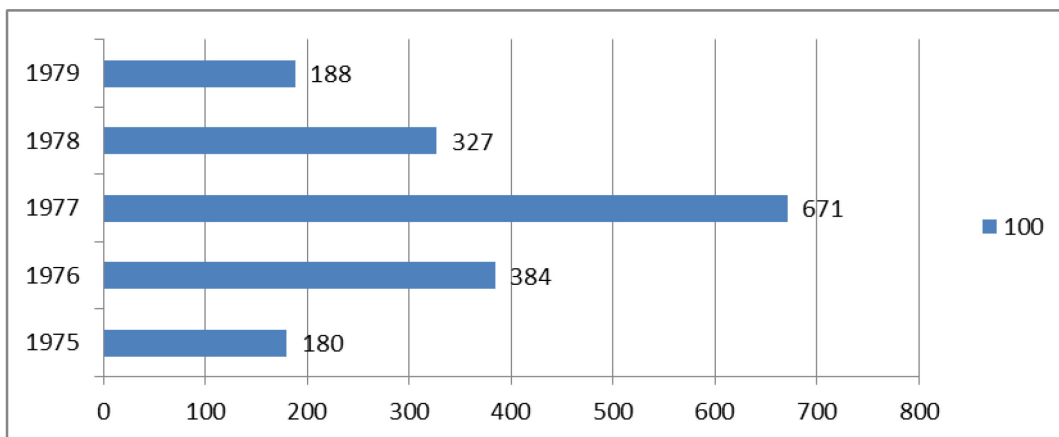


Table I: “Complaints Against RUC Alleging Assault During Interview” (Walsh 57)

The research undertaken by the QUB’s Law Department in 1983 also shows that 94% of the cases brought in front of a Diplock Court resulted in conviction:

Between seventy per cent and ninety per cent of the convictions are based wholly or mainly on admissions of guilt (self-incriminating statements) made to the police during interrogation. Only in a minority of cases is other evidence – forensic evidence, intelligence evidence, or testimony of witness – produced in

court to secure a conviction.” (Walsh 136)

It is noteworthy that the big majority of confessions were of a written nature:

	<i>Written</i>		<i>Oral</i>		<i>None</i>		<i>Not Known</i>	<i>Total</i>	
<i>Loyalist</i>	61	87%	3	4%	6	9%	0	70	41%
<i>Republican</i>	67	74%	11	12%	12	13%	0	90	53%
<i>Security Forces</i>	6	86%	0		1	14%	0	7	4%
<i>Other</i>	1	100%	0		0		0	1	1%
<i>Not Known</i>	2	100%	0		0		0	2	1%
<i>Total</i>	137	80%	14	8%	19	12%	0	170	
<i>Terrorist</i>	74	73%	12	12%	15	15%		101	59%
<i>Non-Terrorist</i>	63	91%	2	3%	4	6%		69	41%
<i>Not Known</i>	0		0		0			0	
<i>Total</i>	137	81%	14	8%	19	11%		170	

Table II: “Nature of Confession” (Walsh 72)

The Case History of Patricia McGarry from the Ardoyne area in Belfast illustrates some of the stages of the conveyor belt system and how numerous confessions in Castlereagh were come by. Patricia’s family’s house in Ligoniel was destroyed by Loyalists in 1975 and forced the family to move into a nationalist neighbourhood. As most of the people from the Ardoyne, Patricia was used to being abused by the soldiers on a regular basis and she was detained on several occasions before the age of 16. She had a brother, Jack, who would later go on the blanket protest for re-introduction of Special status in Long Kesh. On June 23rd 1977, aged 17, she and seven other girls from the area were arrested and several days later Patricia was charged with causing explosions. In a written statement she recalls the horrors she had to endure during repeated interrogations:

Then one of them [the detectives] lost the bap. He pushed the table out of the room. They pushed me back and forward between them, calling me names F- - - -, and running my family down, kept on saying things about my sisters. They shouted about mutilated bodies and said they would show me pictures. This lasted about an hour and half. Back to cell. I couldn’t sleep with the fan. Light was switched on and off, lowering and putting it higher. (Trade Unions 23)

On the next day, the torture continued:

The small one got up and got me against the wall, started slapping me on the face... She slapped me across the back of the head; my forehead kept hitting the wall. They used very foul language: F- - -, C- - -, W- - -. This lasted an hour and a half. [...]
In the corner of the room he slapped me and pushed me about. He kept shouting in my ear “You are a murderer.”... He hit me slaps on the head. He said – why

not tell I was a member – I would get three years. (23)

It was only during the 9th interview that McGarry cracked and succumbed to her interrogators repeated outbursts of sheer brutality:

[...] The two of them got me up against the wall, back against the wall. Both took an arm on each side and tried to break my arms from the shoulders. I was roaring, crying, screeching, and yelling. They said “By the time we are finished with you you will need a hospital.” The skinny one let go my arm. The other one kept my arms and hands back and then flinging it. The other kept digging me on the head with his fist. The big one then gave me a great slap on the face. I was crying all through. This beating went on for an hour. They kept on questioning, yelling and shouting. I couldn’t take no more. I let a terrible squeal out of me – “What do you want me to tell you?” ... He wrote a statement and I signed it.... [...] (24)

Patricia’s court case took place in early 1978. She was sentenced to ten years although four witnesses described the girl involved in the bombing as “tall, dark and stout”, the utter opposite of Patricia’s physical appearance (24). In prison, she suffered from frequent blackouts she had never experienced before and had to have daily medical attention due to a blood condition. Patricia joined the protest for political status as well as the no wash-protest two years later. The harassment continued with wards attacking her and her comrades and hosing them down in their sleep.

Another girl in Armagh reported that her statement was forced out of her by the police who kept showing her pictures of her brother’s dead body. He had gone missing several months after having been interrogated himself and his body was found in a lake: “[T]hey kept shoving the picture in my face. It looked like a big lump of rotting meat. They told me I’d look like that because they would hang me, so I signed. I would have signed anything to make them stop.” (Coogan, “On the Blanket” 218) When she realised what she had admitted to later on, she tried to commit suicide but could be saved by a fellow inmate.

By the time Special Category was officially abolished on March 1st 1976, over 236 political prisoners had served time in Armagh Gaol. As the prisons were overcrowded, the loss of Special Category was linked with half remission for those with a political status. On the other hand, the sentences for those jailed after March 1976 increased greatly.

5.4.2. The Birth of the Blanket Protest

When IRA-volunteer Ciaran Nugent was arrested in mid-1976 and subsequently sentenced to 3 years of prison, he vowed to never wear the prison uniform that would brand him as an ordinary criminal. His refusal to wear the prison clothes marks the birth of the blanket protest. Due to his insubordination he had to spend 23 hours a day in his cell with nothing but a blanket to cover his body. Gradually, more and more men sentenced after the loss of Special Category joined Nugent 'on the blanket'. By April 1978 almost 300 H-Block men were on the blanket protest. (Faul and Murray 20) A member of a government-appointed visiting committee found that "they were, for all practical purposes, in the equivalent of solitary confinement. They had been allowed to wear a blanket in their cells, but are not allowed to wear blankets outside their cells. This means that if they leave their cells they are naked; this they regard as degrading and, therefore, refuse to go." (Trade Unions 8) They were frequently punished and ill-treated, including forced baths, internal searching of prisoners before and after visits, continuous light in their cells, removal of combs and toothbrushes, inadequate food quantities, scaldings and beating. (8f) They were refused medical treatment

unless we first wash and come off our protest. As a result many men are suffering from a variety of illnesses. About one in five suffers from worms. Almost everyone is hit by regular bouts of vomiting and diarrhea, pains, 'flu and colds. But more serious is their disregard to men with old gunshot wounds, ulcers and even missing limbs. [...] The bad food we are served up in here, mostly inedible, badly cooked, cold and of a low quantity and quality leaves us in a permanent state of hunger. (9)

As the conditions further worsened, acts of disobedience became more and more frequent. More and more punishments were dished out with the Maze Prison as the hub of rebellion. Any breaches of the code of conduct were monitored and compiled meticulously as the below table illustrates:

	Prisons				Total
	Males			Females	
	Belfast	Maze	Magilligan	Armagh	
Offences					
Violence	107	83	36	3	229
Damage to Prison Property	36	20	12	2	70
Idleness	-	4	4	-	8
Trafficking or possession of prohibited articles	62	149	16	8	235
Insubordination	57	53	99	28	237
Other breaches of regulations	321	92	52	101	566
False allegation	4	-	2	-	6
Refuse to work or wear Prison Clothing	-	3.147	-	408	3.555
TOTALS	587	3.548	221	550	4.906
Punishments					
Close confinement	194	3.481	79	-	3.754
Dietary punishment	100	53	-	-	153
Loss of privilege or remission	811	6.368	105	521	7.805
Stoppage of earnings	150	3.120	83	417	3.770
Warned	36	12	35	6	93
TOTALS	1.291	13.038	302	944	15.575
Number of prisoners punished	523	3.417	189	45	4.174

Table III: "Offences Committed and Punishments Awarded Whilst in Prison During 1977" (Faul and Murray 51)

Two years later, in March 1978, the blanket protest escalated into the 'dirty protest/no-wash protest' when prisoners refused to leave their cells and thus made them impossible for the wardens to clean. In the course of the blanket protest the prisoners had been repeatedly harassed, leading to a number of minor riots and eventually resulting in their general refusal to wash or have their cells cleaned. At first the prisoners tried to empty their chamber pots through the windows and doors but when they were boarded up, they started smearing it on the walls of their cells. The prison authorities remained inoperative in the face of their demands and the continually declining conditions.

For the mothers it was especially hard to see their sons in their horrible states at their rare visits. Mairéad, the mother of one of the blanket men commented that

[t]he mothers eat, sleep and die H-Block every day, every hour, every minute. [...] My son's terrible looking, so thin, and he's someone who believes in going out and fighting for his country, captures, tried in them Diplock courts. He's only 22 and he looks 40 ... going bald, the laughter has gone from his eyes. H-Block is a hell hole, it really is, it's just a concrete tomb. (Fairweather i.a. 90)

Another protestor's mother was afraid that "[t]he only way this government's going to do something is if say ten prisoners took ill, so they'd have to be brought to outside hospitals. It's an awful thing to say but that's the only sort of thing that's going to move

the British government.” (90) Only some time later the prisoners of Long Kesh were to come to the same conclusion.

Five mothers of blanket men staged their own blanket protest, trying to get the international media’s attention to focus on the horrible circumstances of the prisoners in the H-Blocks. They travelled to Western and Central Europe and – wearing blankets and displaying posters – protested in Brussels, Paris and The Hague. There were also regular marches, such as the Women’s Cross Border March or marches for the blanket men, which were joined by the families of the imprisoned. Many mothers felt that there was little they could do for their sons, so they participated in these often strenuous marches:

The hills are bad and sometimes the marches go on for ten miles but you try to keep up. You would be ready to drop but there is this man who comes along and wears nothing but a blanket and he marches in his bare feet, no matter what the weather is like. I don’t know who he is but when you see that, you have to keep going. (93)

While the men in Long Kesh were on the blanket, most of the women in Armagh, who did not have to wear prison clothing, joined them in a ‘no work’-protest, refusing to work and thus losing their privileges. In February 1980 however, after a serious incident at Armagh Gaol, several Republican women prisoners followed their male comrades on the dirty protest.

5.4.3. The Armagh Dirty Protest

Since January 1980 the Armagh women had noticed increased harassment by the prison guards. Their use of the toilets was restricted and the prisoners were repeatedly humiliated by their wardens:

On Saturday evening, 12th January 1980, Anne-Marie Quinn became ill in her cell. When she went to slop out the wardress refused to allow her access to the toilet unless the contents of her chamber pot were first examined. Naturally enough Anne-Marie Quinn refused to allow this and an argument ensued. The wardress pushed Anne-Marie spilling the contents of the chamber pot. The wardress then lifted up a used sanitary towel and threw it at Anne-Marie, who was then shoved into her cell and charged with assault.

