MORE THAN JUST THE BACKBONE? WOMEN IN LOYALIST AND REPUBLICAN PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATIONS DURING THE NORTHERN IRISH TROUBLES, 1969-1998

by

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ABSTRACT

TABITHA CAUSBY WOOD. More Than Just the Backbone? Women in Loyalist and Republican Paramilitary Organizations During the Northern Irish Troubles, 1969-1998. (Under the direction of DR. PETER J. THORSHEIM.)

The Northern Irish Troubles lasted for almost thirty years, from 1969 to 1998. Various scholars have studied many aspects of this conflict, but women in loyalist and republican paramilitaries are often overlooked. This thesis seeks to rectify the oversight by using women paramilitary members' voices to understand why they joined, why they fought, how they were perceived by their societies, their male comrades, and ultimately, themselves. To achieve this aim, this thesis uses a comparative lens to examine the diametrically opposed view of loyalist and republican women. These two groups of women are rarely examined, and if they are studied, it is almost always separately. By examining both groups of paramilitary women in the same space, it allows for a greater understanding of the differences and fractures present within Northern Irish society during the Troubles. Further, this thesis examines the question of why women paramilitary actors are not included in conflict negotiation and peace talks, and how their absence ultimately led to a continuum of violence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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While the professional support I received was immense, my gratitude is ultimately due to my family that had to deal with me when I would panic over deadlines or swear I could not write another word. My husband, Joe, has been more help than he will ever know. Rory, my son, was, in his own way, also an encouragement, but for the wrong reasons. When I would say I couldn't write anymore, he would say, "That's okay, mommy. You can come play outside with me instead!" So, to Joe and Rory, and my parents, in-laws, and grandparents, I love you dearly and thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

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ABBREVIATION LIST

Paramilitary Groups

PIRA (Provisional Irish Republican Army)

UDA (Ulster Defense Association)

UFF (Ulster Freedom Fighters)

UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force)

WUDA (Women's Ulster Defense Association)

State/Security Forces

RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary)

UDR (Ulster Defense Regiment)

Miscellaneous

LPO (Loyalist Paramilitary Organization) - Umbrella term

*If first names are in quotation marks, they are pseudonymous to protect the person's identity.

INTRODUCTION

A Tale of Two Women

Irish folklore venerates women in many ways. Perhaps most famous among the mythological figures are the two wise women who helped raise Fionn mac Cumhaill into a cunning warrior and a shrewd planner. Bodhmall the Druidess and Liath Luachra the Warrior both served as surrogate mothers to Fionn mac Cumhaill, but they are not unique within Irish mythology. In fact, the presence of women in Irish mythology is so pronounced that several different women personify particular eras of Irish history: Hibernia and Erin for Ireland as a mythologized nation, Gráinne Mhaol for the period of Tyrone's Rebellion and the Flight of the Earls, and Cathleen Ni Houlihan for a matronly figure to impel the émigré Irish diaspora to return home and fight for Irish independence. It is this later personification that would come to define much of the Irish struggle of the twentieth century through a play of the same name, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory, in which her character requires the blood of sacrifice to become her true, young and queenly form, and popular songs such as "Four Green Fields," which laments the partition of Ireland.

Women also feature prominently in the folklore and myths of the United Kingdom. The veneration of the Iceni leader Boudica in her fight against the Roman conquest extends into the realm of myth and legend across Britain and Wales, while Scáthach, the warrior-woman who trained Cú Chulainn, comes from the Isle of Skye. Following the trends of nationalist movements in the nineteenth century, newspaper propagandists and cartoonists in the United Kingdom settled on a personification: Britannia, derived from the various Roman influences of early Britain. Britannia features prominently in songs and as a personification of Britain longer than many other nationalist symbols, however. Popular and even official use of the name "Britannia"

throughout England and Wales spans through the eighteenth century, the reign of Elizabeth I, the medieval period, and even concurrently with Roman rule. The figure of the woman has thus always been entwined in some way with Britain and the United Kingdom.

This aside is to enlighten readers to the importance of the feminine and gender in understanding the greater context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland as it relates to women. This thesis argues that women were important actors in both loyalist and republican paramilitary groups, and further that their levels of involvement differed because of a different set of patriarchal standards that existed in Northern Ireland at the time. This thesis seeks to illuminate these women's stories by using their own words, to understand why they fought, and what that particular fight meant to them. Further, it examines how familial relationships, religious understandings and social constructs, or the common beliefs of their collective society that formed the basis of their reality, shaped and impacted their involvement.

The Troubles in Northern Ireland formally occurred between 1968 and 1998, though violence occurred prior to and after these years. The Troubles began as a civil rights movement in the early 1960s.[1] Catholics in Northern Ireland faced discrimination when trying to access housing, education, jobs, positions in politics and everyday life. In a global sense, 1968 was a year of civil rights movements across the globe, and the same was true in Northern Ireland. Civil rights advocates engaged in peaceful protests and demonstrations in Northern Ireland, however, brutality from a predominantly Protestant police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) changed the tone of these protests, and eventually sparked the Troubles. Ultimately, the violence

[1] Niall O'Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997).

perpetrated by the RUC spread to other loyalists inciting violence.[2] The burning of thousands of Catholic homes and businesses caused many to flee from the neighborhoods their families had lived in for generations.[3] Those Catholics felt that the police were not protecting them, and they looked to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) that still existed in the Republic of Ireland. The IRA did not defend these Catholic neighborhoods in Belfast and Derry... This led to an outbreak of civil unrest and sectarian violence between Irish Catholics, who were mostly Irish nationalists/republicans, and Northern Irish British Protestants, who mostly identified as British unionists/loyalists.[4] The Troubles would kill over 3,600 people and scar countless other lives over the following three decades. The Good Friday Agreement in 1998 finally ended the conflict, and that is where this thesis concludes. Although many historians have studied the Troubles, significant gaps exist, particularly in terms of the roles that paramilitary women played on both sides of the divide. This thesis not only helps fill in those gaps but illuminates women's central role in this sectarian conflict in an effort to create a more complete understanding of the history of the Troubles.

Chapter one focuses on women in loyalist and republican paramilitary groups and analyzes why the latter achieved greater visibility. The second chapter two, which examine republican paramilitary women as they saw themselves, how their contemporaries viewed them, how the greater Northern Irish society portrayed them, and what can be elucidated and added to the historical narrative by exploring and rethinking their reasons for involvement and their

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[2] Ibid.; Brian Dooley, *Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland and Black America* (London: Pluto Press, 1998); Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999* (Lanaham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999).

[3] Max Hastings, *Barricades in Belfast: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., Inc., 1970).; Connla Young, "Bombay Street burning remembered 50 years on," *The Irish News*, August 6, 2019, https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2019/08/06/news/50th-anniversary-of-burning-of-bombay-street-and-deaths-of-august-1969-to-be-marked-1678500/.

[4] John Darby, Editor, *Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1983).

actions as paramilitary actors. Chapter three similarly looks at those same questions as they relate to loyalist women. This chapter also takes a deep dive to understand how familial relationships and Protestant community standards changed how loyalist paramilitary women were involved. Furthermore, it examines why in some ways they were less visible than their republican counterparts. The fourth and final chapter examines the tenuous peace agreement reached in 1998. It analyzes why paramilitary women were not involved with these negotiations and considers the ramifications of this on the long-term prospects for peace in Northern Ireland.

While this thesis is specific to women in Northern Irish paramilitaries, it is important to note that it adds to a broader framework for examining gender in ethnonational conflict. Throughout history, and even in the present day, women are breaking traditional gender roles and engaging in paramilitary or terroristic actions to further the cause they believe in. The same is true about loyalist and republican women. This thesis expands on this at a more intimate level examining two diverse groups in a very small country. This thesis adds to the broader framework of not only Irish studies, but gender studies as well.[5]

Historiography

Much of the scholarship depicting Irish women as terrorists comes from the decade following the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which saw peace in Northern Ireland for the first time in three decades. Additionally, the sectarian lines of republican and loyalist communities continue to divide Northern Ireland, furthering the cycle of distrust and irreconciliation. Because communities still harbor such distrust, much of the scholarly work focuses on main players, or people who already were known to be paramilitaries, almost all of whom are men. The silence

[5] For further reading on women in direct conflict, readers can look to the Tamil Tigers, the Sandinistas, Kurdish resistance fighters, the Black Widow Chechen's, North Vietnamese women during the Vietnamese War, the Yugoslav Partisan's, the Women's Anti-Fascist Front.

from and about women when dealing with academic work is born from that distrust, so much of the recent scholarship has focused not on women, but the larger implications of the Troubles as a whole. This is not uncommon when examining the history of conflict. Women are seen as incapable of committing violent acts, particularly as terrorists or paramilitaries. To broach the subject of women during the Northern Irish Troubles, this chapter will utilize two main methodologies and engage with several works of scholarship on the involvement of women in paramilitary organizations.

While the works that follow are valuable for their methodologies, interviews, analysis, and highlighting of important questions, none of them fully addresses *why* the difference was so stark between how loyalist and republican paramilitary women were represented as well as the actions they were involved in. My research looks at how these women were portrayed by their contemporaries, by historians, and by themselves, and it uncovers the reason that there were perceived different levels of participation between the two groups. My research and analysis seek to expound on why those discrepancies exist, and how not understanding the full breadth of the work of paramilitary women leads to an incomplete representation of the Troubles. This thesis will not only fill this gap but attempt to create a comparative and fuller understanding of female paramilitaries in the Northern Irish Troubles.

For women in paramilitary groups, it is necessary to understand how the idea of rebelling is constructed within the gendered narrative that often dichotomizes historical understanding. Alexis Leanna Henshaw's *Why Women Rebel* seeks to answer the question of why women join paramilitary organizations. Additionally, Henshaw analyzes why some movements attract massive support from women, while others fail to do so. Her work is important for two reasons. The first is Henshaw's position that gender bias exists when examining economic theories

relating to paramilitarism. This lays bare female involvement in "political economy, risk, and the role of emotion in international relations … and challenges the view that a decision to rebel is purely a cost-benefit analysis."[6] The second important aspect of Henshaw's work is her inclusion and analysis of statistical data pertaining to paramilitary women.

Henshaw roots her work firmly in the empirical, which is exceptionally important for a relatively understudied subject, as it allows her to show the representative makeup of women within the paramilitary organizations she studies. Indeed, she demonstrates that women comprise a much larger proportion of some combat forces than is commonly portrayed in both society and academia.[7] This empirical approach while useful, only comprises half of the methodological framework of this chapter—feminist-postmodernism makes up the rest.[8]

An understanding of feminist theory is integral to this thesis, as considers what happens when women step outside "traditional" roles. In *Gender and the Political: Deconstructing the Female Terrorist,* Amanda Third makes an argument, firmly grounded in feminist theory, highlighting how women terrorists "threaten" societies' understandings of women. Foremost in her work is the notion that a terrorist woman poses a "significatory threat," not only to the potential victims, but to existing understandings of sex and gender dynamics within the greater society. The female terrorist is a Medusa, representing a "decisive rupture of signification … unimaginable; she can never be comprehended." In this sense, the female terrorist has two main,

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[6] Alexis Leanna Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1-12, 8.
[7] See Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002); Brendan O'Brien *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999); and J. Bowyer Bell, *The Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence 1967-1992* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993.)
[8] Ibid., 22-35.

dissonant qualities: hypermasculine and hyperfeminine, where women terrorists are seen to be imitating men in terrorist groups or using femininity to further terroristic goals.[9]

These dissonant qualities are inherently dangerous because they not only challenge the social cohesion of heteronormative and patriarchal society, but they allow women to represent themselves as an equivalent existential threat to that of masculine power and violence. For women to take the agency and committing terrorist acts, they place themselves within the intentionally separate sphere of masculine power and violence, allegedly at the expense of traditional femininity. This dissonance within the perception and self-identity of the female terrorist and paramilitary member is central to the analysis of women in loyalism and republicanism due to the seemingly different expectations those groups placed on women.[10]

Public perception changed due to how other paramilitaries, the public, and the media viewed the female terrorists; concurrently, the self-identity of terrorist and paramilitary women changed as they adapted to their chosen roles. It is important to note that the terms terrorist and paramilitary member are not used interchangeably by those in paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. Further, some paramilitary organizations, such as the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), were not classified by the government as a proscribed terrorist organization until 1992. However, the studies on women in terrorism not specific to Northern Ireland use the term terrorist more frequently than paramilitary. Most academic works on the Troubles use the term paramilitary rather than terrorist.