Another prisoner, Lynn O’Connell was beaten by wardresses on Thursday 17th January as they suspected her of possessing a cigarette! A wardress grabbed Lynn and twisted her arm up back as she was run onto the wing, whilst she was kicked and punched. An orderly who saw this attempted to intervene and both

Lynn and the orderly were charged with assault. (Women Against Imperialism 21)

The B wing, the biggest wing of Armagh Gaol, was hardly cleaned and after some time maggots were everywhere. It was impossible for the women to keep a satisfying standard of hygiene and two women even contracted a form of scabies. (22)

On February 7th, 32 Republican prisoners were unexpectedly attacked by the Special Prison Officers Riot Squad. The attack lasted for days, during which the women were repeatedly beaten and could not use the toilets. Out of this the Armagh no-wash protest developed – it was less of an intended political statement than born out of sheer necessity. Apparently the prison authorities had arranged for this to happen. On February 13th the women were moved from B wing to A wing and they were not allowed to bring anything with them. Other than their male comrades female prisoners were allowed to wear their own clothes. The five demands of the protesters both in Long Kesh and Armagh Gaol were

1. The right to wear their own clothes.
 2. The right to refuse to do prison work.
 3. The right of free association with other prisoners.
 4. The right to organise educational and recreational facilities, to send and receive one weekly letter, a weekly parcel and visit.
 5. Restoration of full remission of sentence.
- (Brady i.a. 184)

Síle Darragh, jailed in Armagh during the dirty protest, recalls the circumstances in which they lived:

The cell walls and ceiling were covered in our excreta making the cell dark and cave-like. Our hair hung limp and greasy, tied back, in most cases, with shoelaces, our clothes were stuff with filth and our skin was grey. [...] We had discovered very early into the protest that the smell of excreta dissipated once it was smeared onto the walls and dried, and so it became ‘bearable’ to remain in the cells and to get used to our own smell. (227)

On a regular basis, however, the cells would be ‘cleaned’ by prison staff, making things indeed worse for the occupants:

A ‘clean’ cell was one where the male screws had power-hosed most of the excreta off the walls and ceilings, turning it to liquid which ran down the walls, onto the floor and in a lot of Armagh’s cells this was a wooden floor where this foul, vicious liquid seeped into the floorboards, releasing a worse stench than months of smeared excreta could have ever produced. We hated it and we were waiting for days for that overwhelming stench to go away. (227)

Other than their male counterparts, the women did not only smear excreta on the walls but also menstrual blood. As the prison authorities viewed tampax and sanitary towels as privileges, they never got enough of them, so they had to dispose of it themselves. Priests and other observers visiting the women in gaol were disgusted by the conditions they had to live in, even more so than with the men's. "The "dirty protest" is bad enough to contemplate when men are on it, but it becomes even worse when it is embarked on by women, who apart from the psychological and hygienic pressures which this type of protest generates, also have the effects of the menstrual cycle to contend with." (Coogan, "On the Blanket" 115) As one woman recalled, she was "most scared about possible vaginal infections, which quite a few suffered from. We never changed our knickers or jeans, but one had to have some protection there." (O'Keefe 548)

In total, 32 women embarked on the no-wash protest, many of whom had been on the no-work protest before. The youngest ones were only 20 years old, the oldest participant was in her early 40s.

NAME	AGE*	HOME AREA	SENTENCE	HOW LONG ON PROTEST
Briega Ann McCaughley	(17) 20	Andersonstown	10 yrs.	2 yrs.
Mairéad Nugent	(17) 20	Andersonstown	12 yrs.	2 yrs. 6 mths.
Mairéad Farrell	(19) 23	Andersonstown	14 yrs.	2 yrs. 6 mths.
Rose McAlister	(39) 41	Ardoyne	2 yrs.	1 yr. 10 mths.
Maria McClenaghan	(22) 24	Ardoyne	5 yrs.	2 yrs.
Patricia McGarry	(17) 20	Ardoyne	10 yrs.	2 yrs.
Katrina Pettigrew	(17) 22	Ballymurphy	8 yrs.	1 yr. 4 mths.
Eileen McConville	(21) 22	Ballymurphy	2 yrs.	18 mths.
Anne-Marie Quinn	(17) 20	Ballymurphy	12 yrs.	2 yrs. 10 mths.
Rosie Nolan	(21) 23	Ballymurphy	10 yrs.	1 yr.
Christine Beattie	(19) 21	Bone	12 yrs.	1 yr. 3 mths.
Janet Murphy	(24) 26	Bone	5 yrs.	1 yr. 3 mths.
Eilis O Connor	(19) 22	Bone	5 yrs.	2 yrs. 10 mths.
Marie Doherty	(18) 21	Derry	4 yrs.	2 yrs. 6 mths.
Sadie McGilloway	(21) 23	Derry	8 yrs.	1 yr.
Pauline McLaughlin	(19) 23	Derry	D. Sec. of State	2 yrs.
Bernie O Boyle	(20) 24	Derry	15 yrs.	2 yrs. 5 mths.
Lynn O Connell	(21) 23	Derry	8 yrs.	1 yr.
Ann Bateson	(20) 23	S/Derry	Life	2 yrs. 5 mths.
Dolores O'Neill	(22) 25	S/Derry	Life	1 yr. 3 mths.
Patricia Craig	(17) 20	Downpatrick	7 yrs.	1 yr. 3 mths.
Mary Doyle	(21) 24	Greencastle, Bel.	8 yrs.	1 yr. 3 mths.
Maureen Gibson	(19) 22	Kashmir, Bel.	3 yrs.	2 yrs. 6 mths.
Sinéad Moore	(18) 22	Lenadoon	10 yrs.	2 yrs. 6 mths.
Ellen McGuigan	(23) 25	Lenadoon	16 yrs.	1 yr.
Teresa McEvoy	(22) 24	Markets	5 yrs.	1 yr. 3 mths.
Shirley Devlin	(17) 20	Newington	4 yrs.	2 yrs. 9 mths.
Peggy Friel	(19) 22	New Lodge	6 yrs.	3 yrs. 1 mth.
Eileen Morgan	(18) 22	Newry	14 yrs.	2 yrs. 3 mths.
Rosie Callaghan	(17) 20	Short Strand	5 yrs.	2 yrs. 2 mths.
Síle Darragh	(18) 22	Short Strand	5 yrs.	3 yrs.
Briega Brownlee	(18) 20	St. James	8 yrs.	1 yr. 4 mths.

* Age when charged in brackets.

Table IV: "Protestors in A Wing" (Coogan, "On the Blanket" 126&127)

5.4.4. The Hungerstrikes

As the demands of the Long Kesh and Armagh prisoners were not granted, the blanket men decided to step up their game and embark on a hungerstrike. In late October 1980 H-Block O.C. Brendan Hughes and six other men began refusing food. On December 1st, three women in Armagh gaol joined their comrades: Mairéad Farrell, Mairéad Nugent and Mary Doyle. Mary Doyle remembers her determination and the resistance they met by their male comrades:

It was not done lightly. It was not just a rash decision. I was almost 25, so I think I was mature enough. I said to myself, 'There's every possibility I will die'. It was not a case of 'Och, we'll be on it for a few weeks and Maggie Thatcher will give in.' I was never under that impression. The leadership did not want the hunger strike and they sent in all this information about what it can do to you, your body and vital organs. They tried to deter us. (Brady i.a. 222)

The hungerstrike of the three women in Armagh Gaol was not met favourably by most on the outside. The Catholic Church did not like the idea of women behaving like men and drawing media interest on themselves, the male republicans feared that the women would divert too much attention away from their own struggle. The women were even attacked by people on the outside and received a 'poison pen letter' denoting them as "dying soldiers of Satan." (235)

On December 18th Brendan Hughes called off the hungerstrike. He was led to believe that the British government would come up with a solution to meet their demands. However, when it turned out that the prisoners had been deceived, they immediately arranged for another hungerstrike. On March 1st 1981, O.C. Bobby Sands went on hungerstrike. This time, the women decided not to join their male comrades to allow the focus to be on the men in Long Kesh. They went on 24-hour token hungerstrikes to show solidarity with their male comrades in the Maze. About every week another male volunteer would embark on the strike to increase pressure on the officials. In an appeal to their friends and family, the prisoners of Armagh and Long Kesh asked for support:

Our brothers and sisters in the H-Blocks and Armagh Gaol are working class men and women who are imprisoned because they were prepared to sacrifice life and liberty for the goal of Irish freedom – our freedom – the freedom of the people, so that never again would we have to live under the constant yoke of repression which the British and their Loyalist lackies have placed upon our shoulders.

In the past you have shown your unwavering support for the political

prisoners. Now at this critical time, the political prisoners again look to you, the working class, as a bastion of support. They look to you to help end the suffering in the H-Blocks and Armagh Gaol. (H-Block/Armagh Bulletin, No. 4)

The IRSP also turned to the Nationalist people to ask for their support in the hunger strike:

WE are now four days into the hunger strike which is the end result of four years of protest in the H-Blocks.

IT is not the end we would want if we had the choice but, despite the protests both inside and outside the prison, since 1976, the British Government has pigheadedly pursued its policy of "criminalisation". A policy intended to degrade not only the prisoners but all those involved in and sympathetic to the political and military struggle for Irish freedom.

THERE have been times when we have all been war weary but the prisoners have been our inspiration to keep going. To give in to the Brits - to return to a situation of "normality", as they call it, would be to accept sectarian Unionist and British rule and be kicked back into the gutter.

(Hunger Strike Bulletin No. 1)

It was decided that Bobby Sands should run for office in the April elections to draw the attention of the media onto the horrid conditions in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh and Armagh. After a successful campaign he won the seat for the constituency of Fermanagh/South Tyrone. The question, why a member of Westminster Parliament was starving himself to death in a British prison gained indeed the attention of the global media. It was a big embarrassment for the British government who subsequently created electoral rules barring prison inmates from running for office.

Despite international protests, the Thatcher government remained unyielding and Bobby Sands died on May 5th 1981 after 66 days on hunger strike. Upon the news, the streets of West Belfast and Derry were filled with tears and also the prisoners in Armagh Gaol were deeply saddened to hear about Bobby Sands' passing:

In the last days of his hunger strike you were trying to stay continually awake, as if you were on watch. That Monday night I was exhausted and fell asleep. The screws quietly opened the doors at 7.30 the next morning. There was an eerie silence throughout the wing. I went to slop out and in the toilets and Brenda Murphy came in and said. 'Did you hear?' I knew by the expression on her face. 'Bobby died this morning...' I went back to my cell and just broke my heart. Even though we were expecting it from the reports of how he was deteriorating, it was still unreal. (Brady i.a. 223f)

Jennifer McCann, another prisoner at Armagh, remembers Bobby, whom she had known well already before the prison struggle began:

The thing that always struck me was that people used to say he was a real leader and he was a real leader; everyone in our area looked up to him. He had a very special way with young people and also looked after them. [...] He was also a very kind person. I remember going into Armagh, I had just turned 20 at the time and on my first visit I got a comm from Bobby telling me if I needed anything I had just to let him know and he would get it for me. My thoughts were that he was in prison and several years on the blanket and he was making sure that I was all right. That was just the type of person he was. (210)

100.000 people attended his funeral and paid their last respects, all under permanent surveillance by the British security forces.

In total, ten men were to die on the hunger strike, the youngest of them 23 years of age, the oldest one 30. When Joe McDonnell, the fifth man to embark on the strike, was close to death, the women of Armagh appealed to the Irish government to end the torture:

With our comrade Joe McDonnell now on his 55th day of hunger strike we the women Republican prisoners in Armagh Gaol make a fresh appeal to the new Dublin government to exert pressure on the British Government to secure our 5 just demands and save the lives of our comrades on hunger strike in H-Block.

The election of Bobby Sands in Fermanagh/South Tyrone and the recent government elections in the 26 counties show where the Irish people stand on this critical issue... (H-Block/Armagh Bulletin, No. 20)

Micky Devine, O.C. of the INLA prisoners in Long Kesh, was the last one to die on August 20th. Although many more men were on the strike and determined to go through until the very end, eventually some families intervened. Micky's sister Margaret and her husband Frankie stayed with Micky for the last two weeks of his life. "He could barely speak. He was like somebody deformed, like a retarded child, you had to keep cleaning his mouth with tissues." (Fairweather i.a. 106) Micky did not slip into a coma but was conscious until the end and made sure that his sister would not sign the papers to take him off the protest. After his death, Margaret was sick for an hour. Despite everything they had been through, she also felt a sense of pride for her brother's sacrifice: "I don't look back and say I wish I'd done this or that – I did everything he told me: I've nothing to be sorry about. I'm proud of him, very proud. He was so thoughtful, worrying for me, not for himself. He says to me, 'It's too late for me but I might save who's coming behind me'. There's not many can say that." (107)

Gradually, the British government granted the 5 demands and the situation in the H-Blocks improved. In Armagh Gaol the conditions worsened, however, and in 1982 the practice of strip-searching was re-introduced. When the prison was eventually closed down in 1986 and the remaining women prisoners were transferred to Maghaberry Jail, strip-searching continued until the late 1990s, when the last women prisoners were released under the terms of the Belfast/Good Friday-agreement.

5.5. Strip-Searching

The aim of strip-searching was to demoralise the prisoners by literally stripping away their dignity. Statistics show that these searches were not, in fact, targeted at finding prohibited objects but a mere means of degradation. During the roughly 2.000 strip-searches conducted in Armagh Gaol between the early- and mid-80s, not a single item was found. (O'Keefe 543)

In a letter to the British Medical Journal in 1984, two medical members of the Armagh board of visitors claimed that

[s]trip or reception searches are carried out throughout the UK. Only in Northern Ireland has it become an emotional issue. [...] Members of the board have witnessed searches unannounced but with prisoners' permission, and they are carried out in a cubicle. Only two officers are normally present outside the cubicle. A loose tunic is provided, and rarely is there physical contact. Staff like this no more than prisoners, but after recent Maze escapes security measures are even more important than before. They are carried out as reasonably as possible.³¹

This statement was met with much objection from the prisoners. One woman recalled how her body “is scrutinised inch by inch, hands are run along the sides of your feet and the back and palms of your hands, around your neck and through your hair, every action meticulously and slowly performed.” (O'Keefe 543)

Sometimes the wardens would not even try to make strip-searches appear to have another purpose than humiliation:

The day started as a pretty normal day. It was 2nd March and we endured ten hours of physical, sexual and mental torture. It turned into a nightmare of a day.

³¹ <http://europepmc.org/backend/ptpmcrender.fcgi?accid=PMC1440951&blobtype=pdf> (8.9.2015).

It started with eight or ten screws going into a cell, and what they did was they actually attacked people. They pulled them onto the floor, stripped them, humiliated them and degraded them, one by one. You could hear your friends, people who were your comrades, being attacked. (Brady i.a. 245)

Many women lost weight due to the ongoing harassment and some of them stopped having their periods altogether. Women who went to visit Republican prisoners sometimes also had to undergo the procedure of being searched, including their sanitary towels. The body politics of the British authorities was aimed at punishing Republican women not only for their political views but also their gender. Many campaigns were launched to defy strip-searching, one of them by the Sinn Féin Women's Department. The Women's Centre on the Falls Road worked with prisoners and their families after their release to overcome trauma suffered through sexualised violence in prison. (O'Keefe 550f)

Retrospectively, the Ulsterisation policy and the the process of criminalisation had done a big disservice to the British government. Despite much criticism from various international Human Rights organisations, it also brought the Northern Irish society further to the brink. In 1980, the number of people involved in security was 1:38 as compared to 1:2078 in the case of doctors. (71) Under the Thatcher government the expenses for prisoners in the Six Counties rose from £255 per inmate per week in 1980 to £933 in 1986/7. Ten inmates were faced by 17 staff and on average each of them earned £27,900 per year. Of the overall prison budget 83% make up for the staff costs. With regard to functional categories, the biggest chunk of 46% accounted for 'security and control'. 'Inmate care' had allocated 19% while 'inmate occupation' only made up for a meagre 4%. (Tomlinson 189)

5.6. Prison Morale

However dire the conditions in jail were, the prisoners made their best of it and their sense of community remained strong. Margaret Barr, who was interned in Armagh in 1974, feels that "[t]he comradeship in Armagh was great and it made up for the loss of freedom. Everybody was always there for each other. The friends I made in gaol were

friends for life.” (Brady i.a. 61) Ann O’Neill, interned in 1973, commends the spirit of the women:

When I think of the women prisoners I think of Louise Michel, the great French revolutionary feminist and prisoner herself, who fought on the barricades during the Paris Commune in 1871 and who continued until her death in 1905 fighting tirelessly for social liberation and women’s rights. Like many great women she is largely forgotten by historians. It was by chance I was given and read a book about her amazing life. Louise said, ‘Everyone has to carry a torch for the next era so that they may walk in light.’ This simple but profound statement sums up for me the mentality of the women Irish Republican prisoners. (36)

One day the Armagh women wanted to thank their O.C. Eileen Hickey for her guidance and continuous support throughout their prison time. They conspired to create a flag for her, which they then planned to unfold during a military-style parade. It was difficult for them to find a good enough design for the flag as they wanted it to be personalised and representative of the Armagh struggle. The usual prison struggle symbols, Tish Holland recalls, were male-only and “had men’s hands on it with handcuffs and a caption, ‘Free the Political Prisoners.’ Always men’s hands in captivity, men’s faces struggling, men’s speeches from the dock – MEN!” (71) So eventually they decided on women’s hands in handcuffs and captioned their struggle with ‘Strength and Liberty’. The final unfolding event was a big success and succeeded in binding the women together even more.

Mary Robinson remembers that “[t]he smallest of things were seen as a victory over the system. On one occasion I was having pains but never let on to the screws. Even that was a small victory. All this helped to heighten our morale – getting one over on the screws, gaining more control over our circumstances in some small way. It all served to keep the girls going when times got tough.” (153) Máire óg Drumm, daughter of Sinn Féin vice president Máire Drumm, recalls an anecdote when her mother came to visit her for her birthday and brought a cake: “[I]t was massive, the size of a table, with a tricolor and the letters UTP (Up the Provos) on it. The screw wasn’t going to let it in. She was a big RAF woman. Mammy said it meant ‘unity through peace’, so she let it in.” (320) Stories like this made for great banter and contributed to a positive atmosphere in times of arrest.

As education was seen as a tool to advance liberation, the women had their own timetable with courses ranging from Irish language to Arts and physical activity. Many women wrote their own songs and poetry, such as Mairead Farrell, who expressed her

hopes and dreams in The Armagh Song: “And fight we will until the day/Every woman, man and child are free/To live where all have equal say/In a non-sexist Gaelic society.” (219)

Also the male prisoners in Long Kesh, who were often regarded as hyper-masculine and chauvinist, discussed issues such as sexism, feminism and women’s rights. Two volunteers studied an Open University course on ‘Changing Experiences of Women’ and managed to win over lecturer Joanna McMinn to set up an informal Women’s Studies course for them. Over a period of two years, more than 200 men attended the course. (Sharoni, “Gendering Resistance” n.a.) Laurence McKeown, one of the initiators, recalls that the course

put a focus onto masculinity and the role that played in our lives in an all-male society and in our relations with women [...] It certainly wasn’t the case that everyone who went through the course came out as ‘new men’ at the end of it but it challenged our thoughts and practice on a wide number of issues. It raised consciousness on gender roles and the perspective of a woman. We weren’t in situations where we had the responsibility to run a household, provide for a family, look after sick children or parents so couldn’t say just how we would behave in such situations. But nevertheless I believe it had a major impact upon us and in particular it moved us from a theoretical debate about feminism to a practical one about masculinity. (n.a.)

McKeown and some of his comrades founded a prison magazine in 1989, An Glór Gafa/The Captive Voice. The publication went on public sale three times a year and covered a wide range of controversial topics, such as relationships and homosexuality.

6. The Larger Prison Struggle

*In Ireland the soul of womanhood has been trained for centuries to surrender its rights, and as a consequence the race has lost its chief capacity to withstand assaults from without, and demoralisation from within.*³²
(James Connolly)

6.1. Everyday Life

While life in prison was hard and full of privation, life on the outside for many women was akin to a never-ending struggle. The situation in the 1970s was equally depressing, with female life expectancy and housing quality ranking by far the lowest in the whole of the United Kingdom. Education was poor and unemployment accordingly high:

	England	Scotland	Wales	N.I.	UK total average
life expectancy (female)	100	98	99	94	75.6 years
infant mortality	102	98	107	79	14.5 deaths per 1,000
staying on at school	101	98	110	64	32.4% stay at school
housing quality	101	97	96	80	90.5% adequate housing
weekly industrial earnings	100	101	101	93	£66.97 earnings (1977)
GDP per capita	102	97	90	78	£1,928 GDP per capita (1977)

Table V: “The Degree of Difference” (Coogan, “On the Blanket” 70)

To cope with their living conditions, many women fell back on Valium and other tranquillisers to numb their pain. Many women were hooked on ‘Mother’s Little Helpers’ and while in England the number of women in mental asylums was about 1.90, in the six counties the number amounted to 2.82 per thousand (Fairweather i.a. 15). A woman from the Creggan, a working-class housing estate in Derry, who worked in a doctor’s surgery, recalled her daily routine:

I was a receptionist. We filled out prescriptions and the doctor signed them. There were so many women on Valium, tranquillizers and sleeping pills that you could have started the day just writing out 100 prescriptions for them. [...]

It’s got a lot to do with the Troubles – a woman with 13 kids, the bother with sons at an age to join the IRA, the police and the army patrolling and

³² Connolly, James: The Re-Conquest of Ireland - <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1915/rcoi/chap06.htm> (15.11.2015)

searching... it's no wonder the women are living on their nerves... the doctors I worked for were well worried, but what could they do? Women really need the tablets. (35f)

Of course these agonies were not confined to women with a Catholic background. Protestant women equally felt the strain of the struggles, of sons joining paramilitary organisations, husbands in gaol and their own lonesomeness and depression. Women would even resort to suicide to end their misery, whose reasons differed between the communities. The story of a Catholic woman who killed herself “in the ghetto because of poverty” became known and was echoed by the story of “a Protestant woman, dying of loneliness, of the isolation of the housewife.” (325) The tightly-knit communities of the Catholic working class largely prevented women from feeling isolated, while their Protestant counterparts rarely had functioning social networks to fall back on. For Catholic women not isolation but poverty was the driving force of destruction. In this context Monica McWilliams speaks of the “feminisation of poverty”, in reference to women experiencing poverty in their various roles: as prisoner’s wife, widow, single parent, as being in charge of an unemployed family, as being divorced, unmarried, having low-income or part-time jobs or simply as elderly women. (McWilliams, “Women in Northern Ireland” 92)

The traditional dichotomy of public/male and private/female was ruptured as the British army began raiding houses at all times of the day and indeed night in the early 1970s. Women were not safely tucked away from the outside events any more but right in their midst. They were witness to their sons and husbands being dragged out of their beds and away to facilities which were not disclosed. They were subject to – often sexualised – abuse of the security forces and by literally being invaded without warning stripped of the securities normally associated with the family home. This invasion of privacy forced the women to develop means of resistance, to get involved in politics and to thus become agents of change. As Sharon Pickering observes in ‘Women, the Home and Resistance in Northern Ireland’, it was mainly Catholic working-class women who reported frequent raids from the army, which contributed to the awareness-raising of the class. (57) A woman named Emma remembers the typical procedure of these house raids:

It was a very normal thing to have these raids and that meant that there was maybe ten or twelve soldiers entered your home at about four or five in the

morning when everybody in the house was fast asleep, the element of surprise, and then your house was just pulled apart and all your documents were read and letters were read it was just an absolute disgrace what went on. Your children were lifted out of their beds, my youngest child at that time was five years old, carpets lifted up, in some case fire places lifted out of the wall and so it was all this aggravation that went on by the security forces in the nationalist areas for a long, long time. (58)

Betty, a Republican woman from Derry, recalls numerous occasions of being invaded: “In 1974, I remember the local priest saying that we were the most raided house in the six counties. In one week, at one stage in 1974 we were raided three times in one day and twice nearly every other day in that week.” (59) Women in the Catholic working-class areas felt the full force of state authority and there was effectively little they could do. While houses in nationalist neighbourhoods were raided up to several times a day, in Loyalist areas it was but an occasional occurrence. The nature of raids in Catholic areas reportedly varied between “general harassment, and vicious house raids and recognised surveillance as a significant aim for security force intelligence gathering in their execution.” (62)

Pickering identifies two forms of resistance women developed in this situation, namely individual resistance and collective resistance. (64) Women in their role as housewives, mothers and homemakers would often make sure the army found the premises spotless, even if they knew that there was a big chance they would destroy everything. Others would enjoy a fry while the raid was going on, a little show of defiance. Others again would refuse to put money in the electric meter, so the army had to bring their own money for electricity. In the early 1970s, the “bin lid-banging” emerged as a form of collective resistance: As soon as the British army was seen in an area, the women would start warning their fellow residents by banging bin lids on the ground and whistling:

Now the hen patrols, if anyone saw the army patrolling the street its called a duck patrol and the women set up a hen patrol that followed the duck patrol around the streets blowing whistles and banging bin lids. . . . Again, it was the women that done that and organised it and took up the watching and the waiting, sitting up in the house and listening and then when they did come into raid they were out with their bin lids and whistles . . . it was frightening and I think at times you wondered if they open up I wonder what they’ll do and I wonder if they’ll do that but at the same time you were so angry that this was happening to your streets or your district, you were so angry that no one was prepared to stand up and say . . . (67)

Their commitment was indeed dangerous, as they were frequently shot at, beaten, or hit with rifles. Many women felt that they had no choice but get active, as Mary, a woman from Belfast, states: “It’s the instinct to fight for your family and then the instinct of your community as your greater family. I think that’s what really organised women.” (68)

In the early 1980s house raids were not on the agenda any more, however, poverty still was. 35 % of all Northern Irish households lived below the poverty line, making the Northern Irish working-class the most deprived not merely in the United Kingdom but in the whole of Western Europe. Food was more expensive than elsewhere in the UK, electricity prices were about 33 % higher than in mainland Britain and gas even 50 %. About half of the dwellings were officially declared ‘unfit for human habitation’. (Fairweather i.a. 14f) Many women like Turf Lodge resident Maureen O’Hara struggled in their attempts to make ends meet:

I hate it, it’s degrading and depressing. The men are out of work, 60 per cent unemployment among Catholics, so they drink – it’s the despair.