To firmly root this thesis in historical fact, a chronology of events, even if they exclude women, is imperative to understand the events as they affected the course of the Troubles. *The*

[9] Amanda Third, *Gender and the Political: Deconstructing the Female Terrorist* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1-8.
[10] Ibid., 53-71.

Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence 1967-1992 is J. Bowyer Bell's 1993 history of the conflict in Northern Ireland. While Bell does not cover women as much as later scholars would, his almost 900-page tome provides much of the contextual background that any analysis of women active in the conflict requires. Irish historians broadly consider Bell's painstaking research to be the best history of the Troubles to appear by 1993, which makes this monograph indispensable for any scholar covering the conflict in Northern Ireland. Bell's work, while not analytical, provides a chronicle of events of the Troubles and their consequences through 1992.[11]

To fully understand how people operated within paramilitary organizations, it is vital to have a collection of interviews with added analysis. *Out of the Ashes* by Robert W. White is a history of modern Irish republicanism that contains a surprising amount of information about the involvement of women in the Troubles. Much of the value of this work comes from his coverage of the Troubles and the primary sources contained within. White begins his monograph with the generally accepted start of the Northern Irish Troubles in 1968 but carries it past PIRA's disarmament in 2005. Additionally, White conducted interviews with leading figures in the movement, as well as less prominent individuals who took part in the conflict as republicans—women among them. *Out of the Ashes* also relies heavily on oral interviews for an overview of the Provisional IRA movement, which was in some ways inclusive of women.[12]

In contrast to *Out of the Ashes,* Miranda Alison's *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-national Conflict* examines paramilitary women from a transnational perspective. It focuses on women's involvement in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which resisted state pogroms against Tamil citizens in Sri Lanka, and women's involvement in loyalist

[11] J. Bowyer Bell, *The Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence 1967-1992* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), 15-18.
[12] Robert W. White, *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of the Provisional Irish Republican Movement* (Kildare: Merrion Press, 2017), 15, 47-49, 52, 280.

and republican paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. Alison includes many interviews across the spectrum of involvement in these conflicts, and as such, establishes that women's reasons for involvement in resistance and terrorism are as varied as the motivations of men—a revelation at the time it appeared in 2009.[13]

A large part of Alison's work aims at dispelling the myth of the woman as a peacemaker. Historically, essentialist thinking about women being less prone to engaging in active combat consistently hampered scholarly research into women in combat. Even cursory research shows this to be untrue, but Alison goes a step further and demonstrates that socially, detractors denigrate women who have historically engaged in paramilitarism and terrorism as "deviant," "unwomanly" or anomalous to a degree that does not apply to men. Again, Alison seeks to rectify this and get to the issue of why this perception might arise.[14]

One of the most valuable sources for both the historiography and for this thesis is women's voices from within loyalist paramilitaries. There is so little recorded on the topic, that these loyalist women's interviews are what made this thesis possible. Sandra McEvoy, a political scientist, wrote "Telling Untold Stories: Women in Loyalist Paramilitary Organizations in Northern Ireland, 1968-2006" for her dissertation in 2008. In this, she utilizes family and personal connections to paint a portrait of life as a loyalist woman during the Northern Irish Troubles. As a result of her work, more information is available for scholars who wish to study women in loyalist paramilitaries.[15]

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[13] Miranda Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-national Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2009), 4-6.
[14] Ibid., 7.
[15] Sandra M. McEvoy, "Telling Untold Stories: Women in loyalist Paramilitary Organizations in Northern Ireland, 1968-2006" (PhD diss., Clark University Worcester, Massachusetts, 2008), 9-13.

One of McEvoy's most important contributions is her assertion that not only did women exist in loyalist paramilitarism, but they played a significant role in the conflict. Journalists and academics ignored these women for decades for several reasons. As a result of media and scholarly avoidance, the peace talks in the closing days of the conflict completely shut out female paramilitary representation. Because they were unrepresented, they felt betrayed by the concessions made during the peace talks. Additionally, McEvoy goes into detail about the family dynamics between loyalist women and their mothers, fathers, and husbands, emphasizing the patriarchal oppression perpetrated by loyalist men that may have limited women's direct involvement in armed conflict. Alison's research supports this assertion. McEvoy reveals that most of the interviews conducted could only happen through men as arbiters of conversation.[16]

Power dynamics play a large part in understanding women's involvement in Northern Irish paramilitaries. Azrini Wahidin and Jason Powell's works pertaining to Northern Ireland are firmly rooted within a Foucauldian framework. In "'The Irish Conflict' and the Experiences of Female Ex-Combatants in the Irish Republican Army," they seek to understand the experiences of women ex-combatants and highlight key moments of their internment at Armagh Gaol, such as the "dirty protest." They also examine why women joined armed movements.[17]

An issue with Wahidin's work, especially *Ex-Combatants, Gender and Peace in Northern Ireland: Women, Political Protest and the Prison Experience,* is the lens she chooses to employ in some of her analysis: that of the "accidental activist." This viewpoint is problematic, but exceptionally important for the historiography of women in the Troubles. The problems

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Azrini Wahidin, *Ex-Combatants, Gender and Peace in Northern Ireland: Women, Political Protest and the Prison Experience* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Azrini Wahidin and Jason Powell, "'The Irish Conflict' and the Experiences of Female Ex-Combatants in the Irish Republican Army: Power, Resistance, and Subjectivity," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, No. 9/10 (2017), 560-561; Margarette D'Arcy, *Tell Them Everything: A Sojourn in the Prison of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at Ard Macha (Armagh)* (London: Pluto Press, 1981).

come from an older understanding of women in republicanism: “accidental activism” states that women were forced into the role as activists and paramilitaries by necessity rather than choice, which ultimately serves to remove their agency.

Many of the issues with Wahidin's *Ex-Combatants* are resolved within Niall Gilmartin's *Female Combatants after Armed Struggle*. Gilmartin's monograph is important in providing a direct rebuttal to Wahidin through interviews using former paramilitary women. A ubiquitous aspect of Gilmartin's work is fact that the women interviewed claim their own autonomy and intentionality, which further highlights the shortcomings in Wahidin’s work. With Gilmartin’s monograph as an indication, the field seems to increasingly consider women as self-determined actors within the historical narrative. Other published works of women’s interviews from Northern Ireland tend, in more recent times, to treat women’s involvement in armed conflict as less anomalous.[18]

There are some strong scholarly works on women in paramilitary organizations, however there is less discussion of those women at the peace table or conflict negotiation. Postdoctoral fellow, Robert Nagel examined this in his Master’s thesis. His work, however, leaves much to be questioned. Nagel successfully explains why women, in general, need a seat at the negotiation table. His analysis on the inclusion of paramilitary women leaves much to be desired. It is not uncommon in Northern Ireland for former paramilitary members, both loyalist and republican to hold political office. This is in large parts because those paramilitary members were instrumental in the peace process and actively worked to shape Northern Ireland devolved government today. While Nagel does show the patriarchy present at the negotiating table, he still uses sexist tropes

[18] Niall Gilmartin, *Female Combatants After Armed Struggle: Lost in Translation?* (New York: Routledge, 2019); in addition, Silvia Calamati's "Women's stories from the North of Ireland" is a collection of interviews with 21 different women in Northern Ireland and it provides additional historical information about the experience of women with explorations of autonomy and self-determination.

as to why they are necessary. Women are not inherently peacemakers or conciliators, particularly when looking at paramilitary women.[19]

[19] Robert Ulrich Nagel, "The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement: Why a Seat at the Table is not Enough" (MA thesis, University of Kent, 2015), 20, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

CHAPTER 1: WOMEN'S PARAMILITARY RATIONALIZATION

On March 6, 1988, the British Special Air Service (SAS) carried out Operation Flavius, which at face value was to stop three Provisional IRA (PIRA) members from carrying out a bombing in the British territory of Gibraltar. One of these prospective bombers was a woman named Mairead Farrell, a veteran PIRA volunteer with over a decade of experience.[1] The cold-blooded nature of her execution by the SAS stunned many around the world, though not because of Farrell's gender. The presence of an active woman in PIRA was not surprising, as women were involved in the republican movement for the onset of the Troubles in 1969. Their visibility was present in public consciousness, as sisters Dolours and Marian Price had carried out a bomb attack on the Old Bailey in London some fifteen years prior.[2]

The visibility of women in PIRA did not translate across the lines of conflict to the loyalist paramilitary groups. Whether for reasons of propaganda or the necessity of upholding the patriarchal system present in Protestant communities in Northern Ireland, loyalist women did not garner the visibility of their republican counterparts. Fewer loyalist women were involved than their republican counterparts. Evidence shows that women were actively involved in Loyalism, so why did they not have the same visibility as their republican counterparts? The currently accepted answer is that there were few, if any, women involved in loyalist activities, but this is assuredly not the case. Because loyalist women were involved in parades, funeral processions, and strikes, so they were at least minimally visible; however, very few loyalist paramilitary women have spoken about their actions within paramilitary groups. This chapter seeks to address why republican paramilitary women were more visible than their loyalist counterparts. To do so,

[1] Nicholas Eckert, *Fatal Encounter: The Story of the Gibraltar Killings* (Dublin: Poolbeg), 1999, 6-10.
[2] White, *Out of the Ashes*, 251.

an examination of how cultural perceptions relating to socioeconomic class impacted their visibility must be done. Further, it analyzes why women joined paramilitary organizations and the roles they filled in them. The actions of women paramilitaries, both loyalist and republican, involved in the Troubles ranged from hen patrols to conducting surveillance, armed robbery, murder, and bombing. Because of the historical inclusion of women in the republican struggle, their fight against the state and their political leaning made them more visible than their loyalist counterparts.

Optics and Visibility: Loyalist and Republican Women

Why were republican paramilitary women more visible than their loyalist counterparts? The political and cultural tenets of republicanism allowed women more visibility within their paramilitary organizations and in the public mind. These ideals are congruent with more liberal ideas, which put them in front of their more patriarchal loyalist counterparts. During the twentieth century, republican women were often visible in combat, while loyalist women were less so, if at all. Does this actually mean that loyalist women were not combatants or that the combat roles of loyalist women were of an inherently different nature than those of republican women?

Historically, Irish republican women have participated in armed conflict while their loyalist counterparts have not. The Easter Rising, which occurred in 1916 and led to the formation of the Irish Republic, was strong in the cultural memory of both male and female republicans. The 1916 Proclamation that declared Ireland a Republic free from the United Kingdom began, “Irishmen and Irishwomen.” Women were publicly visible during Easter week 1916. These women, such as Constance Markievicz, nee Gore-Booth, openly carried arms,

engaged in direct combat, and were interned after the Easter Rising failed.[3] James Connolly was an Irish republican martyr, but republicans clearly remembered his secretary, Winifred Carney, as well. She refused to leave his side once he was wounded in the General Post Office (GPO). The British Army bombarded the GPO, and she put her life in danger in the fight for an Irish Republic. British authorities initially condemned Markievicz to death for her role in the Rising, but because she was a woman, they reduced her sentence to life imprisonment.[4]

The legend of republican women taking up arms to free themselves and their comrades from British oppression was ever present in cultural memory. Mural facades in Derry and Belfast included republican women like Markievicz alongside men, whereas women were seldom present in loyalist murals. Ireland was personified as a woman, a mother. This meant different things for loyalists and republicans. Loyalists had to fight to "protect" the mother Ulster. Because the identity of Ulster was female, she required protection by her loyal children. Republicans, however, viewed Ireland as a mother in a different light. She was not one that needed protection, but rather was strong enough to create life, and bear the pain of labor and childbirth to bring it to fruition. Both sides viewed her with respect, however, the reasons behind that respect varied greatly. Republican women drew strength from Ireland and allowed the female personification to be a model for them to follow; so an inspirational figure not one for them to protect. In this same vein, republicans were fighting against the status quo. They fought for a united thirty-two county Republic, free from British oppression. Because they were fighting against the status quo, rather than trying to uphold it, they were more visible.[5]

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[3] Ruth Dudley Edwards, *James Connolly* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1981) 140-141; for more information on Constance Markievicz, reference Jacqueline Van Voris, *Constance de Markievicz* (Long Island, NY: The Feminist Press, 1972).
[4] Ibid.
[5] Eileen MacDonald, *Shoot the Women First* (New York: Random House, 1991).

A more nuanced reason republican women were more visible than their loyalist counterparts had to do with the cultural perceptions of the two main religions in Northern Ireland. Republicans were predominantly Roman Catholic, whereas loyalists were primarily Protestant. Catholics did not have equal access to jobs, public housing, education, or voting. The fact that they often had more children than their Protestant neighbors helped create the image of the large, impoverished Catholic family.

Loyalist Protestant communities maintained an extremely patriarchal moral compass. Loyalist women were expected to act as mothers, wives and "tea-makers." The Reverend Ian Paisley, in his address *The Fundamentalist and the State,* sums up the patriarchal connotations that Protestantism espoused. "I believe that the husband is the head of the wife and the home. I believe that the father should be the prophet, priest and king in his home. As king, he should exercise rulership. As prophet, he should exercise rulership."[6] This speaks to the role that working-class loyalists believed appropriate for women. Paisley, while not involved in paramilitary activity and not a member of the working class, held great sway over working-class Protestants. His message helped shape loyalist paramilitary men's thinking about loyalist paramilitary women. Much of Paisley's rhetoric, however, comes from another vantage point than those of the common working-class loyalists, with Paisley acting as the upper middle-class patriarch of Loyalism.[7]

The cultural memory of the Ulster Plantations also shaped loyalist Protestant identity. The Ulster Plantations were established at the beginning of the seventeenth century by England. They allowed staunch Scottish Presbyterians the ability to move to Ulster to "tame" the Irish

[6] Eileen Fairweather, Roisin McDonough, and Melanie McFadyean, *Only the Rivers Run Free, Northern Ireland: The Women's War* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 266.
[7] McEvoy, "Telling Untold Stories," 160.

Roman Catholics. The land grants the Ulster Scots received set up massive economic disparities between Protestants and Catholics. While this class disparity was evident throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it began to change as Ulster became more industrialized. By the mid-twentieth century, a large percentage of loyalists were working-class due to population size and preferential treatment in the work force. Rather than owning large tracts of land, most loyalists were forced into the cities as the industrial revolution changed all walks of life. While they still wielded a political monopoly in Northern Ireland, many became members of the working class, and yet still felt superior to their republican Catholic counterparts.[8] This was particularly true in Belfast, where most of the violence occurred during the Troubles.

The common class background that republicans and loyalists shared flies in the face of Marxist theory, as instead of being a united proletariat, divisions were rife. However, as Amanda Third points out, "Terrorism vampirizes the everyday to undermine modernity itself," or, terrorism saps the small securities built into modern life until it becomes something else. Established social order is thrown into disarray, and struggles become life and death, where nothing is considered sacred. In this context, the modernity of the republican-nationalist movement seemingly threatened to usurp the status-quo—the working-class lives loyalists had built after the industrial revolution. Thus, the loyalist women's actions might be better understood not as radical women asserting their place alongside men, but as a counterrevolutionary force bound and determined to preserve the predominant "Britishness" of their communities in Northern Ireland.

[8] Cathal McManus, "'Bound in Darkness and Idolatry'? Protestant Working-Class Underachievement and Unionist Hegemony," *Irish Studies Review* 23 no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 48–6; Ronald Munck, "Class and Religion in Belfast - A Historical Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20 no. 2 (April 1, 1985): 241–259.

Both the republican and loyalist communities segregated themselves along religious and political lines. In Belfast, republican Catholics lived primarily on the Falls Road, while loyalist Protestants lived on the Shankill and Sandy Row. These communities did not look vastly different from each other. One of the only ways to tell them apart was by the colors they painted their curbstones: blue, red and white, or orange, white and green. Regardless of their outward similarities, these two communities did not share the same visibility. Republicans were more visible than loyalists due to greater support from the Irish diaspora abroad, and that fact allowed the public in the Republic of Ireland, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and even the United States, to form opinions of the two groups which were not necessarily true. This would continue to occur through the duration of the Troubles, and into the tenuous peace process.

The fact that republican women were more publicly visible than loyalist women does not mean that enemy combatants or state officials recognized either group of women as a formidable force. Often, when women were involved, the Northern Irish public viewed them as outliers—women incapable of adhering to traditional gender norms or women with no families of their own. However, this ostracization only reflected the disparity between societal denial of the femininity of these women and their own sense of feminine identity.

Women who participated in armed conflict were mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, aunts and nieces. They outwardly appeared no less feminine than those who were not involved in conflict. Often, it was their very normal countenance that allowed them to carry out actions without arousing suspicion. Because the public thought of these women as outliers, their reasons for joining were never really discussed outside of their communities. While those on each side fought for different things, women often joined opposing paramilitary factions for similar reasons. The largest common denominator between the two is the fact that just like men, women

on both sides joined to protect their community. However, while women may have shared some commonalities, there were differences in motivation as well.

Republican Women and Their Motivations

An almost exclusive reason for women joining republican paramilitary organizations was the introduction of internment, which is the imprisonment of suspected paramilitary actors without trial. Republican women also joined out of disgust at the injustice in their communities, invasions in their homes, and to protect their families and communities. Lily Fitzsimmons, who lived in the nationalist Falls Road area, stated, "The British presence unified women in a determination where we organized ourselves against the military repression of the British Army. It also made us realize our strength as a group."[9] Internment also motivated men to join the movement as well, but women more often mentioned internment as a reason for joining.[10]

The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the British Army carried out nighttime raids, focused solely on Catholic, working-class households. Several former female combatants have discussed how this constant intrusion into the home created a sense of hatred against those carrying out the searches. One anonymous source states:

> You know they would come at three o'clock in the morning, four o'clock and you're in a deep sleep and these people [the British soldiers] would just kick your door in. Come in and throw people out of bed. So you were constantly witnessing all this. Experiencing it. You do develop a hatred for these people that are coming into your home, or these people that you see beating people up in the street for no reason whatsoever.... People were living through this every day. You know it's just horrible. It was awful.[11]

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[9] Chrissie McAuley ed., *Women in a War Zone: Twenty Years of Resistance* (Belfast: Republican Publications, 1989), 29; Areas were referred to as nationalist/republican or unionist/loyalist depending on the population that resided there.
[10] Mary S. Corcoran, *Out of Order: The Political Imprisonment of Women in Northern Ireland, 1972-98* (Cullompton, UK: Willan Publishing, 2006).
[11] Wahidin, *Ex-Combatants,* 64.

This quote shows how every aspect of life changed for these women, and how it motivated them to fight back against it. Her use of the word hatred really displays the level of antipathy present in Northern Ireland during the Troubles.

When considering why women would choose to step outside traditional gender norms, it is important to also understand that this conflict was not carried out on battlefields. It was fought in neighborhoods, and more importantly, in homes. The majority of the Northern Irish public at the beginning of the Troubles, especially loyalist society, expected women to take charge of the domestic sphere, including raising children, forming community connections, and homemaking.[12] While Protestant areas exhibited more staunchly patriarchal views, it was still common, in the late 1960s, for the public to view both Catholic and Protestant women primarily as homemakers and mothers. When the British Army began entering working-class Catholics' homes, they turned the private "women's sphere" into a battleground. So, women engaging in violent action was a way of protecting their homes; it was not based on aggression, but on defense. This was a means of intimidation and fear when carried out on a daily basis. Women worried about the safety of their children, their homes being systematically dismantled by invasive searching, and the fear that male family members would be taken to prison without any formal charge or trial. Because this became such a common tactic used by the British Army in Catholic republican neighborhoods, Northern Irish activist women viewed these tactics as an example of "armed patriarchy."[13]

Republican women did not immediately join paramilitary organizations because of the house raids, yet they often served to motivate them politically *as women,* and *as mothers.* By

[12] See Mary Ryan, "Then and Now: Memories of a Patriarchal Ireland in the Work of Marian Keyes." *452° F* 4, no. 4 (2011): 110–130.
[13] Ibid., 65. See footnote 3 in Wahidin.

this, scholars and analysts understand that these were women reacting within the gendered norms and expectations that were socially acceptable at the time. Northern Irish, and, more generally, western society viewed women as peacemakers and mothers—entering their homes and threatening their families attacked them as women: domestically and sexually.[14] Nationalist women often received sexually inappropriate comments and threats from the RUC, and later during internment, they endured forced strip searching.[15] This also eliminated any place of solace they had from the conflict. It erased the boundaries between private and public and gave the women no respite.[16] In retaliation, many women within the nationalist/republican community began "hen patrols." A hen patrol was a group of women that followed the British soldiers through their neighborhood, banging trash bin lids, blowing whistles, and any other way they could make noise to alert their community, and by proxy, PIRA, of the impending house raids.[17] As explained in *Ex-Combatants*,

> Once you heard the bin lids going and you knew what area they were coming from, you sort of got to know different sounds. So we used to hear them in Turf Lodge and we'd say "they're raiding Turf Lodge, they'll be here next." So anybody who was staying in Ballymurphy moved out to a different area. So they [PIRA] depended on the women, big time.[18]

This example from a woman within the nationalist community displays how early on in the Troubles, republican men counted on women within their community to alert them to

[14] Republican women encountered sexual violence throughout the Troubles. For further information, see National Council for Civil Liberties, *Strip Searching: An Inquiry into the Strip Searching of Women Remand Prisoners at Armagh Prison Between 1982 and 1985* (NCCL: London, 1986); Chris McAuley, *Nationalist Women and the RUC,* (Sinn Fein Women's Department: Dublin, 1989); Fr Denis Faul, The Stripping Naked of the Women Prisoners in (Sinn Fein Women's Department: Dublin, 1989); Fr Denis Faul, *The Stripping Naked of the Women Prisoners in Armagh Prison, 1982-83* (Help the Prisoners Committee: Northern Ireland, 1983*); Testimonies, The Facts of Strip Searching in Maghaberry Gaol* (Personal Testimonies of Women Strip Searched on the 2nd March, 1992) (1992).
[15] Ibid.
[16] Wahidin, *Ex-Combatants,* 64-66.
[17] Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 69.
[18] Wahidin, *Ex-Combatants,* 67.

danger. This warning network served to keep the conflict going, for without these hen patrols, PIRA would have been more effectively contained and exposed through security sweeps and other British Army activity aimed at curbing the conflict. Eventually, the British Army came to realize this and began firing upon those women who engaged in sounding out warnings. On the surface level, it may seem that hen patrols would be indirect action, warning PIRA men of incoming searches, and would therefore not be considered dangerous. This idea is incorrect. It was vitally important to help stop republican paramilitary members from being arrested and also, it was very dangerous. On October 23, 1971, a hen patrol in Belfast turned deadly. Sisters Maura Meehan and Dorothy Maguire were both members of Cumann na mBan (Organization of Women), which was initially the female wing of PIRA. They participated in hen patrols after the start of internment. They were riding together in a car, sounding bullhorns and their car horn to warn their neighbors of a

Figure 1- Crime scene photo of Dorothy Maguire. Taken from Women in a War Zone: Twenty Years of Resistance, page 22, edited by Chrissie McAuley.