If you have a coal fire, that’s £20 a week. My electric meter’s fixed, that’s £1 a day. We get £38 off the Brew [Brew is a colloquial term for the dole; originates from ‘bureau’] and £12 Family Allowance. That’s £50 for me and him and five kids. They take £38 off on the PDA. We’ll have to trust to God to help us when the new baby comes. (14)

In the early 1980s the use of plastic and rubber bullets on the part of the British army increased and by August 1981 thirteen people had been killed, the youngest one only ten years of age, six of them under the age of 16. (H-Block/Armagh Bulletin No. 30) Between May and July 1981 alone, 161 injuries were recorded. Most of those who died from plastic/rubber bullets were shot in the head. The Association for Legal Justice (ALJ), formed in 1971 to advise people of their legal rights, investigated many cases and concluded that none of the victims were involved in riots. While some victims fell prey to indiscriminate shooting, others appear to have been carefully targeted (H-Block/Armagh Bulletin No. 15)

Within one month in 1981, four people were killed by plastic bullets, three of them under 16, two of them girls. 14-year-old Julie Livingstone was out with a friend, when the death of hunger striker Francis Hughes became known. The women had just started banging bin lids, when the army moved in and began shooting. Julie Livingstone was

found dead later on, however, the press took more interest in the fate of her jailed brother than hers. Carol Anne Kelly, 12 years of age, was killed on her way home from the shops. The RUC had initially stated that she was shot during an ongoing riot, however, it was proven that there was no riot at that time – it erupted only later, when the news of her death became known. In both cases the media implication seemed that the girls got what they deserved. (Fairweather i.a. 25) In the following month Sarah Begley, resident of the Belfast Unity Flats, was hit in the face by a plastic bullet fired by the RUC as she stood on her balcony. She broke her jaw, almost lost an eye and needed 60 stitches to patch up her wound. (H-Block/Armagh Bulletin No. 18)

The No. 14 H-Block/Armagh News had already reported on new, unidentifiable missiles being used against residents and their allegations were later backed up by the New Statesman, which knew of soldiers “who have served in Northern Ireland [and boasted] that they put razor blades or nails into rubber bullets to make sure they hurt someone.” (26) There was an international enquiry into the use of plastic bullets, which found that “[t]he Northern Irish authorities were knowingly allowing widespread indiscriminate and illegal use of a weapon whose lethal potential was well known.” (26) However, little was done about it.

Not only the British army constituted a constant threat in the Catholic working-class areas of Belfast and Derry, also ‘the Hoods’ posed a serious challenge for the order of the community. They were a by-product of the social and economic deprivation in the ghettos and involved in petty crimes, drug dealing and consumption and activities such as joyriding. These loose rallies of young boys saw themselves as antagonists of the IRA, which they hated deeply as enforcers of law and order in their communities. Other than the IRA, the police rarely punished them, viewing them as precious assets in their fight against the paramilitaries. As the Hoods did not have any political aspirations, they did not have any scruples in passing on inside information.

Often, they would target elderly people and rob them of their savings. A female IRA volunteer recalls an incident, when an old man had all his money stolen and turned to them for help:

The IRA discovered who the four lads were and managed to recover his savings. I was the person asked to return his money and tell him everything had been taken care of. [...] He was very grateful and the tears were streaming down his

face and he turned round and handed me a pound saying, 'Here love, buy yourself a packet of cigarettes.' But I told him to keep it, that it was enough to know that he was safe. If you could have seen the relief on that old man's face... The people responsible weren't kneecapped – they were tarred and feathered. (247)

The Hoods feared the IRA for their punishments, which could rank from being kneecapped, tarred and feathered to being expelled from the country. The reasons for IRA interventions were not always purely noble though: A young woman, whose husband was an imprisoned member of the INLA, once robbed a shop using a gun. As the Provisionals received protection money from the store, they prosecuted the woman, took away the money she obtained, kneecapped the man she got the gun from and handed her over to the INLA – which in turn shaved off her hair. (250f) Later it turned out that there indeed were other reasons for her harsh punishment, namely her involvement with other men. Another woman who knew her case explains that “[w]hat angered me was, the ones who did it were always leeching over her before that. They’d say things like, ‘Look at that, I wouldn’t mind a night with her.’ Just dirty hypocritical bastards. There they were moralizing about her when all they wanted to do was screw her.” (251)

The Hoods also attracted some girls due to their ‘bad boys’-image, however, they were not accepted on equal terms. Josie, a girl from a nationalist Belfast estate, knows about the problems associated with falling in with the Hoods: “Hoods’ girls are like robots, more or less. They’re told what to do and when to do it. What do they get out of it? Maybe a night down at the back of an alley with all the Hoods on top of them, or a kicking if the night’s job goes wrong. The wee girls don’t know their own minds. But they’ve no other option. Once you join the Hoods, you can’t easy leave.” (147) According to Josie, girls were not met with more respect by most of the other boys from her community: “[T]hey call us girls ‘tubes’. That’s what they think we are, just tubes to empty themselves in.” (142)

6.2. Domestic Violence, Structural Violence and Bodily Autonomy

Domestic violence was a serious problem in both communities. Cathy Harkin, a women’s rights activist involved in Northern Ireland Women’s Aid, was confronted

with many horrors during her work in women refuges. The women refuges were built in relatively neutral areas so women from both communities could feel safe to go there. Cathy pointed out that domestic violence was not purely a working-class problem but pervaded all social classes:

[W]e've had the wives of schoolteachers, civil servants, and community workers. It's not that the paramilitaries are necessarily the worst for wife-beating – my point is that they are not exempt from it even though they say they are freedom fighters. In this refuge we've had the wives or girlfriends of men in the IRA, the INLA, and the UDA. And we get some too whose husbands are policemen, or in the Ulster Defence Regiment. Some have been whipped by guns, or threatened with being shot. Now beatings are bad enough, but to have a gun produced and be told that you and all the kids are going to be shot... (129)

The paramilitaries in charge of the safety of their communities hardly ever intervened in cases of domestic violence. For one, domestic affairs were regarded as private and sacrosanct, on the other hand, all too often it would be a case of “the pot calling the kettle black”. (10) Another problem was the lack of awareness when it came to domestic violence. Many people would blame the victim rather than the perpetrator, therefore many women did not dare to speak up against abuse: “We've had women in here who had every bone in their body broken at some time, who have had knives and guns used on them, and their stomachs kicked until they miscarried. Yet still people say, ‘What did she do to *deserve* it?’”(129)

The lack of solidarity with fellow women was not an act of malice, however, but of inurement and defeat. With the Catholic church preaching the benefits of suffering and endurance and praising those who would turn the other cheek, many women felt there was no way out of their misery. Those who did leave their husbands were subject to ostracism. Ann, a young Derry woman, left her husband after he broke her jaw and both her arms. She tried to get help beforehand but to no avail. While her parish priest suggested she should “offer up the pain to God” (132), her mother-in-law told her that “[b]eatings are women's lot. Bow to God's will, child.” (133)

Sex education was virtually non-existent in Catholic schools and communities, opening up a whole new range of problems for poorly educated girls in deprived areas. Often women did not even know how children were delivered and because of their acquired shame regarding all things sexual, mothers would not pass on their knowledge to their daughters. Protection and sex ed were proscribed by the church, as Cathy recalls: “The

church teaches that ignorance in a woman equals innocence, but there is nothing ‘innocent’ about a woman spending nine months in dread and fear. [...] Because men cannot participate in what is to them the mystery of pregnancy and childbirth, they, the doctors and husbands and clergy, have to make it ‘theirs’ by controlling it.” (135)

Abortion was another serious issue for women of all social classes and religious backgrounds, but especially so for Catholics. The story of Catherine, a West Belfast-based young mother of three, shows how Northern Irish officials would use an abortion against a woman in an attempt to instrumentalise her for political purposes. Catherine, a so-called ‘wire-widow’ with a husband in Long Kesh, had gotten pregnant after having had sex with a young man involved in the Republican cause. She considered killing herself because she was afraid of bringing disgrace on herself as well as on her husband in gaol. However, eventually she decided to go to England for an abortion. In case she was interrogated at the airport, she had made up an elaborate explanation about attending a christening there, but on the way out everything went smoothly. When she befriended a young Protestant woman in the abortion clinic in Britain, she decided that she would look a lot less conspicuous at the airport if she was seen with another woman and therefore abandoned her initial reasoning. After their flight back, the two women were stopped by officials and to Catherine’s misfortune they remembered her face from a couple of days back. When asked for the reasons of her trip, the Protestant woman replied truthfully as she felt that she had nothing to hide. Whilst she was free to go, Catherine was taken away to Castlereagh for interrogation. She was abused and called names for hours and threatened to be exposed to her husband:

Over and over again they demanded to know who was the father of Catherine’s ‘poor murdered bastard’. They ran through the names of numerous men in her area, including local Republicans. Which one, they speculated, had enjoyed shoving it up her? All of them probably, whore that she was. They described to Catherine what they think she would be like in bed, became matey, jovial, as they described various perverted sexual practices. And her poor, poor husband, they sighed, stewing in a cage in Long Kesh while she... (47)

Eventually, the ‘bad cops’ were replaced by a ‘good cop’ who wanted to give Catherine ‘another chance’. When Catherine refused to collaborate and become an informant, she was abused again and threatened to have her children taken away. Like many other women, she withstood the threats and blackmail: In the years 1983/84 almost 400

people were betrayed by informants, however, none of these supergrasses had been a woman. (48)

Abortion was common among Catholic women as the only granted means of 'contraception' they had was the rhythm method, cynically dubbed 'Vatican Roulette'. Abortion was only legal on mainland Britain and many women simply did not have the money for the journey, so they had to fall back on other alternatives. Belfast resident Nora O'Donnell was pregnant between 20 and 25 times with thirteen children alive, two stillborn babies and at least five miscarriages. When pregnant, she would take large quantities of substances like liver salts, quinine and pills 'curing feminine problems' to abort the fetus, however, she would never call it that. To her, there was a "moral difference' between self-poisoning and vaginal abortion" (125), as the latter was against her religion. Nonetheless she knew of back-alley abortionists and recalls the story of one of them,

a Protestant woman, but she was awfully good. [...] It wasn't for money she done it. It was just to help women that she pitied. That's how it started, with just one or two. Friends of hers. She'd been a nurse, you see. Then word got round, and everybody wanted her to do it. Protestants and Catholics. And she was heartbroke, because she didn't want the risk, but she didn't have the heart to turn away crying women, either. (127)

Eventually the woman was caught and sentenced to nine years in prison, where she died of cancer. To Nora, this was the peak of injustice: "She was just an ordinary wee woman, helping her own. And for having that pity, she got nine years and peelers to watch over her dying." (127) When a young Protestant woman died of an illegal abortion in 1979, the Northern Ireland Abortion Campaign was initiated, for once uniting Loyalist and Nationalist politicians in the endeavour of preventing mainland British law to become statute law in Northern Ireland. One leading Catholic opponent of abortion illustrated just how sophisticated their argument was: "[N]obody will deny that the hag in seedy backroom or the amateur with potion and knitting needle are horrifying... [and] that the back-street trade is ghastly, why should the answer be to bring it into the front street?" (137)

If abortion had a difficult standing in Northern Ireland, then homosexuality did even more so. While British law theoretically allowed male homosexuality if the consenting adults were 21 years of age or over, in Ireland gay men of any age were liable for

imprisonment. The North effectively condoned homosexuality and coming out was next to impossible. The IRA revealed its true, homophobic colours on the issue of homosexuality in its advice for volunteers on how to resist the humiliation techniques of their interrogators, such as stripping them naked or passing derogatory remarks on their physique:

Volunteers should understand that from a psychological point of view this act is called a penis complex. This complex is inherent in the homosexual and although the interrogators themselves may be married men with a family it indicates suppressed homosexual tendencies. When the volunteer realises and understands this proven fact he should not have great difficulty in triumphing over his interrogators. He should look upon them as homosexuals with the immunity of the establishment, as people who become sadistic from the homosexual tendencies, which underlie them. (The Green Book)

Even the antagonist churches in the Six Counties could agree on the immorality of homosexual acts. While the Catholic church did not openly support Ian Paisley's 'Save Ulster from Sodomy!' campaign in 1982, they certainly condoned it. Mary, an H-Block activist, feels that the Catholic Church in the North was just as responsible for keeping the Catholic people – and especially the women – subdued as were the restrictive policies of the unionist powerholders. The Church was only ever

pretending to be concerned with the spiritual welfare of the people, while all the time adopting a political role, and usually a reactionary one. I particularly hold it responsible for what I call the Irish Catholic 'psychology of defeat'. [...] The Unionists had always told us we deserved nothing and so, in a way, had our church. Total acceptance of suffering and deprivation – that is what we were taught, that somehow as Catholics we should *strive* to suffer, that that was part of our whole Irish identity. That suffering would bring us closer to our creator. What the church had done for the establishment was turn the Catholic people into unprotesting sacrificial lambs. (Fairweather i.a. 154f)

The women's movement on the other hand was aiming to attract 'ordinary women', therefore deliberately discounting controversial issues such as republicanism and lesbianism, thinking them divisive. In turn, many women felt they were not represented by it. Republican feminism offered more room for self-development, however, progress was generally slow. A lesbian ex-Catholic paramilitary woman criticised the Republican movement for its meagre efforts for the cause of women's liberation: "At least the dreaded word – abortion – was mentioned at the 1980 Ard Fheis. I suppose we should be grateful and see it as a sign of progress, but lesbianism is still virtually unheard of as far as most Republicans are concerned. We are the great unspeakable." (Fairweather i.a.