British Army patrol. The British Army fired into the car, hitting Maura and Dorothy in the head, killing both instantly. Maura had five children. The British Army claimed the sisters were wearing combat clothing and had guns. This picture shows this to be untrue.[19] On November 6, 1971, less than two weeks after the murders of Meehan and Maguire, Kathleen Thompson was shot and killed by the British Army in Derry, and Marie Moore was shot in the foot in West Belfast. "On the news the next morning they said I too was a 'gunman,'" Moore explains.[20] She recounts other acts of violence against women by the British Army stating, "She'd [Kathleen Thompson] been trying to alert people in the areas with her bin lid. They shot her, in her back garden, and claimed it was 'an accident'. The fact that so many women were shot in so short of a time made women afraid not just for themselves but for the repercussions it would have on their families."[21]

Outrage poured forth from nationalists against the British Army for not only the three killings discussed previously, but for the death of other unarmed civilians. It was a catalyst for many young women to join the republican movement. An anonymous woman recounted her experience at seventeen with the July 9, 1972 Springhill Massacre in Belfast. She stated that she heard ten shots and knew no one would come help. Her uncle, her friend's mother, a ten-year-old boy, a priest and seven others were shot. She could not reach them without the British Army shooting her too, so she waited for eight hours for the bodies to be retrieved. The headlines called it a gun battle, but the only guns were those used by the army. She says,

> I was filled with rage. I kept waiting on some other thought: the law...Then the newspapers went, "ELEVEN PEOPLE SHOT DEAD IN A GUN BATTLE," you know this was a mother with ten kids. My Uncle Joe had ten kids. A wee boy of ten ... I was there. I saw it. Then something in my head went fuck 'em. You know, they're [the British government]

[19]McAuley, *Women in a War Zone,* 20-22.
[20] Ibid., 20-21.
[21] Ibid., 21-22.

> supposed to be making the laws and they're [the British government] breaking the laws. Well, they are your fucking laws and I went and joined the republican movement.[22]

She heard a family member, and members of her community die, and saw the newspaper lie about why they were killed. She further states that she was not the only one to join in reaction to events like this. These types of events polarized republican women and gave them a reason to organize and join paramilitary organizations. This was not a gendered reason for joining, but an emotional, human desire to fight back against injustice. Women may have initially become involved because of the war being thrust into their homes, but they eventually joined due to the injustice and violence that marked their communities.

Loyalist Women and their Motivations

Loyalist women joined paramilitary organizations for four primary reasons: to stop a United Ireland and defend Ulster, because their husbands were involved in loyalist paramilitaries, for retaliation, and to provide community service.[23] Sandra McEvoy sought to understand why loyalist paramilitary women joined these organizations, and conducted thirty interviews from former loyalist paramilitaries. All thirty women cited the defense of Ulster as their reason. Loyalists saw Ulster as their identity, their way of life, and their culture. Most self-identified as British, but the connection to Ulster and desire to protect it from becoming part of a thirty-two county Irish Republic was the core reason most women joined. A female member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) stated, "I would say that I am a very warm, loving mother of three, grandmother of four and when I was needed I was there. I am not a cruel person. I mean if we've got republican people that's willing to kill our people for their cause I mean, you can't sit

[22] Wahidin, *Ex-Combatants,* 68.
[23] McEvoy, "Telling Untold Stories," 122.

back and let it happen."[24] Sectarianism grew to the point that loyalists perceived republicans as a direct threat to their way of life, and it was necessary for the loyalist communities to arm themselves against that possibility.

Out of the thirty respondents, four cited retaliation as their reason for joining.[25] This was, as stated earlier, a major reason that republican women joined paramilitary groups. It is not surprising that both communities were polarized into action because of acts that hurt their community. In her dissertation, McEvoy lays out the questions that she asked the thirty loyalist women she interviewed. In the case of "Tracy," McEvoy asked her if there was a single event, or a particular moment that made her decide to join a loyalist paramilitary group. Tracy responded,

> Yeah. There probably was. There was a bomb in (*name of area*) and I was up and there was a wee bar at the top of the street… and there was a bomb went off…. I put my coat on and away I went and there was a fella lying on the street and I will never forget till the day God calls me. He was lying on the street and he was semiconscious but he was gripping the pavement stones like that there…. And his guts blew out…. That made my mind up. Then I said, "The bastards will get the same thing."[26]

Tracy was seventeen when she made the decision to join a paramilitary organization and cited similar reasons as the republican woman who witnessed the death of eleven members of her community. Even though Tracy did not know the victim of her enemy, it was still a member of her community. Next time, it could be a member of her church or her family that were killed. Violence against people who were not involved in paramilitarism was common, so Tracy's motivation is protecting her community. While these two sides were vastly different, in many ways they shared common ground in their reason for breaking away from gendered norms and

[24] Ibid., 124.
[25] Ibid., 127.
[26] Ibid.

participating in armed combat. Much of what these two groups of women demonstrate is a reluctance to embrace the existing patriarchal hierarchy, instead opting to act.

Seventeen of the thirty women McEvoy interviewed identified helping their community, in this case meaning their small working-class neighborhood, as their reason for joining paramilitary organizations. It must be noted, however, that the Ulster Defense Association was not a proscribed terrorist organization until 1992.[27] When a large number of these women joined the UDA, they were not doing anything illegal. The women who joined the smaller and more violent UVF knew they were joining a paramilitary organization and the risks it carried. Because the UDA was not a terrorist organization, women could be more visible within it than in the UVF.

The first women's UDA unit, the WUDA, was formed in 1971 on the Shankill road in Belfast as a response to the threat of republicans burning loyalists out of their homes. McEvoy estimates that over 3,000 women took part in the WUDA.[28] Although the WUDA shared connections with the UDA, the groups often acted independently. This independence was a source of pride for many loyalist women, because they were able to carry out day to day activities that aided their community. Typically, these loyalist activities were not violent, though parades and demonstrations could easily turn violent in such a turbulent environment.

Young women often joined the WUDA to help with the "no go" areas. These areas existed in both republican and loyalist neighborhoods for the purpose of community defense. The term "no go" simply referred to a place within a neighborhood that the police, army, or anyone who did not live in that community could not access. A job that often fell to the WUDA was to get milk, bread and butter for pensioners who would have had to leave no-go zones, or cross

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 102-103.

sectarian lines, to go shopping. Because of this, the WUDA was able to provide nonviolent aid to members of their communities.[29] The UVF, in contrast, was a violent, secretive organization. McEvoy estimated that approximately thirty women participated actively within the UVF, meaning that women made up only 2 or 3 percent of its membership.[30]

Republican Women on the Offensive

Both republican and loyalist women engaged in paramilitarism throughout the period of 1968-1998. The command structure of these paramilitary organizations sanctioned these actions, though for the most part, women operating within the paramilitary command structures were taking orders, not giving orders. By far the most visible examples of women transgressing against their prescribed societal norms are the Price sisters and Mairéad Farrell.

The Price sisters were born to a republican working-class family and spent much of their childhood caring for their aunt, Bridie Dolan, who had lost her sight and both hands in an accident while moving a bomb for PIRA. Hearing her stories growing up galvanized them with an understanding of the tenets of republicanism and desire for direct action. They saw a hero of the struggle against the British Empire in their aunt, which ultimately drove them to join PIRA and take part in a bomb attack in Trafalgar Square and at the Old Bailey.[31]

Mairéad Farrell's early life was quite different from the Price sisters. Farrell grew up in a middle-class home with no familial ties to republican paramilitaries. Nevertheless, she joined PIRA as a young teenager. After planting a bomb in 1976, British authorities subsequently interned her at Armagh prison. Once out of prison, PIRA sent Price to Gibraltar alongside two

[29] Ibid., 128.
[30] Ibid., 127.
[31] Patrick Radden Keefe, "Where the Bodies Are Buried," *The New Yorker*, March 15, 2015.

other Provisionals in order to bomb the governor's house. Preemptively, the SAS executed all three in the street, unarmed and in front of witnesses.[32]

These types of gruesome murder were common place and women in paramilitaries treated this conflict as a war, where mourning times were significantly cut. More time was spent on logistics, such as the issues between Cumann na mBan and PIRA.A complicating factor in republicanism is the relationship between PIRA and the women's organization Cumann na mBan, which had declared support for PIRA upon the latter's formation. Many women who were involved in Cumann na mBan eventually joined PIRA for the sake of carrying out more direct resistance against British occupation and escalating loyalist violence. Despite PIRA claims that Cumann na mBan ceased operating as an independent entity in 1980, in fact it still exists. This complicates historical understanding of the latter, especially given that media reports on women involved in Cumann na mBan tended to subsume them within the catch-all "PIRA" moniker.[33]

These republican women engaged in extreme violence to serve political goals. Northern Irish police and British soldiers executed some republican women for far less, as the cases of Maura Meehan, Dorothy Maguire, and Kathleen Thompson make clear. Other women would die while trying to carry out bombings. Six women died alongside PIRA men while handling explosives.[34] One female PIRA member stated, "The girls were very, very—became very experienced. They burned the six counties down with incendiary devices. They were brilliant—brilliant, and without them, the Army [PIRA] would never have survived."[35] Republican women were involved in all aspects of direct and indirect combat, and would continue to be active and

[32] Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011), 92-96.
[33] White, *Out of the Ashes*, 47-49, 237.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, 105.

visible members for the duration of the conflict.[36] The fact that British forces executed so many republican women indicates how the British security command structure perceived these women. This speaks to the threat that women posed to the façade of British security during the Troubles—and highlights one of the reasons that loyalist women engaged in paramilitarism.

"The Bastards Will Get the Same Thing"

At first glance, the thought of women fighting for Loyalism seems counterintuitive from a feminist perspective. Loyalism and unionism both carry a connotation of traditionalism and oppressive patriarchy, with prominent leaders like Ian Paisley toeing a fundamentalist, conservative line. Indeed, it would be easy to place loyalist women in the category of "accidental activists," but this would be an incomplete assessment. Instead, the motivating factors for loyalist women align with the motivations of loyalist men: community service, defense, and revenge. For loyalists, the reactionary politics of enforcing the status quo opposed the radical Irish Socialism of the republican movement.

McEvoy uses a chart to rank actions that loyalist women carried out, and how the actions were or were not accepted by society.[37] McEvoy identifies the first set of actions as "conforming to local Protestant Northern Irish patriarchal 1970s-2000s expectations for working-class women," and includes: "collecting money for LPOs [loyalist paramilitary organizations], protesting at jails, police stations, 'manning' barricades during strikes and PIRA excursions, conducting LPO surveillance, bringing intelligence into/out of jails, participating in shows of strength, serving as funeral honor guards."[38] LPOs deemed these actions appropriate for women

[36] Republican women viewed all action as direct and important, but typically, indirect combat relates to moving and storing weapons, cleaning crime scenes, providing alibis. Direct combat was more defined as participating in shootings, bombings, or robberies directly.
[37] McEvoy, *Telling Untold Stories*, 109.
[38] Ibid.

within loyalist organizations, and most female members participated in this capacity. The next set of actions "stretch[ed] the envelope of conventional expectations of Protestant working-class women," and included "hiding ammunitions [sic], guns and explosives, sanitizing crime scenes, providing first aid to injured LPO suspects, harboring LPO suspects, making petrol bombs for LPOs, [and] transporting LPO contraband."[39] The Protestant community considered these actions "borderline" acceptable for women to carry out. If men carried out these actions, the loyalist community considered them acceptable in the name of Loyalism; however, the fact that women may have been involved in the same activities made them questionable. The loyalist community defined the last set of actions as "actions violating expectations for Protestant working-class women," and included "armed robbery, coordinating hits on republican targets, engaging in punishment beatings, attempted murder, and murder."[40] While Northern Irish society and culture as a whole considered these types of actions as transgressive regardless of who committed them, this same standard did not extend to paramilitary communities. LPOs lauded men who carried out these actions as loyalist heroes, but women who thought to do this stepped beyond the prescribed patriarchal bound of Loyalism. Loyalism came before all things except gender.

Unlike their republican counterparts, loyalist paramilitary women rarely engaged in violent combat. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. An anonymous woman, Tracy, joined the UVF for retribution. She actively transported weapons with male members of the UVF, and in some cases, used her femininity as a weapon. Often, these teams operated with a female member driving behind male members in a separate car, to be used as a diversion, as it was believed they were less likely to be searched or detained by the RUC or army forces. She describes one event where she was transporting arms and was instructed that the car in front of

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

her carrying a male UVF member would warn her if there was trouble ahead. Her male comrade used the signal to warn her of an upcoming British Army patrol, but rather than turn off, she decided to proceed through the checkpoint. She states, “And, you know, a woman can talk really well to the soldiers. And he [her comrade] was away up the road and I says, ‘Could you tell me how I get to (name of port)?’ And they were all men too…. And I smiled and talked away to them, you know, I had a skirt on and showed them a bit of the leg and all the rest of it…. And we had all this load of guns in the back of the car (laughing).”[41] While republican women used this tactic often, loyalist women rarely did, as they did not come in contact with the Army as often. This makes Tracy’s actions even more interesting, as she had to decide how to act, react, and use her sexuality as a weapon without much forethought. While the organization viewed Tracy’s actions as somewhat transgressive, she was willing to do even more in the name of Loyalism.

Sandra McEvoy explains Tracy’s moral compass, and the jobs she believed were justifiable for Loyalism, by discussing her father. Part of the question that McEvoy wanted to answer was how familial relationships impacted or were impacted by paramilitary action. In the case of Tracy, her father was “proud” of her actions within loyalist paramilitary groups. McEvoy explains,

> Employing a seemingly simple, yet actually complex set of logic, Tracy explained that her father's moral code did not condone breaking the law for the purposes of profit (robbery). That was not an honorable act in her father's eyes, yet to Tracy, a robbery was acceptable as long as such a robbery would serve “Ulster's cause.” Tracy confirms that shooting an IRA affiliated Roman Catholic person was acceptable. She states; "What I was involved in was more acceptable. My father ... couldn't accept me going in and doing an armed robbery.”[42]

[41] Ibid., 117-118.
[42] Ibid., 138.

This is a surprising understanding of loyalist activity. The ease with which Tracy discusses what kind of activity she was involved in shows some emotional detachment from it. It is also interesting that because her father would think murder more acceptable, she viewed it as acceptable. This could be tied to the fact that male members and their opinions were so integral to Loyalism, that she respected her father's views more than her own. Tracy also explained what she considered would be a legitimate target for a hit. "Well, again, anybody IRA. Any Catholic that was shot always had links to the IRA. Like we just didn't go out and shoot him [referring to a next-door neighbor].... We knew who was active in the IRA." This quote is empirically untrue. While loyalist paramilitaries did kill and injure many members of PIRA, they killed many more Catholic civilians. Most had no connection to PIRA besides sharing a common religion.[43]

[43] Ibid., 139.

CHAPTER 2: REPUBLICAN PARAMILITARY WOMEN

As noted previously, more women took part in armed combat in republican paramilitary groups than in loyalist ones.[1] This leads to several questions. How did republican women view themselves and other women within republican Paramilitary groups? How were women in republican paramilitary groups treated by their male comrades, their enemy combatants, and the state at large?[2]

Because of the formation of the Historical Enquiries Team in Northern Ireland, former members of paramilitary organizations can still be charged with crimes committed during the Troubles. Anxiety on both sides is understandable when faced with potential jail terms. One thing that is true across both loyalist and republican communities is the difficulty in interviewing former members of paramilitaries. That the former paramilitary members might be women combatants increases the difficulty. Republican women were more visible publicly and internationally, hence more literature exists for them. On the other hand, loyalist men are more likely to "protect" the female paramilitary members than their republican counterparts, who were often more accessible to researchers without the facilitation of interviews by men.

The communities in Northern Ireland are still staunchly segregated, and it is incredibly difficult for historians to interview former loyalist paramilitary women. One tool that researchers have demonstrated the usefulness of is gaining an inroad to the various communities. On the republican side, Niall Gilmartin was able to obtain interviews with republican women because he

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[1] Miranda Alison, "" That's equality for you, dear": Gender, Small Arms and the Northern Ireland Conflict." In *Sexed Pistols: The gendered Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons,* eds. Vanessa Farr, Henri Myrttinen and Albrecht Schnabel (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 214.

[2] Much of the historical information about the IRA as an organization comes from J. Bowyer Bell's *The Secret Army: The IRA 1916-1970*. Additionally, Paul Bew's *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999* and *Northern Ireland 1921-1996* are important to any discussion about Northern Ireland and the Troubles.

had extended family in republican areas of West Belfast that he had visited as a child. Republican contacts thus consider him a relatively "safe" source to talk to.[3] There are more people with inroads to republican communities, because as a rule, republicans were more likely to receive support from the people in the Republic of Ireland and the United States. Loyalists did not have the same international support base, whether popularly or monetarily.

Other scholarly sources, which certainly provide useful context and insight, do not offer the same level of understanding that direct interviews with former paramilitary women provide. What these other scholarly sources can provide, however, are people within communities who were not directly related, or male members of paramilitary organizations willing to share their thoughts about the women who were in them and the actions that they carried out.

Republican Women's Self-image

Women have a prominent role in the history of armed struggle in the name of Irish republicanism. Therefore, it was not surprising that republican women in the Troubles would take up arms alongside the men. The narrative of traditional warfare, and traditional military roles, largely relies on the hypermasculine idea that only those on the front line are the armed combatants. It is necessary to situate roles that republican women played in the conflict as not only being on the front lines. There was very little front-line fighting during the Troubles, as it was guerrilla warfare in many ways, so it can be characterized as direct violent actions and indirect actions that perpetuated violence. This delineation is integral to the understanding of women in combat. From the interviews of women directly involved in the conflict, they seem to almost unanimously place all roles that women played as integral to the struggle. While many women were involved in direct combat action, such as Mairead Farrell, Dolours and Marian

[3] Gilmartin, *Female Combatants*, 21-23.

Price, others played less visible but nonetheless vital roles in support of the republican cause. While republicanism venerates the sacrifice of men who carried out these supporting roles, women who took part in these roles do not receive the same level of recognition.

Men in armed conflict often dichotomize the roles as either fighter or supporter. Within the republican movement, men and women participated in both roles. The idea that there must be a difference between fighter and supporter is based in patriarchal ideas that have defined armed conflict for millennia.[4] It is high time for researchers to recognize the efficacy of both roles within the contexts of paramilitarism and rebellion. Many republican women viewed armed struggle as no more valuable than work "behind the scenes." This contrasts with the masculine understanding of war, where the direct action was deemed more important, or required more bravery and heroism. Their male comrades carried out the same type of work but did not risk the dreaded label of "supporter," which would lessen the gravitas of their service. This is mostly due to the fact that while men often worked behind the scenes, they also had mostly seamless transitions to direct combat roles, as that was what was expected of them. One of the most common aspects of this was the use of men as intelligence agents. Women were also often used as intelligence agents, but they only relayed information, and were not assigned tasks to act on that intelligence. Men, on the other hand would gather intelligence, and then be assigned further roles to carry out direct actions such as bombings or shootings.

Like the men within PIRA, one woman, "Patricia" did not ever refer to herself as a combatant, but rather as a volunteer. This stems from the early twentieth century, when members of the IRA were Army Volunteers. Regardless, Patricia joined PIRA at age 14, and in later years was subsequently interned in Armagh jail.

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[4] Ibid., 40-41

> The struggle was daily life or death situations. And that went for transporting weapons from one dump to another, to robberies, to attacks in the town, incendiary devices, might be bombs, shooting operations against the British Army and things like that. You could've had five of those operations in a day. It was quite intense and so for someone to have said to me "a woman's place was in the home," I'd love to meet the man that had the courage to say that. There weren't any I can tell you.[5]

This shows the breadth of tasks that republican paramilitary women carried out. Many women performed these actions without being formal members of PIRA. One woman, "Theresa," was involved in hiding weapons in her home, teaching gun use and gun safety from her house, and transporting weapons. Gun lectures were common in republican paramilitary circles during the Troubles, due to the fact that most members had not previously owned or handled guns and had especially never used high caliber military grade weapons. She finally decided to formally join PIRA since she had already been carrying out those tasks.

> I wanted in there [the IRA] because I had the skill already…. I said that I'm getting involved in the 'RA but they [local male leaders] wouldn't let me because of my kids. And I said sure what's the difference because I was *already* involved.[6]

PIRA did not discourage male membership if the men had children. While Irish republicans built their movement on a socialist platform of equality, the understanding of women in conflict was still marred by patriarchal assumptions. The PIRA *Green Book* relies on these tendencies in explaining "support roles."[7]

> [Armed] resistance must be channeled into active and passive support with an on-going process through our actions … of attempting to turn the passive supporter into a dump holder, a member of the movement, a paper seller etc., with the purpose of building protective support barriers between the enemy and ourselves, thus curbing the enemy's attempted isolation policy.[8]

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[5] Ibid., 42.
[6] In informal contexts of conversation, "PIRA" is often shortened to "the Provo's" or "the 'RA."
[7] The Green Book was a handbook given to all PIRA volunteers for them to read and learn material. It functioned as a training and induction manual to republican paramilitarism.
[8] Ibid., 47.

Niall Gilmartin writes, “The notion that combatant is wholly encapsulated by a ‘person holding a weapon’ is not only deemed erroneous by interviewees but also fails to accurately capture the realities of women’s participation in armed conflict.”[9] While the republicans embraced a socialist platform, their actions did not always match their principles. No evidence exists of women holding leadership positions within either PIRA or INLA. While some paramilitary organizations allowed women to be full members, these same organizations did not allow them the same amount of agency as men in planning attacks or leading others.

This lack of representation in leadership roles is interesting, as former PIRA chief of Staff from 1969-72, Seán Mac Stíofáin stated,

> The women were completely undefeatable. They were the first to give warnings, the first out in the streets to face the oncoming troops. I say without hesitation that it is due to this determined spirit of resistance by the nationalist women of Ulster that the campaign has gone on so long…. Some of the best shots I ever knew were women. So were the smartest intelligence officers in Belfast.[10]

In an interview I conducted with a former member of the British Army, who wishes to be known by the pseudonym Cuffs, he stated that republican women acted as camouflage, to divert the state’s attention away from republican men as a viable threat.[11] This could further explain why there were more visible republican women than loyalist women. Women were in fact used sometimes, according to Mac Stíofáin simply because they were women; they could employ their femininity and sexuality in ways that men could not.[12] This further proves that regardless of basing Irish republicanism on socialist principles, republican organizations often relegated women to separate spheres. From numerous interviews of republican paramilitary women, they

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[9] Ibid., 42.
[10] Seán Mac Stiofáin, Interview by anonymous, Northern Ireland. Found in Chathmhaoil and Reinisch, *Cumann na mBan*, 82-86.
[11] "Cuffs" (Former British Army, name changed) in discussions with Tabitha Wood, May-June 2020.
[12] Mac Stiofáin, Interview by anonymous, Northern Ireland. Found in Chathmhaoil and Reinisch, *Cumann na mBan*, 82-86

had no desire to remain in separate spheres, because in the ethnonational conflict that was the Troubles, homes were as much a battleground as the streets.

It is necessary to consider that the very way researchers have been looking at women in armed conflict is a product of hypermasculine understanding of roles within military and paramilitary conflicts.[13] While some women have received recognition for their contributions to armed conflict, history overlooks many others in ways that do not apply to their male comrades. Although PIRA was more accepting than loyalist paramilitary groups of women within their ranks, women within the republican paramilitary groups nonetheless had to fight for equality. They often express anger at the women's inadequate representation both during and after the conflict. It is integral to the study of women within these groups to challenge the traditional masculine view of war and conflict. Women as the "backbone" of republicanism remains a common sentiment within republican communities, but this term diminishes the actions they took. As "Anne" states,

> There were girls involved in all of that [armed struggle], more or less written out of history. But a lot of young girls like myself, we took the same risks…. But women are not just the backbone, they're the knee bone, the hip bone, every bone of this movement. That used to annoy me about being [labelled] the backbone; women are in this organization on an equal footing throughout the body of this organization, not just the backbone.[14]

Many women echoed these sentiments at being labelled the backbone when they were integral to all parts of the republican armed struggle.

Many Irish historians recognize that women had to fight for inclusion within PIRA as volunteers. That leads to the question, once PIRA accepted women as volunteers, how were they

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[13] L. Crowe, "Masculinities, Pain and Power: Gendering Experiences of Truth Sharing in Northern Ireland" in *Gender Agency and Political Violence* eds. L. Ahall and L. Shepard (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 19-20.

[14] Gilmartin, *Female Combatants*, 47.

treated by their male comrades? Although republican women struggled to join PIRA, many of them felt that once they were on missions, their male comrades did not treat them differently. When men and women were carrying our bombing campaigns, or shootings, they were equal, due to it being a life or death situation. However, treatment within PIRA as equals during terrorist operations did not translate to equality outside of the battlefield.