265) Nonetheless, Sinn Féin was the first party to oppose the criminalisation of homosexuality on the island in 1980. Even so it took them until 1996 to come up with a policy statement – ‘Moving On: A Policy for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Equality’ – declaring that “second-class citizenship is not acceptable, and that the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are not negotiable.” (O’Keefe Identity 177)

In 1992 Brendi McClenaghan, a Republican prisoner in Long Kesh since the late 1970s, published an article on “Invisible comrades: Gays and Lesbians in the Irish struggle” in *An Glór Gafa*. Therein he outlines how gay and lesbian activists had always been involved in the struggle and that “[i]t is now time, indeed long past time, to open up debate among republicans on the issue of gay and lesbians, our oppression and its causes, and on our right to be visible equal partners. I believe that national liberation by its very nature incorporates gay/lesbian liberation as an integral part, and it is only through open debate leading to an understanding of gay/lesbian experience that our equality in struggle can be made a reality.”³³ He analyses how gay and lesbian comrades are basically forced into invisibility by means of “moral blackmail” and comments like “What will the family think?” or “It will harm the Movement/struggle”. He criticises the prejudices prevalent in Republican circles and how they indeed contribute to the oppression of others. In the end, he calls on his comrades: “Everyone has a role to play in the struggle to end all oppression. Those who are themselves oppressed have an obligation to ensure that they do not contribute in any way to the oppression of others. To do otherwise is to deny the essence of the struggle for “liberty, equality and justice for all.”” In his 1995 book “Letter from a Gay Republican: H-Block 5” he recalled that the “[r]eactions to the piece were many and varied, ranging from blatant homophobia to solid support.” (McClenaghan in Magennis 83)

6.3. Collective Action – Resistance Against the Status Quo

From the early beginnings of the Troubles, women organised to fight for a better future for themselves, their families and their communities. These organisations took different forms: While some women closed ranks to establish a broad women’s movement with the ultimate aim of women’s liberation, other women joined together for the sake of

³³ <https://www.greenleft.org.au/node/2588> (15.9.2015).

particular goals. While Catholic working-class women mostly became involved in political agitation, peace initiatives were mainly attractive for middle class women with a vague desire for peace and a safe distance from the thick of the Troubles. In her analysis of groups emerging from the Catholic working-class areas during these years, women's rights activist Mary Nelis concluded that

[w]omen, previously housebound and childbound, without power or representation, suddenly found themselves in the front line of the battle. Organisations emerged from the working-class communities; Women against Internment; Political Prisoners' Action Committees, Relatives' Action Committees, all composed of women who were hitherto only involved in raising money for the Church or sending invalids to Lourdes. Women daily confronted soldiers on the streets, built barricades, set up a community warning system, marched in protest, defied bans, became adept in public speaking and joined those involved in the military struggle. Other women, mainly middle class, became involved in peace and reconciliation movements. (Nelis 6)

Callaghan further illustrates the disparity between the issues prompting women from different social backgrounds to get involved: "While women from less affected more middle-class areas worried more about the threat of bombs in the commercial and shopping districts, working-class women from the most affected areas often faced a daily struggle for survival where the war zone was actually at their doorsteps." (37) And indeed their fears for their children to wind up in a cross-fire were more than eligible, as previous examples have shown. Working-class women were forced into becoming political due to their role as wives and mothers. With their husbands on the run or in gaol, they were the ones left to take care of the children and preventing them from suffering the same fate as their fathers. However, while political groups emerging from Nationalist areas naturally did not make it on the covers of the newspapers, peace initiatives were just what the media was waiting for.

6.3.1 Women's Peace Initiatives

The two examples of the Derry Peace Women and the Belfast-based Peace People illustrate the challenges and obstacles peace initiatives had to face, the harsh realities leading to women's involvement and the reasons why these movements were only short-lived. Both groups failed to address the issue of justice as a substantial factor in any potential peace negotiation, merely providing all-too fleeting hope without any

long-term perspective. Ultimately, the people's desire for justice proved stronger than their desire for an autotelic peace.

6.3.1.1. The Derry Peace Women

The Derry Peace Women were formed in 1972 in the nationalist /working-class areas of Derry as a women-only group. As such, they defy the representation of peace initiatives as middle-class, however, as they formed early into the Troubles, their scope was not yet to be surmised. They came together after the deaths of two young Catholic Derry boys on a weekend in May. One of the boys was randomly shot by a British soldier, the other one, who served for the British army abroad himself and was home on leave for the weekend, was killed by the Official IRA. After Bloody Sunday the OIRA had orders to indiscriminately kill any British soldier they could. The soldier boy's death, however, outraged the community, not at least because he was known for his sympathy for the Irish cause and had been involved in some rioting with his Provo friends himself.

An article in the Irish Times illustrates the women's motives for their activism:

When asked who they were speaking for, they reply "just ourselves". They consider it rightful, the women who have suffered most, to come out to speak against yet another death. They underline the fact that they have no leaders, that they are a team, that they didn't know each other before they began the protest: they went as five mothers . . . "And we've had 33 children between us" . . .
(qtd. in Clanaghan 40)

The women openly defied the Official IRA in one of its strongholds and showed them that their presence was not welcome. Consequently, the OIRA called a truce only several days later. The media as well as state and Catholic Church officials welcomed the Peace Women as they facilitated their task of delegitimising the paramilitary resistance. The warm, life-affirming and maternal qualities of women were highlighted in media reports, opposing the destructive violence of its allegedly male perpetrators. However, the media's attempts to paint the IRA as nothing but an unwelcome minority in the midst of a peace-craving people failed. The Peace Women were well aware that the paramilitaries were a product of the violence and not their cause. They accurately analysed the circle of cause and effect after the introduction of internment: "They [the British soldiers] did some stupid things rounding up young fellas. I said "Sure I know

that young fella's mother and father, and they have nothing to do with troubles''. You know. We would have said things like that to them: "Yous are only making the people worse doing these things''." (41) They did not allow anyone to instrumentalise their commitment.

The Derry Peace Women did not act in a conciliatory manner, but managed to incorporate many perspectives into their analysis, such as a gendered position as working-class Catholic mothers in traditional roles, spontaneity and informality in group structure and processes; a sense of community solidarity, nationalist perspectives of the conflict and support for civil rights reforms in their vision for peace. (42) However, with the Republican struggle re-intensifying by the mid-70s and the prisons as a new battleground, the DPW began to fade away. Many Nationalist women were disillusioned with their activities and the radicalised communities felt betrayed by the adherence of the women to an impalpable peace. In the aftermath, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey critically assessed the shortcomings of the Derry Peace Women as well as of the Republican organisations in general:

We were stupid never to organize the women; we never did it and the inevitable happened – there was an explosion of female rage, only there was no political analysis to back it up. . . . As a mother I could sympathize . . . [But] they are being used and they will be discarded . . . The British will use them for information, the opportunistic politicians for personal glory. It is a dangerous movement. It cannot bring peace – you can't superimpose peace; you bring peace by solving the problems of the people . . . I don't think we will see peace in our life-time. (qtd. in Callaghan 45)

6.3.1.2. The Peace People

In 1976 the British army chased a car with two IRA volunteers down Finaghy Road in Belfast. They fired at the car numerous times, contributing to the driver losing control of the car and crashing into a woman and her three children. While Mrs Maguire, the mother, survived, her three children aged between 6 weeks and 8 years were dead immediately. One single gun was later found in the back of the volunteers' car, which was riddled with 69 bullets. The incident caused a lot of outrage in the North, with the politicians using the tragedy to intensify their criminalisation policy towards the IRA. In a report in the Irish News, the deputy leader of the Alliance Party was quoted:

The responsibility for the death of the children rests fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the Provisional IRA... once again, their insane and barbarous acts have brought nothing but hardship and suffering to the people who live in the areas where they operate. Never has the need been greater for a determined response from both sections of the community to unite against the men of violence and for the British government to discharge its responsibility in restoring law and order. (Fairweather i.a. 28)

Other than the newspapers reported, however, the bereaved mother was convinced that two of her children did not die as a result of the accident but were killed by shots fired by the army before the car even hit them.

While politicians used the tragedy for polemics and showmanship, two Belfast women outraged by the event went to found the Peace People. In its early stages, more than 20.000 people from both communities would take the streets and march together. However, as the movement's leaders, who even compared themselves to Gandhi or Martin Luther King, were "hot on emotion, and hazy about politics" (29), they soon lost the support of the Republican women. With their sons and husbands on the blanket, they could not turn a blind eye to the ongoing struggle in Long Kesh and hope for the pray-ins to solve them. For People's Democracy, the emergence of the Peace People illustrated the success of the British criminalisation policy, which in its core was a 'depoliticising' policy: "The support this pro-British group clearly received in Catholic areas showed just how deeply the process of depoliticisation had eaten into the Catholic community. At the same time Ciaran Nugent, almost unnoticed by the mass media, became the first person to confront the prison system over political status." (Prisoners of Partition 6)

The two founders of the Peace People won the Peace Nobel Prize in 1977. When they announced they would keep the money, more and more of their supporters faded away. The newspapers lost their interest in them and thus the main stage for their activities was gone. In late 1979, Mrs Maguire, the mother who lost her three children, killed herself by cutting her throat with an electric carving knife. Only a few weeks later, the two founders of the Peace People split. Disillusioned with the outcome of the initially successful peace initiative, many women gave up on politics. Others sought alternative opportunities to get organised. Especially for Middle class women and academics, the already established Women's Rights Movement offered an alternative.

6.3.2. The Women's Movement

The earliest women's groups in the North of Ireland emerged in the early 1970s. The Belfast-based Lower Ormeau Women's Group and the Coleraine Women's Group were women-only groups, whereas the Queen's University Women's Liberation Group accepted men in their midst. Margaret Ward was one of its earliest members and recalls how "I thought men were as valid a part of the women's movement as women were and it was really the experience of being in the group with men that started making me rethink that." (Evason 16)

6.3.2.1. The Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement

The Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (NIWRM) was founded in 1975 after an event at Queen's University Belfast, which was co-organised by the Women's Liberation Group. Representatives of the various groups and individual activists came together for a film weekend on the topic of "Women in Society". After lots of talk and discussion they decided to establish the NIWRM as an umbrella organisation to unite the various existing women's groups and initiatives in the Six Counties. Their hopes of strength through unity were soon shattered, however, as the organisation could not cater for all the different needs and demands the individual groups had. One of their first debates emerged when they tried to come up with a Women's Charter for Northern Ireland along the lines of the 1970s Women's Charter for England, which demanded

- * Equal Pay
 - * Readily available abortion and contraception
 - * Equality of education and job opportunity
 - * Available child-care facilities
- Added to in 1974:
- * Legal and financial independence
 - * Self-defined sexuality

(Kilmurray 181)

While many women in the North wished for a clear pro-choice statement and treatise of the topic, others felt this may jeopardise general acceptance of the charter. Some women wished to demand British legislation, while others opposed this line of argument for numerous reasons. Evason states that the debate was regarded as "the reformers versus

the revolutionaries”/”engaging tacticians versus purists” (Evason 21). Eventually the points they could agree on included

1. Equal opportunities in education, training and work.
2. Equal pay for work of equal value.
3. Improved family planning services.
4. Maternity leave and childcare facilities

(Law 234)

In 1976/1977 the Women’s Aid groups, successors of the first women’s groups, and the Socialist Women’s Group (SWG) left the NIWRM. Women’s Aid was especially opposed to the hierarchical structures of the umbrella organisation and thought it not radical enough. The SWG missed the consensus that socialism was the way forward. More and more new groups emerged as the NIWRM could not satisfy many activists’ call for greater self-assertion. Oonagh Marron, a member of Women against Imperialism which formed in 1978, repeatedly criticised the NIWRM’s neglect of lesbian as well as nationalist women in its futile attempt to show unity: “[T]he fear of putting off ‘ordinary’ women was used to rule out any open discussion on the whole issue of compulsory heterosexuality. Are lesbian and nationalist women not ordinary women?” Women’s rights activist Maggie Feeley took the same line and illustrated how “[b]oth groups are directly threatening the status quo, refusing to comply with the established order. Both groups are obviously behaving in an unacceptable way for the coloniser, and those who would side with the coloniser – be it of their body or their country.” (Feeley 45) Nonetheless and despite all these arguments, the NIWRM insisted on remaining ‘inclusive’, thereby excluding all the women deemed outside the realm of self-defined ordinariness.

The Belfast Women’s Collective, which emerged out of the SWG around 1978, did not shy back from marked political comments. In the statement of aims in their publication *Women’s Action* they insist that “the oppression of Irish women is not ‘natural’. It is POLITICAL and it is only by seeing it as a POLITICAL condition related both to National and Class oppression that we can organise to change it.” The women involved did not believe in a single-issue struggle and indeed fought for their liberation on many fronts. When several women from the Collective were refused entrance into the Martyn Forsythe drinking club in Turf Lodge on a Sunday afternoon and staged a picket in response, they were told by the all-male committee members to “go home and make the

dinner” and “stay at home and look after the children”. The picket was repeated two weeks later and as the women recall in a short article, nothing much had changed – “they [the men] had still not thought of any good reason to keep the women out – other than the fact that they might “get drunk”, “spend the family’s food money” or “neglect the children” – in other words all the things they seem to think is all right for men to do!” (12) Women were far from equal and especially feminists were met with distrust and denial.