There are a variety of reasons why women had to fight for full status within PIRA. Some of this has to do with Cumann na mBan, or the Organization of Women, which was founded in 1914 as a response to the formation of the Irish Volunteers in the years leading up to the Easter Rising, the war of independence, and the Irish Civil War. Cumann na mBan had a different internal structure from the IRA, and Cumann na mBan membership was entirely female. Most of the women in Cumann na mBan worked in auxiliary or secondary roles, but many of them also waged war on the front lines.[15] Like women in republican paramilitaries during the Troubles, women in Cumann na mBan did not view their actions in supporting roles as any less important than their front-line roles. Several factors may play into these views within Cumann na mBan. It could be because women within a patriarchal society see conflict differently than the traditional front-line and support binary—this would lead to an understanding that each aspect of an armed campaign was integral in the fight for a united Ireland. Republican women consistently explained that all roles were integral to the struggle, so it is not surprising that Cumann na mBan held similar views. Regardless, the IRA and general society considered Cumann na mBan the "women's wing" of the IRA at the onset of the Troubles.[16]

[15] Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland, 1800-1918: A Documentary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 240, 242-244, 245, 252, 297.
[16] Jack McNally, Morally Good, But Politically Bad (Andersonstown News: Belfast, 1989).

After the 1969 split between the Official IRA, headquartered in Dublin, and the Provisional IRA in Belfast, Cumann na mBan sided with the Provisionals. PIRA and older women in republican society directed many young women to join Cumann na mBan in the early years of the conflict rather than encourage direct membership in PIRA.[17] This leads to an interesting question: if these women viewed all the roles of an armed campaign of equal importance, why were they unhappy joining Cumann na mBan rather than PIRA? It comes down to the fact that even though members of Cumann na mBan viewed their roles as equally important, the republican community did not grant them the same leverage that they would have had were they members of PIRA. This is due to the fact that PIRA was seen as masculine, and traditionally, women were not "capable" of committing the violence necessary to further the cause. This of course, was not the case. Regardless of having an internal structure separate from that of PIRA, republican leaders expected Cumann na mBan members to subordinate themselves to PIRA leadership. This thought did not sit well with many women, who instead decided to forgo joining Cumann na mBan entirely and enlist directly in PIRA. One volunteer, Patricia, demanded to be part of PIRA, stating,

> Women were encouraged to go into the Cumann na mBan and the thing about that which bothered me, and no disrespect to them but they had their own structure different to the IRA structure. I was as able and equal as any man. And if I'm going to die carrying a gun then I'm not going to die carrying a gun for a male comrade, or I am not going to be arrested for carrying a gun and serving ten years after *he* had shot somebody with it. If I go to jail or die, then it'll be under my own probation to be a very active member.[18]

The other reason that many young women joined PIRA instead of Cumann na mBan comes down to the idea of first vs second wave feminism—an issue of equitable domestic

[17] Chathmhaoil and Reinisch, *Cumann na mBan*, 74-80; Rory Nugent, "Inside the IRA: SPIN'S 1994 Feature," *Spin*, August 21, 2015. Accessed Online.
[18] Gilmartin, *Female Combatants*, 52

treatment being upended by a stringent demand for equal social footing and women's liberation. Prior to the onset of the Troubles, there had been minor skirmishes in the continued fight for republican ideals, namely the Border Campaign in the 1950s and early 1960s.[19] Irish historians have largely glossed over the important fact that members of Cumann na mBan at the onset of the Troubles were overwhelmingly middle aged to elderly women in the same way the Dublin-based Official IRA were predominantly middle-aged to elderly men.[20] While the OIRA still held the cause of Irish republicanism to be of the utmost importance, they carried within them very patriarchal sentiments.[21] Irish republicanism embraces socialism and gender equality to some degree, but that does not preclude Irish republicanism from adhering to more traditional concepts of patriarchy alongside loyalist groups in Northern Ireland. Many women who took up the torch of Irish republicanism did so out of sincere belief in a united Ireland, but along the way, these young women came to believe that republicanism would also further their cause as women. Theresa O'Keefe analyzed the idea that nationalism could, by its very nature, run counter to feminism; however, if women are allowed equal footing to men within government, as was the aim of Irish republicanism, then women would have that chance to make a more equitable society. The two do not have to be contradictory, although they are often at odds.[22]

Women who decided to join PIRA directly also did so because Cumann na mBan held women to a different standard than the male members of PIRA. Men could get married and have children out of wedlock. They could do any number of actions that would not cause them to lose standing in the command structure of PIRA or the republican community at large. Cumann na

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[19] Anderson, Malcolm and Eberhard Bort, eds. *The Irish Border: History, Politics, Culture* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).
[20] Chathmhaoil and Reinisch, *Cumann na mBan*, 84-86; Ryan and Ward, *Irish Women and Nationalism*, 151-152.
[21] Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward, eds, *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags* (Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 134-135; Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 259.
[22] Theresa O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity, Development, and Activism in Revolutionary Movements,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3-6.

mBan and PIRA frequently dismissed women due to pregnancy, while male volunteers who may have impregnated them received no repercussions. Linda, a member of PIRA, recalled a meeting from the early 1970s:

> The republican movement that I joined was a very male-dominated movement and we had a lot of battles. I remember being at one meeting where somebody mentioned a motion where any woman that got pregnant, she was to be dismissed immediately. So I got up and said "what do you mean she's to be dismissed, if she still wants to be in the republican movement then that's her choice…. But you see here I was saying, "What about the volunteer who got her pregnant, is he being dismissed?"... So you were fighting this war but also the war with the Brits. But you know the undercurrents of the men were very old fashioned. Some men regarded the women, because of the split between the IRA and Cumann na mBan, as a kind of lesser species of revolutionaries and things like getting women on the same training camps as men or going on the same operations as men, women had to fight for that, had to prove themselves so that was always in there.[23]

Linda refers to the split between PIRA and Cumann na mBan. This split is often not discussed in academic literature when looking at republican women in the Troubles. Although many young republican women did make the choice to bypass Cumann na mBan entirely and join PIRA outright, some women wanted to remain in Cumann na mBan.[24] For these women, it was a mark of tradition and honor carried over from the early twentieth century, and they were all fiercely republican. Although many of their ideals on women's place in the movement may have been antiquated and mired in patriarchal values, it was still an organization created by republican women for republican women to further the cause of Irish independence and freedom. After Cumann na mBan made the decision to side with the Provisional IRA and wage an armed campaign in the North, PIRA reacted in an often-overlooked manner. Although they initially directed women who wanted to join PIRA to Cumann na mBan, they eventually realized that it would be to their advantage to have women in PIRA for several reasons. The first was as a

[23] Gilmartin, *Female Combatants*, 52-53.
[24] Chathmhaoil and Reinisch, *Cumann na mBan*, 74-80

diversion to draw attention away from illegal activities, the second was the necessity of the use of "traditional women's spheres" such as the home, and for community defense, and the other was to replace the rapidly depleting male force due to both death and the introduction of internment.

How Men Treated Women in Republican Paramilitary Groups

Once the all-male leadership of PIRA recognized this, rather than just stop telling women who wanted to join PIRA to join Cumann na mBan, the leadership actually attempted to subsume Cumann na mBan into the structure of PIRA. Although Cumann na mBan had worked closely with PIRA and other iterations of the IRA over the past century, they maintained their own female command structure, their own uniforms, and traditions. The socialist PIRA actively attempted to erase Cumann na mBan. This, as one may imagine, did not sit well with the leadership of Cumann na mBan, who although still maintaining patriarchal ideas, had been fighting for one type of independence for over half a century. These women disregarded the order from PIRA's leadership and continued to maintain active membership rolls in Cumann na mBan, remaining a wholly separate organization.[25] At the beginning of the Troubles, female members of PIRA were rare, but this changed as the conflict evolved and PIRA directly accepted more women into combat roles, bypassing Cumann na mBan entirely. However, this did not mean that Cumann na mBan membership wanted to do nothing; indeed, international intelligence groups and governments to the present day consider Cumann na mBan an active terrorist group. This divisive split ended up leading to a larger split within the republican movement.

Broadly speaking, the treatment of paramilitary women by their male counterparts within the organization varied depending on the time period, the geographical location, the structure of

[25] Ibid, 76-80.

the local branch the women were involved in, and even the personal beliefs of their male comrades. In the early years of the Troubles, PIRA had a more classically militaristic structure, with divisions, brigades, squads, and platoons. Each organizational subdivision had its own leaders of appropriate rank, which ultimately answered to the army council.[26]

The Belfast brigade restructured in 1973, moving away from a centralized command structure to one of independent terrorist cells, styled as active service units (ASUs). This move possibly made it easier for women to join PIRA. At times, women even led active service units. And in fact, PIRA would see an increase in the number of women volunteers following decentralization. [27]

The PIRA decision to decentralize followed immediately after the British began interning suspected republicans, and it allowed PIRA to work under more secretive terms. This did not mean that people in republican communities were unaware of who was in PIRA, but it provided those members with more layers of protection, so that if they were interned, charges would be harder to hold against them and information leak more slowly. After Cumann na mBan was "subsumed" by PIRA, many women went directly into PIRA to serve in whatever capacity required. After the hunger strikes in Long Kesh in 1981, many women joined PIRA in retaliation for the deaths of the ten interned men who died.[28]

While the structure of the Belfast attachments of PIRA changed in 1973, it would take another four years for the rest of PIRA to follow suit. The autonomous actions gave some degree of "plausible deniability" to the ever-embattled Provisional Army Council and allowing for some measure of distance in case of a foiled attack, as was the case with the Loughgall Ambush, or if

[26] Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 337.
[27] Thomas Leahy, *The Intelligence War against the IRA* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020,) 89- 90.
[28] Wahidin, *Ex-Combatants, Gender and Peace in Northern Ireland*, 90-95.

the actions were too socially reprehensible to claim as legitimate, as with the murder of Jean McConville.[29] Rose Dugdale, a woman involved in PIRA activities such as dropping improvised bombs on a police station from a helicopter, was disowned by her PIRA superiors following a home invasion and robbery at Russborough House in the Republic of Ireland where £8 million worth of old masters paintings were stolen. The action was ostensibly to procure funding for PIRA and to secure the release of Dolours and Marian Price from prison. The following nationwide hunt for the thieves and rare paintings by the likes of Gainsborough and Vermeer prompted PIRA to disavow one of its suspected members.

Some men of high rank within PIRA lauded the efforts and efficacy of their women comrades, foremost among them Seán Mac Stíofáin. As discussed in chapter one, he was chief of staff of the Army Council during the early years of the Troubles and consistently praised the efficiency of women as soldiers. However, though Mac Stíofáin was prominent within PIRA, not all men believed women were on equal footing with them or that they should be.

The sentiment of male supremacy seemed to not depend on the age of the reactionary man. To these men, women had a shelf life depending on if they married or had children. To the women involved, however, having a shelf life in paramilitarism was a ridiculous notion. Some women, like Martina Anderson who was an active PIRA member, wanted children, but after serving a lengthy jail term, was unable to have any, and has since moved her life into republican politics.[30] For the male leadership of PIRA to assume that women would abandon their convictions showed that they had not moved into thinking about women in the same way as male

[29] The Loughall Ambush refers to an incident in 1987 where SAS officers attacked a PIRA group as they attempted to bomb a police station. Several civilians were caught in the crossfire and British forces came under scrutiny for condoning free fire on a busy street. Jean McConville, meanwhile, was a mother of ten who became the most famous of the "disappeared"—civilian victims of IRA kidnapping and execution.
[30] Peter Taylor, *BRITS: The War Against the IRA* (New York, Bloomsbury,2002), 157-159.

members. Men could have children at any age, and the PIRA did not exclude men because they were or would become fathers. By recognizing that many women in Northern Ireland had to take care of their families and earn money at the same time that they fought against loyalist paramilitaries and the British state, they overlooked the fact that women had been doing this for generations. As more women entered into the "war" sphere of PIRA, men within the organization began to understand that women's convictions were as strong as the men's, they had as much to lose as the men, and often had to fight more and different battles than their male counterparts. Rose Dugdale, the woman arrested after the Russborough House robbery, never returned to paramilitary activity after her release from prison, but she spoke in support of the hunger strikers in 1981.[31] Because PIRA viewed women as volunteers and recruits, they needed training in marksmanship, intelligence gathering, and bomb-making. Additionally, PIRA needed a time commitment for volunteers to prevent mistakes, which still happened.