When the Republican women prisoners in Armagh Gaol embarked on their dirty protest in 1980, the women’s movement struggled even more to find a common denominator. The NIWRM was under pressure to support the prisoners, however, their fear of taking sides made it impossible for them to take a stand.

6.3.2.2. The Armagh Protest – Feminist Issue or Nationalist Struggle?

The NIWRM had repeatedly condemned violence and paramilitary organisations, arguing that the Provisional IRA’s bombing campaign was “a major obstacle in the way of uniting a deeply united working class.” (22) Aligning in the face of the Armagh Gaol protests thus proved a great challenge as it unveiled the difficult relationship between nationalism and feminism. Although they had condemned the act of strip-searching numerous times, the NIWRM tried not to take a stance on the Armagh hungerstrikes and dirty protest. In 1980, they issued a statement clarifying that

[w]e have condemned the British army on many occasions. We have decided to work for a women’s movement independent of political parties and political positions. The refusal to take up positions on these general questions is not because we fear disunity and conflict: we believe that sticking to feminist issues is the best way to achieve feminist ends... the fact that... women prisoners are demanding political status does not make it a feminist issue any more than the fact that Cumann na mBan exists makes a united Ireland a feminist aim.

(Evason 23)

People’s Democracy argued that effectively there was no ‘nationalism vs. feminism’-issue at hand because the two are inextricably linked with each other:

Those women who are politicised and organised have a responsibility to take up the defence of the Armagh prisoners who struggle for political status. They must come to realise that their struggle for women’s liberation cannot be separated from the struggle for national liberation. It’s not a matter of national liberation

‘coming first’, then dealing with the ‘women’s issues’ - - rather that by the very fact of women becoming politicised and organised they will begin to take an equal place in the struggle, and the new society that will come after the defeat of imperialism. However, if the struggle of the prisoners is defeated and there is a victory of imperialism, the gains that have been made, however minimal, for democratic rights for women will also be lost.” (H-Block Struggle 11)

In an 1980 article in the *Irish Times*³⁴, civil rights activist and feminist Nell McCafferty pleaded for more than just nationalist, namely collective feminist support of the Armagh struggle. She made clear that “[i]t is my belief that Armagh is a feminist issue that demands our support. I believe that the 32 women there have been denied one of the fundamental rights of women, the right to bodily integrity [...]”.

In the article, she then outlines the prison situation in general and the case of Pauline McLaughlin specifically. During her time in remand in 1976, Pauline developed a stomach condition and could not keep any food in at all. When she was sentenced in 1978 and subsequently lost her political status and privileges such as food parcels, she joined her comrades on the protest. She lost a lot of weight and was declared unfit for punishment. Thanks to the food parcels she could receive then, she regained some weight – but as soon as she was declared fit for punishment again and thus lost her privilege, the whole procedure began anew. This went on for some time and still her condition had never been properly diagnosed. In July 1980, Pauline had to be hospitalised, weighing just over 5 stone but was still transferred back to gaol after only one week. It is in these circumstances that McCafferty calls on her fellow feminists: “What is to be done? Shall we feminists record that she is inflicting the conditions on herself in case any question of moral dereliction arises against us? The menstrual blood on the walls of Armagh prison smells to high heaven, Shall [sic!] we turn our noses up?”

Opinions on the issue were highly controversial and whenever the NIWRM managed to forge cross-community bonds, they were reluctant to risk them for the sake of some paramilitary prisoners. An activist in these times herself, Margaret Ward recalls the tensions and ongoing debates on the issue in her book ‘Unmanageable Revolutionaries’, published in 1983:

³⁴ *Irish Times*, Friday, August 22, 1980 (as qtd. in *Women against Imperialism*, 29)

The contradictions between nationalism and feminism continue to overwhelm us, as the debate of whether or not the campaign for political status waged by the women prisoners in Armagh jail was a feminist issue, so painfully confirmed. Many feminists were emotionally torn between their desire to support the sufferings endured by the women, and their concern lest this feminist solidarity be translated into unconditional support for the Provisionals. And, unhappily, women within Sinn Fein who are fighting for greater equality for women, isolated as they so obviously are, felt betrayed at the lack of public support by the feminist movement. (3)

In discussions the focus often lay with the violations of human rights happening in the jails. People's Democracy emphasised the necessity of viewing the prison struggle not merely as a humanitarian issue but as a political one. The treatment the women were subjected to was not merely based on their gender, but very much on their political views:

It is dangerous to see the H-Block/Armagh struggle as simply a humanitarian issue. This leads to a conclusion that a solidarity campaign should be built mainly by exposing the degradation and suffering imposed on the prisoners. [...] To avoid this danger it is necessary to remember that the humanitarian aspect of H-Block/Armagh is also political. The prisoners are suffering because of Britain's political strategy. The policy of 'criminalising' the prisoners is not just Tory vindictiveness gone mad. There is no emotion involved at all – just a cold calculated plan. (Prisoners of Partition, 10f)

The debates were long and tiring and the outcome meagre. Many women were frustrated with the refusal of the NWIRM to take a political stand. Oonagh Marron describes how for her, "women's conferences became an experience of endurance, not solidarity. To raise the question of imperialism and the situation of nationalist women in the six counties or even the question of women prisoners' health was to invite immediate hostility." (39) As a former member of the SWG she recalls how she was treated by fellow feminists and how she became alienated in the process: "To defend the community I belong to, to work with women protesting against oppression, torture, plastic bullets and prison conditions was to be accused of co-opting the women's movement to the Republican struggle" when "[i]n fact [...] the women's movement allowed itself to become co-opted to one political pro-imperialist line." (40) Many women therefore felt that the NIWRM did not represent them and became involved in their own new structures, further compartmentalising the women's movement.

6.3.2.3. The Thatcher Years

Although the women's movement was "at the forefront in the struggle against the ideological onslaught on the welfare state, rising unemployment, growing poverty, the endless cuts in benefits and services and the uncaring, macho, managerialism that now dominates so much of the public sector" (Evason 40) women's rights activist Eileen Evason criticised its defensiveness in the early 1980s. Marie Mulholland also commented on the growing timidity in the face of the Thatcher government: "When we had nothing we had everything to gain. Now that we have a little, and it is very little, we feel we can no longer afford the attempt to gain everything." (Mulholland 35) In an attempt to explain the difficulty in finding a common denominator, women's rights activist Maggie Feeley has perceived that:

[f]or most women, taking any of these stances, is not always easy. We are in the unique position of being closely involved with our oppressor, involved to such an extent that not only compliance is demanded of us, but also love. We are daughters, sisters, mothers and wives. This love is freely and understandably given on an individual basis, but such divided loyalty means that quite often women are separated from each other by purely male concerns. Sometimes we fail each other because of this. (Feeley 44)

While the 1960s and 1970s politicised women and forced them to reflect their role in society, the 1980s saw a conservative backlash in Ireland North and South. The defeat of the divorce referendum in the Republic cemented the woman's role as possession of her husband and a big campaign launched by the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) once again denied women their right to bodily autonomy. In the Republic of Ireland, a court verdict led to the closing down of pregnancy counselling services. The highly controversial ruling saw the Right of Information as a qualified right and elaborated that "the qualified right to privacy, the rights of association and freedom of expression and the right to disseminate information cannot be invoked to interfere with such a fundamental right as the right to life of the unborn which is acknowledged by the Constitution of Ireland." ("The Women's Movement at the Crossroads" 5) It basically proscribed any attempts of a woman to find information or – in its most literal interpretation – even criminalised women discussing their pregnancy and possible alternatives with close friends. For the SPUC, which was also active in the Six Counties, this ruling provided another breeding ground for their reactionary campaigns.

Due to its heterogeneity, the Northern Irish Women's Rights Movement did not have enough firepower to cause real change, however, it did succeed in raising awareness of the various issues surrounding a woman's life. H-Block activist Mary feels that the limited success of the women's movement was caused by its lack of courage and radicality: "Sometimes we get nothing because men don't want to give anything. But often, we get nothing because we don't even ask." (Fairweather i.a. 159)

7. Protestant Women During “the Troubles”

While nationalist women have become subject of interest within the context of marginalised narratives, “Protestant women have not yet been written back into the history of the “Troubles””, as Constance Rynder observes. (93) Just like their Catholic counter-parts they are mothers, daughters, wives and fighters in their own right. During “the Troubles” they suffered just as much as anyone else but little notice has been given to their agonies. As women, they were naturally shoved to the sidelines of the struggle and as they lacked the aestheticism of the overtly oppressed, little notice was given as to their fates. They were pushed to the margins of historical relevance and the male gaze of historiography has done its best not to bring them to the fore.

The umbrella term ‘Protestant’ evokes a number of prejudices and preconceptions, however, the term is a lot less monolithic than one may think: Protestant women may be loyalist and in favour of the Queen, they may loathe the British government for its actions, they may identify with the preachings of Ian Paisley or detest him for his excitements, they may be involved in paramilitary organisations or hate their very existence, they may even be in favour of a united Ireland or an independent Northern Irish state. They may think of themselves as Irish, Northern Irish, British or their very personalised mixture of all.

While the common narrative of oppression and resistance led to tightly-knit communities in the Catholic ghettos and strong bonds of solidarity between those affected, Protestant women often lacked this kind of support. They did not have to fill in for their absent and interned husbands and therefore did not develop the same level of agency and awareness Catholic women were forced to. Also, Protestant women were involved in women’s rights networks to a far lesser extent than their Catholic counterparts. For working-class women it was especially hard to become organised as they were faced with “the difficulty of challenging the state with which they identified and which was under threat.” (Evason 11) Protestant women who got involved in campaigns were faced with accusations of supporting the Republican cause, just like women on the Catholic side were often accused of betraying the Republican cause if

they refused to subordinate their needs as women to the supposedly greater need of a United Ireland.

The Shankill Women's Centre run by the Lower Shankill Women's Group was one successful initiative in the Loyalist heartland of Belfast and was involved in cross-community campaigns. The Ballybeen Women's Centre – 'The Cellars' – in Loyalist Dundonald offered another opportunity for women of the area to get together and discuss their issues. The situation in Ballybeen was especially difficult as intra-community tensions with people torn between their support for the RUC and the UFF were the order of the day. (cf. Kilmurray 177f)

While Protestant women in the North were often seen as rather impassive with regard to women's issues, there still was a notion that feminism actually had been an import of enlightened English suffragettes. This account was fervently dismissed by Northern feminists. For one, they wanted to avoid attributions and remain non-sectarian, on the other side, they emphasised the different natures of the challenges faced by feminists in mainland Britain and Northern Ireland: "Northern Ireland women still travel in their thousands each year to England for abortions. Northern Ireland is still the only region in the United Kingdom without a single state day nursery. Women are hemmed in and oppressed to an obviously greater extent than elsewhere." (Evason 12) Most certainly Protestant working-class women were just as affected by Britain's neoliberal policies as their Catholic counterparts. Even before she became Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher was well known to Northern mothers. In her function as Minister of Education, she withdrew free school milk in 1971. While the Catholic women of the Community Women's Action on the Ormeau Road marched to Stormont with two cows at the head of their march (49), the Protestant women – although eager to join – had to stage their own protest as not to brush against the alleged nationalists. Because of the sectarian atmosphere in the North, both sides missed out on vigour as well as on potential allies for future campaigns on numerous occasions.

This chapter shall explore some exemplary cases of Protestant women's experiences in relation to three categories relevant for the Troubles: the paramilitaries, religion and party politics.

7.1. Women and the Paramilitaries

The biggest Loyalist paramilitary organisation was the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), which was founded in 1971 and legally suppressed in 1992. Faced with Republican violence and the disbandment of the RUC in 1970, many loyalists got involved in the group, which had between 40.000 and 50.000 members by 1972. (cf. McEvoy 269) The Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) served as their more militant wing from 1973 onwards, declaring that “our active service units will carry out sectarian murders” and that “our targets could include innocent Catholics.” (Fairweather i.a. 282)

The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was much smaller but a lot more efficient in terms of violence. It was initially founded in 1912 and re-grouped in 1966 along the lines of its predecessor. Many of its members – about 1.500 in 1972 – claimed to follow in the footsteps of the Thirty-Sixth Ulster Division, a battalion of Northern Irish soldiers who fought for the British in World War II. While the UDA had numerous women’s branches across the country and a rough total of 3.000 female members, there is no official record of women in the UVF. A small number of women were involved in the force, due to its clandestine nature it is however difficult to determine their impact. The driving force behind their existence was anti-Catholicism and in their re-founding manifesto they stated that “[f]rom this day on we declare war on the IRA... known IRA men will be executed mercilessly and without hesitation.” (289)

Seeing how the male members of both the UFF and UVF repeatedly denied any women’s involvement in their organisations, their status cannot be assessed too easily. Their general tasks included everything from transporting arms and ammunition to conducting surveillances, serving as guards of honour at funerals and carrying out punishment beatings. One of these punishment beatings gone wrong was the reason for the disbandment of the UDA’s women branches. In 1974, Ann Ogilby was ‘rompered’³⁵ by a number of Sandy Row UDA women for her ‘crime’ of taking parcels to a married UDA prisoner. They sent out Ogilby’s little daughter to buy sweets and when the girl returned, she could hear her mother being beaten to death. In total, ten women and one man were sentenced due to their involvement in the crime and some of them got life

³⁵ A UDA practice introduced in the early 1970s; a method of interrogating/torturing and then killing a victim.

sentences. The incident did a lot of harm to the UDA's reputation, which in turn tried to cover up what happened. The statement of a Republican ex-prisoner, who was in Armagh Gaol with the murderers, suggests that their crime took its toll on the women: "Every Saturday they'd re-enact the killing. You'd hear them in their cell and in the end it nearly drove them mad and they even asked the Catholic chaplain to exorcise the cell – they were terrified, they thought Ann Ogilby's ghost was there. It was terrible." (283)

Elizabeth, a welfare worker at the UDA, is one example of how the term Loyalist is far from being monolithic:

I work for the prisoners. Our lads are in for all sorts of things – murder, guns, but they're all political crimes. [...] They were out defending Ulster and God. They were fighting to their death to keep Ulster British. We were determined then, and we're determined now, never to go into a United Ireland. We have nothing in common with them in the South. I couldn't tell you a thing about the Irish, love, I learned English history at school. I have more in common with South Africa than I do with Ireland. [...] I am a Loyalist and what I mean when I say this. I wouldn't give Paisley the time of day. [...] I told you I'm not Irish, but I don't want direct rule from Westminster either. I tink this independent Ulster [...] is the answer. Although I feel I'm a British person and we fought the war for Britain, Ulster was her right-hand man, but Britain has failed us. (285f)

Elizabeth was disappointed by Margaret Thatcher's policies: "Well, when she was canvassing I liked her, she was true blue. But now she seems to have put herself above the working class and she's catering for the higher-ups. [...] I just wish Margaret Thatcher would be more flexible towards the working class." (286) Also, she expresses a feminist sentiment of sorts when she wishes for women to have "more say in the running of the country because it's men who ruined it. Men are just a necessary evil. They are all self-centered and selfish. A man can put on his coat when he likes and a man will buy a pint before a loaf, he goes to clubs, a woman doesn't." (286)

Just like many Republican women, Loyalist women would take to poetry to express their feelings of grief and frustration. As women would often be overheard in their organisations, expression through art seemed the only way to go. In her poem 'Ulster says NO!', one former UDA woman reckons with Margaret Thatcher and her Anglo-Irish Agreement policy of 1985:

[...]
If I could tell you a story of what happened long ago,
but do you really think it matters that Ulster still says no?
And sometimes I would ask myself, "Do people really care?"

For standing at the City Hall they told us to beware.
They said tell Maggie Thatcher that Ulster's not for sale,
and then they sat in talks with Dublin, but did anybody wail?
For if they did it went unheard on deaf ears it did fall.
So again I have to ask myself, does it matter? Not at all.
Are people really stupid, so blind they cannot see,
that Dublin they mean business and a united Ireland we will be?
So get up off your arm chair and get on the streets and shout
and show them that we mean business for we want Dublin out.
(McEvoy 274f)

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement thirteen years later was met with the same resistance as the one in 1985. As one loyalist activist said, the Agreement “was like the shooting and the bombing all over again. The government took away their belief that at least the people died for a reason: We've been kicked in the teeth, not once but twice; once by the perpetrators and the second time by our own government.” (276) Many loyalists were thus inclined to build their own Northern Irish State rather than remaining with Britain, which they felt had repeatedly betrayed them. A major point for them to reject the Agreement was that Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, prominent figures within the Republican struggle both armed and unarmed, should become the faces of power-sharing. One activist explained how they “resented the fact that they were being brought into government. [...] Can you imagine Bush and the likes sitting on the government with al Qaeda after the 9/11? But that's what they expected us just to do to sit down and say “Carry on.” You know?” (278)

The surname Spence was infamous in the troubled six counties. UVF leader Gusty Spence got a life sentence after killing the Catholic barman Peter Ward in 1966. He and his comrades were out to find and assassinate a well-known IRA man and when they could not find him, Spence settled his frustration by shooting Ward instead. Although surrounded by bigotry and sectarianism most of her life, his wife Louie proved to be extraordinarily open-minded and balanced in her views and analyses: “I'm being honest, love, you'll never get to the truth of what happens in these Troubles, it'll go down in history, this Northern Ireland, and in history they'll never boil down to who started these Troubles, because one side will always blame the other.” (Fairweather i.a. 291)

She was disillusioned with both, party politics and the paramilitaries and echoed the sentiments of many impoverished Protestant women when she stated “I certainly don't

support Margaret Thatcher, she's a snob, she's not for the working class people." (291) Spence illustrated the need for policies focused on the working class and acknowledged that the divide is between social classes much more than about religion or citizenship:

Sure if I had my way, love, although I'd vote Labour now, I wouldn't support none of them, I'd throw them all out and let working-class people what's on the street run the country, Catholics and Protestants. In fact women could run things better, just lift women off the Falls and the Shankill and let them take over, they know what it's like to have it hard, they know what it's like when your children are running about with no shoes on their feet, those big fellas in their fancy cars, what do they know? (290f)

One motive that came up time and again was the betrayal of the working class by the ruling politicians. Sally, a young Belfast woman whose husband is doing time for manslaughter, claimed that "I'm for the people and I'm not sure whether that means I'm a socialist or not, but see all these Tories and Labours, they're not really for the people. I'm for the working-class people, not the rich." (302) So while religion and ethnicity certainly were important markers of identity, social class-awareness was even more so. Both sides held the opinion that the paramilitaries of the other side were 'in it for the money': "At one time you could have mixed marriages but not now – you could never trust them. It's the Catholics fault the Troubles go on – it's because the IRA are making money out of it, and I don't want a united Ireland because it's the working class will suffer more at the hands of the Provisionals than they do now." (300)

Lily, another Protestant Belfast woman, held inside knowledge about the UDA: "The UDA are in it for the money, lining their pockets. The leaders are all on the dole, but they have fancy cars and nice holidays, every one of those men is the same. [...] Have you seen Andy Tyrie's house in Dundonald? Beautiful £30,000 house – who gets that on the dole?" She claimed that

[t]he UDA have massage parlours, I know girls who have worked in them. Some girls need the money, that's why they do it – they're just brothels. When the UDA formed in 1972 people joined to protect their homes, now the men can't get out of it, the UDA are like the Mafia in Chicago. [...] It's the ordinary working-class people are suffering, it's us that's paying, the likes of me that can't open the door, and it's the organizations that keep it going – their pockets are well-lined, they don't want to go back to being ordinary Catholics or Protestants. (305)

Her husband was a UDA man himself and forced her to carry weapons, listen to his stories of killing Catholics, have sex with him, abused her physically and

psychologically and beat her up if he felt she was being disrespectful. To escape his violent fits she started drugging his drinks: “God forgive me, I used to drug his drink, put it in his tea and all, anything to get him asleep. All the women do that.” (310) Domestic, communal and structural violence were just as prevalent in Protestant communities as they were on the other side of the divide. And while Catholicism overall was regarded as much more totalitarian than Protestantism, the Ulster-specific Protestant fundamentalism of Ian Paisley and cohorts was just as dogmatic and indeed a lot more political than its Catholic antagonist.

7.2. Women and Religion: Ulster Protestantism

The preacher and founder of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, Ian Paisley, was one of the key figures of “the Troubles”. He coined what became to be known as Ulster Protestantism meant that in the Six Counties indeed two highly conservative Christian currents were at play: “On the one side there was the catholic church [sic] – fast becoming the most reactionary branch of catholicism in Western Europe – and on the other an equally conservative protestantism with a strong dose of the fundamentalism normally associated with the deep south of the United States of America.” (Evason 14) Another activist took the same line and concluded that “Ulster protestantism, isolated from the general Protestant evolution which has moved towards secularisation, is archaic and fundamentalist. Its adherents, currently under pressure from the Anglo-Irish accord, exhibit fanaticism of the besieged and feel spiritually akin to the whites of the southern United States or of South Africa.” (n.a., “Unfinished Revolution” 21) While many moderate Protestants refused Ian Paisley’s militant sermon, he was very successful in spreading fear and creating upheaval

We have come to do a task and by the Grace of God we will do that task. If in doing so our bodies fall into the grave as they have done in 1641, 1798, 1820, 1916, 1920 and the 1950s and have done in the past ten murderous years that soil will have been fertilized by the blood of Protestants. From that soil will rise again a race of free Protestants who will fight through until the day of victory... [...] We will stop at nothing.” (qtd. in Fairweather i.a. 267)

His Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) ensured that he held power on a constitutional as well as on a congregational level, which made him one of the most powerful and

controversial figures to influence the course of “the Troubles”. He also rejected the British establishment, insisting that “could one ‘wring out the skirts of Maggie Thatcher’ one would find them soaked in the blood of Protestants whom she betrayed.” (270) Marie, a young girl from the Catholic Ballymurphy area, was convinced that Paisley was the main reason why “the Troubles” continued: “If they did shoot him, it would be all right, no harm to him like. He calls himself a man of the church but see if I got anywhere near him I would put a bomb under his chair. If him and his kind was shot then I think there’d be peace in Ireland.” (39)

Eileen Paisley was not merely his wife but also his biggest apologist and shared his analyses and perspectives of the real problems in the North:

My anger is really with the IRA, they are the root of it all. I want us to remain part of the UK, but if Britain didn’t want us we’d better be knowing something than going along with our heads in the sand. And you see, the murders don’t happen the other way round, it’s always Catholics murdering Protestants. If it happened the other way round, it would be screamed to the highest end. (275f)

She claims that “[p]ower-sharing would never work. It would be like Hitler and Churchill setting up power-sharing during the war. [...] Thank God the police are armed now. We Protestants have been pushed further and further back, our backs are to the wall over these last ten years.” (276) Moreover, she feels that “the death penalty should be brought back because there’s no deterrent... some of these people in the jails are getting better fed and cleaner beds than they’ve ever had before, and that’s a terrible expense on the country.” (276f) She thinks that the degeneracy of Catholics is ingrained in their very religion itself and that nothing can be done about it:

You see, they never had those things and instead of enjoying them and living as they could, they turned the housing estates into slums. And if you put those people in Buckingham Palace they would have it a slum in no time. They get jobs and then they destroy their places of employment. I feel sorry for them, because they are not allowed to think for themselves. The Roman Catholic Church tells them not to have contraception so they are human incubators, that’s wrong, it takes away a man’s rights. But they probably have big families so they can overcrowd the country. (280)

Another disciple of Ian Paisley further elaborates on the problem of Catholicism: “You see the Roman-Catholic church is the anti-Christ, the rotting body of the anti-Christ. I believe in the second coming; no, Ian Paisley is not the Messiah returning, he is an

ordinary man... [...] [he] could lead Northern Ireland out of the Troubles [...].” (280) Both seemed happy enough with the roles they had to play according to Paisley’s perception: “I believe that the husband is the head of the wife and the home. I believe that the father should be prophet, priest and king in his home. As king, he should exercise rulership. As prophet, he should exercise rulership.” (Paisley in Fairweather 266)

7.3. Women and Party Politics: Anne Dickson

Stormont, the 52-seats Northern Ireland Parliament, had always been a men’s assembly. Women comprised only 4 percent of candidates standing for election between 1921 and 1972. Only nine women were elected, six Unionist candidates, two Independents and one Liberal. (Rynder 93) In 1969, UUP candidate Anne Dickson was the only woman to be voted into Stormont. Unlike most in her party, she was convinced that “granting the Catholic minority a legitimate role in government would broaden and strengthen Ulster.” (94) Already before her time as official representative she was known as recruiting Catholics in her party on a local level. Due to her non-sectarian attitude she made many enemies within the ranks of loyalist hardliners and Paisleyites, with Paisley even denouncing her as “Anne of the Thousand Knives” in one of his infamous sermons. (101) She received anonymous letters and phone calls, being branded as a “traitor to the constitution” (98) and even had her house pipebombed. In the early 1970s paramilitary organisations, presumably the UVF, targeted not merely Republican activists but also Unionist activists with a Catholic background, such as friends and coworkers of Dickson, who refused to be intimidated. (99) Due to her inclusive personality she managed to enforce small changes at least:

When she first entered Stormont in 1969 she was surprised to learn that no Catholic had ever been invited to conduct opening prayers in the House of Commons. That function rotated among the Protestant denominations, despite the growing presence of Catholic MPs in the chamber. Dickson began lobbying behind the scenes to correct this blatant disregard for minority rights. Amid protests from some Paisleyites, in December 1970 she finally got her way with the appointment of the first Catholic chaplain to Stormont. (100)