> At the start, there was some thinking around that women had a certain life span and the thinking was that women will join the IRA when they are young and single. They will meet a man, marry, have children and then they will leave the IRA. So the thinking was that women have a certain life span so what's the point in training them up...but when I got to 18 that wasn't our notion and we were sort of saying 'No, we're as good as the next man', plus the fact that if someone went out and took a shot and shot a Brit or an RUC man and you were arrested taking the weapon away then you were getting charged with that killing.[32]

Men within PIRA placed an inherent value on women as mothers. Within republicanism, family was important, and most members of republican paramilitary associations, both male and female, came from republican households. Fathers and mothers passed these republican ideals, myths, and legends to their sons and daughters. Because of the patriarchal bent in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the ideal of republican motherhood was a real thing. Irish

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[31] Fiona MacCarthy, *Last Curtsey: The End of Debutantes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 257.
[32] Gilmartin, *Female Combatants*, 52.

republican society expected that women in the family would keep republican ideas alive and teach them to the children so they would later in life take up the idea of Irish republicanism. From one side, keeping republicanism in the home is keeping a revolutionary dream alive, and from the other, it is indoctrination into an ideology. Regardless of which it was, that burden fell on female family members. Men also participated in this, but due to patriarchal norms present in Northern Irish society, mothers were primarily the caregivers, so the burden of this feel disproportionally on them. This is one of the reasons that men in PIRA placed a value on the role of mothering over the value of fathering. Further, men placed a value on women in PIRA based on whether they had children. They then had the job of creating more republicans through childrearing and propaganda.[33]

The perception of women within republican paramilitary organizations varies. From women's accounts, members of PIRA treated them equally to their male counterparts when they participated in "front line" actions and relied on them in the same way that men would be. Behind closed doors, leaders often stifled women's voices. That women never held any significant places within the hierarchical power structure within PIRA is evidence of the general devaluation of women outside of combat roles. The reason had less to do with the tenets of Irish republicanism than with the internalized patriarchal values found in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. While women never held positions of power within PIRA, they did move into prominent positions in Sinn Fein, which was the political wing of PIRA.Many former republican paramilitary women have held political office, including Shauneen Baker, Siobhan O'Hanlon, Martina Anderson and others. The same is true of their male counterparts.

[33] Ibid., 53-54.

In ethno-national conflicts, the lack of defined battlegrounds often leads to a higher involvement of women.[34] During the Troubles, homeowners opened their houses to hide republican paramilitaries, arms and ammunition, and bombs. Many women felt that if they were going to be involved in a "secondary" role, then they may as well be full Volunteers within PIRA.[35]

Furthermore, ethnonational conflict is vastly different from traditional warfare in how members of both sides recognized one another. The combatants are usually not in any uniforms, and there is little neutral territory. Northern Ireland consisted primarily of segregated neighborhoods, homes and businesses. The Irish Tricolor and street murals to fallen Irish republicans decorated the side of many residential and commercial buildings, particularly in Belfast and Derry. They signified what in traditional warfare would be called a "camp," a safe area for republicans.

The community in staunchly republican neighborhoods had little ability to remain neutral, for several reasons. If they did not aid republican paramilitaries they could be seen as traitors, and face punishment from PIRA. Often, businesses were extorted by paramilitaries on both sides, so the war existed not only in the home but in the streets. As Cuffs put it, "Terrorism was the business model."[36] He further discussed how a store owner in a republican area would not sell him an apple. The owner later told him, quietly, that "he couldn't be seen selling apples to the likes of you, but if you want to steal a few from the truck on the way out, I won't take notice." This further illustrates the way that republicanism was ingrained into the life of everyone living in republican areas, whether they wanted it to or not.[37] This also made it

[34] Wahidin, *Ex-Combatants, Gender and Peace in Northern Ireland*, 90.
[35] Gilmartin, *Female Combatants*, 60-62.
[36] "Cuffs" (Former British Army, name changed) in discussions with Tabitha Wood, May-June 2020.
[37] Ibid.

difficult for the British Army to differentiate between enemy combatants and those who were aiding PIRA out of fear. While PIRA did not force people into their organization, they demanded community support.

Enemy Paramilitaries and State Treatment of Republican Women

The concept of republican paramilitary women changed over the course of the Troubles. As the war raged on, state forces and loyalist paramilitaries began to consider women as more viable targets. The cultural difference between republicans and loyalists did not exist solely along lines of religious or national identity, but also based on how they viewed women. Loyalist paramilitaries viewed republican women as legitimate targets, and even women who were only related to republicanism on the periphery, such as Máire Drumm and Rosemary Nelson, also suffered the consequences.[38] It could be said that perhaps loyalist men viewed them as a relatively unknown quantity because women within their own organizations did not carry out the same roles as their republican counterparts. If that analysis is correct, then republican women were viable targets because they were legitimate threats to loyalist paramilitaries. Another potential reason for the targeting of women in republican organizations was to demoralize republican men.[39] Due to the more blatant patriarchal beliefs within loyalist communities, the loyalists intended the execution of republican women to be emasculatory. According to this thought process, men within PIRA would suffer via their inability to protect women within their ranks. This concept is ancient, particularly when discussing rape as a weapon of war that demoralizes both women and men.[40]

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[38] Our Correspondent, "IRA Retaliation Feared Over Drumm Murder," *The Times*, October 30, 1976, 2; T. R. Reid, "Car Bomb Kills Catholic Lawyer in Northern Ireland," *The Washington Post*, March 16, 1999.
[39] "Cuffs" (Former British Army, name changed) in discussions with Tabitha Wood, May-June 2020.
[40] Republican women encountered sexual violence throughout the Troubles. For further information, see National Council for Civil Liberties, *Strip Searching: An Inquiry into the Strip Searching of Women Remand Prisoners at*

The most likely reason that loyalist men targeted republican women was not because they were seen as threats, or to demasculinize the republican men, but as punishment against the women, whom they viewed as inferior due to their national identity, their religion, and their willingness to actively stand against the ingrained patriarchal microcosm of Northern Ireland. Because loyalists were not fighting against the status quo, and were instead fighting to uphold it, they saw republican paramilitary women as an existential threat to their very way of life. This challenge could be dangerous because it could encourage the same type of changes in loyalist communities. From a male loyalist paramilitary standpoint, it was necessary to make examples out of those women, and the consequences for stepping outside of their separate spheres of community building, peacekeeping, and childrearing. One striking example is the murder of Marie Drumm, who was a vocal member of Sinn Fein. She was staunchly republican, and she may well have assisted PIRA even though she was not a member. Regardless of this fact, she was still stepping outside of what was a traditional female role. She was executed by loyalist paramilitary men as she recovered in hospital after surgery. Rosemary Nelson was a solicitor who was defending an alleged PIRA member in court. After issuing her many death threats, loyalists placed a bomb under her car, and she died in the explosion as she pulled out of her driveway to go to work. These were targeted assassinations. Other republican paramilitary women were killed carrying out their paramilitary activities alongside their male counterparts.

State forces recognized republican women as possible threats from the onset of the Troubles, but their level of threat changed over the course of the Troubles. The RUC arrested far fewer women than men but brought many in for questioning.Republican women's bodies

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Armagh Prison Between 1982 and 1985 (NCCL: London, 1986); Chris McAuley, *Nationalist Women and the RUC,* (Sinn Fein Women's Department: Dublin, 1989); Fr Denis Faul, *The Stripping Naked of the Women Prisoners in Armagh Prison, 1982-83* (Help the Prisoners Committee: Northern Ireland, 1983); Testimonies, *The Facts of Strip Searching in Maghaberry Gaol (Personal Testimonies of Women Strip Searched on the 2nd March, 1992)* (1992).

became battlegrounds in and of themselves. From accounts of many republican paramilitary women, male members of the RUC often used sexual innuendos and thinly veiled sexual threats as intimidation tactics.[41] This is believable, because most of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was made up of unionist Protestants, many of whom were actively involved in loyalist paramilitary groups such as the UVF. The British Army's view of republican women was much more varied. When British troops arrived in Northern Ireland in 1969, the residents of the staunchly republican Falls Road served tea to the soldiers. The British army appeared to be a neutral party, coming in to help protect Catholic communities. This changed soon thereafter.

PIRA began to actively attack the British forces, as they saw them as an occupying army sent by a foreign government. The British Army in the onset of the Troubles considered women off limits. Republican paramilitaries used this to their advantage, using women as camouflage, and occasionally in honey traps to lure officers to their deaths. The British Army killed republican paramilitary women in the early 1970s, including Dorothy Maguire and Maura Meehan, but those deaths were likely collateral damage rather than targeted attacks.[42]

As the Troubles wore on, the British forces began to understand that women were becoming more active in PIRA and viewed them as posing a threat equal to that of their male counterparts, and in some cases, one that was even more dangerous. Women were able to use their sexuality against the soldiers. Once these tactics were recognized, the British forces began to employ more women within their own ranks, as some of the tactics used by female republican paramilitaries would not be used as easily on them. The best examples to display how the British forces understood the viability of republican paramilitary women as threats can be seen by the

[41] O'Keefe, *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements,* 31, 35-36.
[42] McAuley, *Women in a War Zone,* 20-22.

arrest and force feeding of Marian and Dolours Price in the mid-1970s, and the killing of Mairead Farrell in Gibraltar in 1988.[43]

[43] White, *Out of the Ashes*, 247-248; Dominique Searle, Andrew McEwen, and Richard Wigg, "IRA Terrorists Shot Dead in Gibraltar," *The Times*, March 7, 1988, 1-2; Francis X Clines, "Priest, Writing Eulogy, Recalls Woman in IRA," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1988.
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CHAPTER 3: LOYALIST WOMEN

Sandra McEvoy's parents left a unionist area of Northern Ireland for the United States in the 1950s. As she was growing up, McEvoy often visited family members in staunchly loyalist areas of Belfast during the Troubles. Because of her familial connections and promise of anonymity, as well as the length of time she carried out her project, she was able to talk with women who had been members of Loyalist Paramilitary Organizations in the past.[1]

To comprehend the self-image of loyalist women, their community standing, the views of their enemies toward them, and the level of esteem of their male counterparts toward them, McEvoy employed a different approach than scholars have used to analyze republican paramilitary women. Fewer academic sources exist on loyalist women, and there are fewer direct interviews to help understand how they viewed their actions, and how these actions were perceived by others. McEvoy's thesis, which came from her interviews with loyalist women, shows that the experience of women involved in loyalist paramilitaries was fundamentally different from that of women in republican groups for a multitude of reasons.

Theories abound about why women combatants on opposite sides experienced different gender dynamics. One theory is that loyalist women had the option of enlisting in "legitimate" forces, such as the British Army, the RUC, and the UDR. Others point to the fact that loyalist communities were on the defensive, while republican ones were on the offensive. Because loyalists were attempting to uphold the status quo, women's involvement in paramilitary groups would be understandably less, as they would be maintaining traditional ideas of women's roles within the home. The understanding of women's roles was vastly different within republican and

[1] McEvoy, *Telling Untold Stories,* 65-67.

loyalist communities. Northern Irish Protestants, who largely identify as British, were more likely to reinforce the patriarchal conceptions of the protective man and the domestic woman.[2]

Northern Irish courts sentenced fewer loyalist women to prison terms during the Troubles than their republican counterparts. While republican women placed importance on their visibility as full members of PIRA, women in LPOs did not need formal membership to carry out armed combatant duties. A former member of the WUDA stated, "I mean, there is a lot of women in this estate, myself for one, and I know you (name) like if they ask you to do something you do it anyway. You know?... People are willing to help. People are there." McEvoy went on to say, "The sense she conveys is that, rather than the UDA relying only on sworn members, "people are there" - committed, active participants in the UDA- to the extent that the formality of UDA membership can be bypassed."[3]

Women more often found themselves involved in LPOs because their husbands or partners belonged. If Northern Irish courts sentenced their partners to prison for paramilitary actions, loyalist society considered these women as loyalists, even if they were not members of an LPO.