When internment without trial was introduced in 1971, she was one of the few who had actually guessed its consequences: “We alienate not only the wife and children of the

person but the whole street and whole family circle. This can spread not only throughout the area in which the person lives but throughout the Six Counties. There is no doubt that this has stimulated recruitment for the I.R.A.” (102)

In 1973, Great Britain tried to restore power to Stormont, suggesting a 78-member Northern Ireland Assembly and an 11-member power-sharing executive to involve Dublin in the policies of the North. As the UUP was in disarray, Dickson was eventually elected to be an independent Unionist candidate. She supported power-sharing and her election agenda called for:

- 1) an end to the reign of terror we’ve had for the last four years;
- 2) a community that will learn to live together in peace and trust; and
- 3) a fair sharing of the cake of prosperity. (103)

50 Unionists were elected into the Assembly, 27 of whom were declaredly against power-sharing. Apart from Dickson, three more women had been elected, all part of the anti-power-sharing faction. One of them was the wife of Ian Paisley, Eileen, who “quickly learned the disruptive debating style of their male counterparts [and] contributed frequent point-of-order interruptions of other members’ speeches and lengthy diatribes on the sins of all nationalists and “traitors.”” (104) When the 1974 Ulster Workers’s Council strike began with its aim of bringing down the Sunningdale Agreement, Dickson was disgusted: “[The strike] has been called by people who so far are nameless and faceless and have no mandate, as far as anyone knows, to represent anyone. . . . this country is being held to ransom by people who have never stood at an election.” (104)

In the course of the Sunningdale negotiations, the former hardliner Brian Faulkner had developed into a reformist acknowledging the perks of power-sharing. When he launched the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland (UPNI) after the failed Agreement in 1974, Anne Dickson joined him in the new party. (105) In the first elections it stood in 1975, only four UPNI members won seats, among them Dickson. In 1976, she took over as leader from Faulkner and tried to push the power-sharing agenda. Success was limited though and also in the council elections in 1977 just six members of her party were elected. The big majority of Unionist people would rather vote UUP or Paisley’s DUP, which he had founded in 1971. (106)

With the republican prison struggle intensifying in the second half of the 1970s and its peak in the 1981 hungerstrikes, Dickson felt that the polarisation of society left hardly any middle ground for non-sectarian Unionist politics and, therefore, resigned as the leader of the UPNI in June 1981. In her assessment of Dickson's politics, Constance Rynder concludes that

[f]or more than fifteen years Dickson challenged the conventional role of Northern Ireland women as primarily homemakers rather than policy makers. She occasionally championed women's issues, but did not see herself as a women's rights advocate. She promoted gender equality in political and economic life, based on what she saw as a fairness principle: people of all classes and religions and both genders deserved equal treatment from the state and the private sector. A de facto feminist, Dickson nevertheless shunned the label; in her era, the emerging feminism in Northern Ireland was closely associated with Irish republicanism. A centrist politician like Dickson would have carefully avoided such associations. (108)

From 1985 to 1990, Dickson was the chair of the Northern Ireland Consumer Council. She welcomed the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, calling it "Sunningdale for slow learners". (109)

8. Conclusion

This thesis was aimed at providing an overview of the everyday experiences of women during the Northern Irish “Troubles”. In the spirit of the feminist standpoint theory they were given the space to tell their stories in their own voices rather than being reduced to the role of impassive objects. Indeed the roles women played in the course of “the Troubles” – and long before them – were complex and diverse. They were agents of change as well as conservators, perpetrators of violence and advocates of peace, politicians, paramilitaries, mothers, martyrs, housewives and rebels.

As the early examples of women like Maud Gonne, Countess Markievicz and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington show, women have taken part in the struggle for national liberation. However, while names such as Charles Parnell, Terence MacSwiney and James Connolly went down in mainstream Irish history, a lot less is known about the equally stout and committed Republicans Anna Parnell, Mary MacSwiney and Nora Connolly. Unlike most of their male comrades, the majority of the early female Republican activists did not only fight for national liberation but also for women’s rights.

In later years, the relation between female and national liberation became a lot trickier for the women activists. Especially in the times of “the Troubles” it was near to impossible to bridge the gap between both endeavours. The women fighting for national liberation decided to cut back on their needs as women for the sake of the cause: When the male prisoners in Long Kesh embarked on their second hungerstrike, the Armagh women refrained from their own protest as not to divert attention from their comrades’ objectives. Declared feminists on the other hand were wary of expressing too much solidarity for their fellow women behind bars, afraid of alienating potential allies by taking sides.

Women of various political and religious backgrounds repeatedly commiserated the negligence of the working class from the political establishment. Indeed women of both sides of the divide disliked Margaret Thatcher and her neoliberal policies, which were felt in its full force in the impoverished working class-ghettoes. Understandably, in these deprived areas the paramilitaries were especially strong. Accounts of women illustrate the deeply patriarchal and hierarchical structures of these paramilitary groups

as well as the prevalent issue of domestic violence. Whilst the public-private dichotomy was blurred during “the Troubles” with the army invading homes at random, women often could not feel safe in their homes in the first place.

In spite of all the challenges and obstacles women had to face in their daily struggles – no matter whether they were of a political, feminist or private nature – they never regarded themselves as victims of circumstance. The many first-hand accounts in this thesis illustrate how women actively participated in social and political processes and were aware of the greater implications of their situation. They show enormous insight in complex political processes and from today’s perspective many of their reflections seem almost prophetic. In times of political unrest in Ireland in general and during “the Troubles” in particular, women were not on the sidelines of history but right in the heart of it. They shaped and influenced its course just as much as their male counterparts, even if historiography is slow to acknowledge their contributions. *Ni saoirse go saoirse na mBan* - there is no freedom without the freedom of women. Chroniclers of (Irish) history need to be aware that marginalising the role women in historiography – willfully or as so often negligently – will not serve the goal of a united people nor a united Ireland.

9. Outlook and Perspectives

Although “the Troubles” went down in history, the conflict still shapes the political life in the North of Ireland. With his quasi-resignation as first minister in September 2015, Peter Robinson aimed to suspend the devolved institutions in the the six counties. According to Robinson, the assassination of a former IRA member turned rogue by the IRA in August proved that the paramilitary structures were still intact. This would breach the agreement leading to the power-sharing executive and therefore render it ineffective. Downing Street refused to suspend Stormont, however, the outcome of Robinson’s manoeuvring is still unclear. The appointment of Arlene Foster as an acting first minister was a move to buy more time for the negotiation process. Until then, the devolved government will be kept alive in “zombie form”, as a political insider told the Guardian³⁶.

These current events illustrate just how unstable the situation in Northern Ireland is. The same lack of perspectives and sustainable politics were expressed by H Block activist Mary back in the height of “the Troubles”:

I say I want the Brits out, but sometimes I’m not so sure. It pains me even to think it, but I really don’t know that we’re ready to rule ourselves; how long it will take for the wounds to heal. It’s like Britain is the monster, and has wielded clubs against us, both Protestant and Catholic, and at the end of the day, what are you left with? Two smaller monsters, one slightly bigger than the other, but both brain-damaged. (Fairweather i.a. 167)

The lack of female representation in political parties has been a problem until today. Carol Coulter locates this problem in the circumstance “that the state that arose as a result of the anti-colonial struggle was a mirror-image of the state it sought to overthrow: centralised, hierarchical and masculine in ethos.” (as qtd. in Ward, “Finding a Place” 48) Although ambitious initiatives such as the 1994 Clár na mBan (Women’s Agenda for Peace) came up with in-depth analyses of the status quo and suggested ways forward, they were largely overheard. Their criticism was also directed at the developments in the South, which they deemed undesirable:

³⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/sep/10/northern-ireland-government-on-brink-of-collapse> (15.9.2015).

We are concerned that women's voices will not be heard or will be ignored in the current debate about the future of Ireland. Equally, if women of all shades of opinion are excluded from the deliberations on a new constitution for Ireland, then it will be no more representative of Irish society than the 1937 Constitution which shaped the narrow and repressive society from which we are now emerging. (qtd. in Ward 43)

Thirty years ago it was unthinkable that one day, maybe, the island of Ireland could be reunited and independent from the United Kingdom. With the new political culture of participatory democracy and referendums, a ballot on the question of unity does not seem entirely unlikely any longer. However, the case of the Republic has shown that women's liberation is by no means a logical consequence of national liberation. While it is currently hard to foresee how peace with justice in the North of Ireland can be achieved, it is beyond dispute that it will come eventually:

There will be peace in Ireland and it will be a republican peace. It will be a peace that will accommodate both Catholics and Protestants and hence it will be hedged by safeguards, elaborate constitutions, dual symbols and the paraphernalia of laborious bureaucracy. But it will also be a peace, absolutely, that will entail, perhaps after a decent interval, the removal of the Crown from Ireland. And then and only then can the wounds of history heal and the Crown lay to rest the ghost of an old Empire which began in the provinces of Ireland hundreds of years ago and on which the sun will have finally set. (Toolis 371)

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11. English Abstract

This thesis aims to illustrate the contribution of women in Irish history. It focuses on the various fates of women during “the Troubles” in the North of Ireland and therefore explores the stories and experiences of women from diverse backgrounds. Based on the feminist standpoint theory, the thesis allows women to speak in their own voice rather than turning them into muted objects of an abstract historiography.

Unlike most of their male comrades, many of the early female Republican activists did not only fight for national liberation but also for women’s rights. In later years, the relationship between women’s liberation and national liberation became a lot trickier for the activists. Especially in the times of “the Troubles” it was near to impossible to bridge the gap between both endeavours. While women fighting for national liberation decided to cut back on their needs as women for the sake of 'the cause', declared feminists often shied away from the national question, afraid of alienating potential allies by taking sides.

Women of various political and religious backgrounds repeatedly commiserated the continuous negligence of the working class from the political establishment. Poverty and unemployment were omnipresent in the urban working class-communities, as were the paramilitaries and the British army. Despite all the difficulties and challenges women in the North faced on a daily basis, they never saw themselves as victims of circumstance. This thesis illustrates how they indeed shaped history in their own right.

12. German Abstract

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Rolle der Frau in der irischen Geschichte. Sie konzentriert sich dabei auf die unterschiedlichen Schicksale von Frauen während der „Troubles“ im Norden Irlands und ergründet die Biographien und Erfahrungen verschiedenster Frauen. Basierend auf der feministischen Standpunkt-Theorie ermöglicht es diese Arbeit den Frauen, für sich selbst zu sprechen, anstatt sie zu stummen Objekten einer abstrakten Geschichtsschreibung zu machen.

Anders als die meisten ihrer männlichen Mitstreiter haben sich viele frühe republikanische Aktivistinnen nicht nur für die nationale Befreiung eingesetzt, sondern auch für die Befreiung der Frau. Diese Beziehung zwischen nationaler Befreiung und Frauenbefreiung wurde mit den Jahren zunehmend komplizierter. Insbesondere während der „Troubles“ war es nahezu unmöglich, die Kluft zwischen diesen beiden Bestrebungen zu schließen. Während jene Frauen, die im Freiheitskampf aktiv waren, ihre Bedürfnisse als Frauen vielfach „der Sache“ untergeordnet haben, sind deklarierte Feministinnen oftmals vor der nationalen Frage zurückgescheut, weil sie befürchtet haben, potentielle Verbündete abzuschrecken.

Frauen mit unterschiedlichsten Biographien haben immer wieder bedauert, dass das politische Establishment die arbeitende Klasse stetig vernachlässigt hat. Armut und Arbeitslosigkeit waren in den urbanen Arbeiter_innen-Vierteln genauso allgegenwärtig wie die Paramilitärs und die Britische Armee. Trotz der alltäglichen Schwierigkeiten und Herausforderungen haben sich die Frauen im Norden Irlands nie als Opfer der Umstände gesehen. Die vorliegende Arbeit zeigt, wie sie die Geschichte selbst aktiv mitgestaltet haben.

13. Curriculum Vitae

Education and Training

10/2005 – present	Vienna University: German and English (Teacher Training)
3/2013	BA English and American Studies
02/2013	BA German Studies
9/1997-6/2005	BG/BRG Freistadt, Upper Austria

International Experience

May/June 2014	Volunteer in Nablus, Palestine (Human Rights Projects; Teaching: Business English, German for Medical Students)
2012/2013	German Language Assistant in the North of Ireland: Wallace High & Friends' School Lisburn, Lurgan College
2009/2010	Erasmus at King's College London, United Kingdom

Academic Experience

7/2009-7/2013	Student Representative for English & American Studies
10/2010-6/2012	Tutor for "Technical German for Foreign Students" at the Vienna University for Technology
3/2011-7/2011	Tutor for Middle High German

‘Céad míle fáilte sa bhaile romhat.’

A hundred thousand welcomes home to you.

I smiled and said, *‘Go raibh maith agat.’*

Thanks.

He looked very serious and tenderly enquired,

‘Caithfidh go bhuil sé go hiontach bheith saor.’

‘Caithfidh go bhuil.’

‘It must be wonderful to be free.’

‘It must,’ said I, walked down the gangway, past a detective, and got on the train for Dublin.

(Brendan Behan: Borstal Boy 371f)