Loyalist women perceived their roles within paramilitary organizations far differently than did their republican counterparts. Although both loyalist and republican women valued their own contributions, loyalist women admitted throughout many interviews that for the most part, women in loyalist paramilitary organizations acted in a secondary role to the men. Women involved in LPOs saw themselves as aiding the cause and aiding the men, juxtaposed to

[2] Michael Potter, "Loyalism, Women and Standpoint Theory," *Irish Political Studies* 29, no. 2 (October 2014): 263-264.
[3] McEvoy, *Telling Untold Stories,* 107.

republican women who viewed their actions as furthering the cause and less about supporting men.

An interesting divergence exists between Sandra McEvoy and Michael Potter's analyses of loyalist paramilitary women. Scholarly investigations have in large part failed to account for loyalist paramilitary women, primarily because of difficulty and often inability of scholars to conduct interviews with them. The reason for this is multifaceted. It is illegal to be part of a proscribed terrorist organization in Northern Ireland. Many former paramilitaries, men and women alike, loyalist and republican, are hesitant to talk about their actions during the Troubles. Part of this is fear of persecution, but it is also because the paramilitaries on both sides were very secretive. Giving out too much information is dangerous to former paramilitary members, even twenty years later. Loyalist women are even more difficult to interview, because men in loyalist communities still "protect their women," which means most interviews are set up through former male paramilitaries. This is reinforced with the contrast between Sandra McEvoy's personal interviews with loyalist paramilitary women that yielded new information and understandings, and Michael Potter's engagement within the loyalist community at large that relied heavily upon assumptions about the role of women. Potter's work, in contrast to McEvoy's, focuses on the community involvement of women affiliated with LPO, and the gendered forces of coercion and familial bonds that made loyalist women feel obligated to carry out tasks on behalf of loyalist paramilitary men.

The women McEvoy interviewed stated that loyalist men rarely asked women to carry out any type of operation, but rather that they just knew what to do. Loyalist paramilitary women transported guns, cleaned up crime scenes, harbored male loyalists who were on the run, visited jails, and provided community support. Very few women carried out more combative

actions, such as bomb making, armed robberies, and murders. One woman, "Carol" stated, "If guns had been thrown into my house I would have automatically cleaned them before hiding or moving them." In her conversations with loyalist women, McEvoy asked whether they resented being asked to do certain tasks by loyalist paramilitary men. One woman stated, "It wasn't that they told you to do it.... You were just there."[4]

McEvoy stated that to her, it seemed that doing such things would go against the "instinctive mothering" nature of women.[5] However, Michael Potter postulates that loyalist paramilitary roles were split along remarkably similar lines to domestic labor in the household.[6] If that logic is applied, then it makes complete sense that loyalist paramilitary women were not necessarily told what to do, as the interviewee claimed, but acted on their own initiative. When thinking about the delegation of traditional labor roles within the home, women are not asked by their husbands to wash dishes or clothes, clean the house, or raise children. That is simply expected of them. If that same logic is applied to the roles of many loyalist paramilitary women, then it can be understood that they did not need to be told what to do, they knew what their subordinate supporting role was meant to be. This juxtaposition allows a deeper look into how loyalist paramilitary women viewed themselves within their organization. They understood their support roles as being integral to the struggle and seemed for the most part content with carrying out secondary roles to further the cause of preventing a United Ireland.

Loyalist paramilitary women did have a wing dedicated to women, the Women's UDA, but this organization was a creation of the original UDA, unlike Cumann na mBan, which operated outside of the guidance of PIRA. Women in the WUDA viewed themselves as the

[4] McEvoy, T*elling Untold Stories,* 112-113.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Potter, "Loyalism, Women and Standpoint Theory, 264.

backbone of the cause, allowing the men the resources and capability to continue fighting against both state forces and republican paramilitaries.[7] They did not see themselves as revolutionaries, but rather as trying to maintain the way of life that they knew at any cost. One loyalist woman interviewed by Miranda Alison stated that "the women were the backbone of the paramilitaries, years ago: the men couldna done it without the women. You know, moving guns and things – the men didn't do that, the women done that, so they did."[8]

This is in direct contradiction to how republican women saw themselves, who vehemently rejected being the backbone, as they felt their contributions were equal to that of their male counterparts. Loyalist women also had to operate within the confines of traditionally acceptable roles for women to play in a loyalist Protestant community. Some actions, if undertaken, could ostracize her from her community. Women within Loyalism did not perceive themselves to be fighting for equal rights between women and men, but rather to uphold a traditional way of life that they felt comfortable in. This directly translates to the fact that most loyalist paramilitary women were involved due to their husbands' or partners' involvement. If the male in the relationship was involved in loyalist activity, this provided the woman with more opportunities to be involved in paramilitary activity themselves. This, of course, was not true among all women involved in loyalist paramilitary organizations, but it was true for many.

Loyalist Women's Reception and Self-image

One question when discussing the loyalist community is whether women were more likely to be involved if their male partners were involved in paramilitary activity. In one interview, Potter spoke to a woman named Marion who said, "There was a women's UDA that was made up of the wives, girlfriends and partners of UDA men." Potter then postulates that

[7] Ibid., 263, 265.
[8] Alison, "Gender, Small Arms and the Northern Ireland Conflict," 227.

"involvement was therefore via association with a male combatant, women's identities being linked to a man, rather than women becoming active in their own right."[9]

Both McEvoy and the thirty women she interviewed who were formerly involved with loyalist paramilitaries dispute this. Twenty-seven of them were married during their time of involvement, and twelve had husbands who were supportive or complicit in their activities within loyalist paramilitary groups. Among these twelve, seven had husbands who belonged to the same loyalist paramilitary organization as themselves. Not all loyalist men supported their wives as members, however. "Chloe" was married to a founding member of a loyalist paramilitary organization. When she decided to join, he beat her and told her she had no place in the movement.[10] It sounds extreme that she was willing to go through such difficult situations with her husband over her involvement, but that in itself is a testament to her dedication to the Loyalist cause. It is also important to note that many women on both sides of the conflict disagreed with their husbands' involvement in paramilitary groups, but that was often considered to be of little importance. However, when women were in direct confrontation with their husbands over their own involvement it seems particularly noteworthy. This alludes to how gender bias shapes the way that involvement in paramilitary groups and how it impacted familial bonds is studied and understood.

She explained that her husband thought her place was at home with their children, and not in a loyalist paramilitary group. She said that the husbands of other women within her unit also beat their wives. Their husbands were also active in loyalist paramilitary organizations at the time. When asked why he was against her involvement, she stated:

> Even though he was in (name of LPO) from when it first formed … (pause) because I was a woman. No other reason, but because I was a woman and a

[9] Potter, "Loyalism, Women and Standpoint Theory, 263.
[10] McEvoy, *Telling Untold Stories,* 140.

> woman was expected to stay at home. Even though I went out to work and brought in money, I was still expected to stay at home to do as you were told to do. And all of the women were the same, every one of them women in the picture were the same. We all had a hard time with our husbands, every one of us because they didn't want us to do this.... It wasn't our job. We weren't supposed to do this.[11]

While this quote refutes the idea that all loyalist paramilitary women were involved because of their husbands, it reinforces the idea that loyalist women were expected to maintain traditional roles within the home, and were either not important to the organization, or that they were only valuable in a secondary context. This demonstrates that loyalist women had to grapple with their self-actualization within their organizations, because in many cases, the men within the loyalist paramilitary organizations gave mixed messages on what was acceptable and what was not. Loyalist women believed their cause to be correct but faced more difficulty than their republican counterparts in understanding their roles and contributions to loyalist paramilitary organizations.

Loyalist and unionist society expected women within loyalist paramilitaries to uphold a system of patriarchal views that were present in the Protestant Northern Irish communities during the Troubles. Where their republican counterparts received support from the nationalist community at large, loyalist women did not receive the same level of support. After Potter asked how loyalist communities responded to loyalist paramilitary women, "Debbie" stated, "Very negatively, as women could not be violent. A woman couldn't do that." "Marion" went on to say, "Men got a slap on the back for what they did. But women didn't get anything." [12] According to a scale created by McEvoy that graphs the continuum of violence, what loyalist communities

[11] Ibid., 142.
[12] Potter, "Loyalism, Women and Standpoint Theory," 266.

deemed acceptable coincides with Debbie's comments.[13]

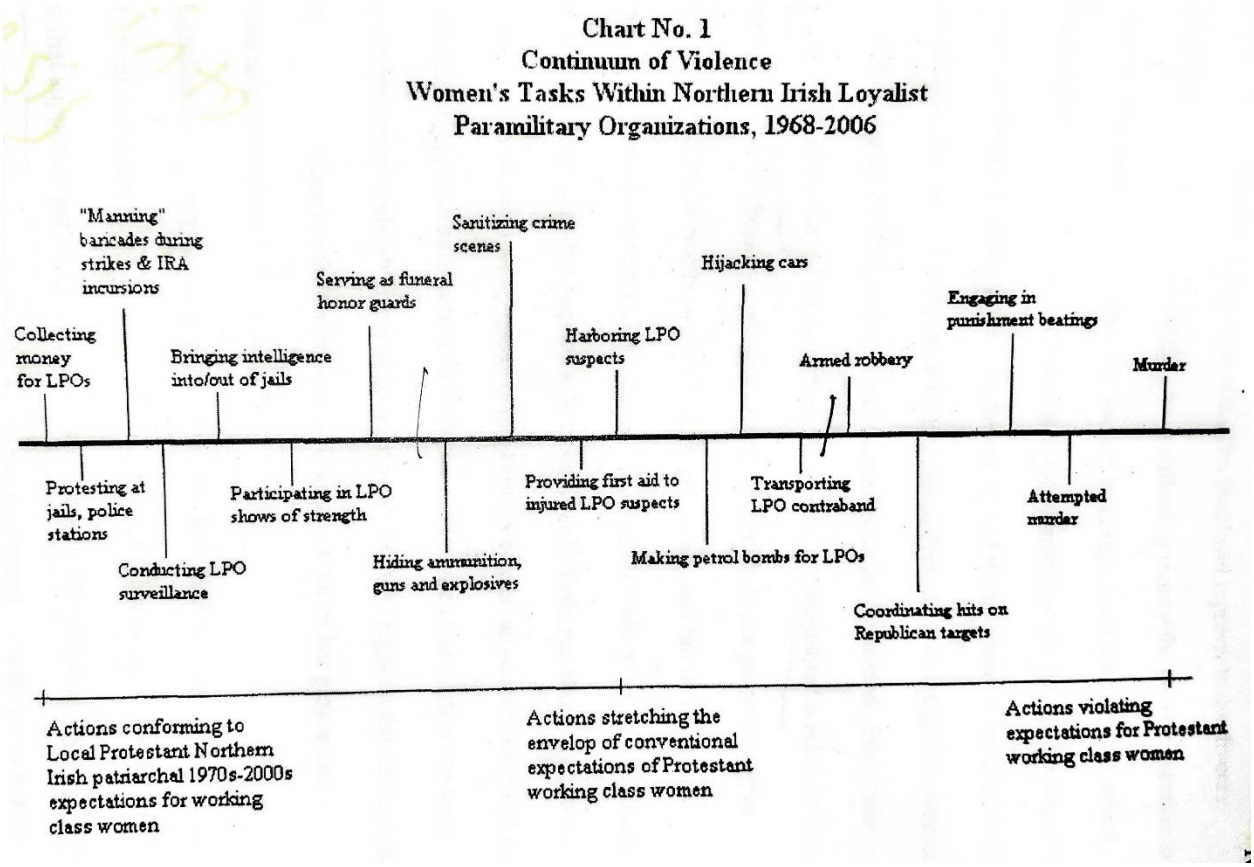

Figure 2 - From Sandra McEvoy's *Telling Untold Stories*, page 109.

[13] McEvoy, *Telling Untold Stories*, 109; Potter, "Loyalism, Women and Standpoint Theory," 266.

LPOs expected women to maintain patriarchal Protestant standards and be supportive of loyalist organizations. While republican women fought to be included in republican paramilitary organizations on an equal basis while fighting state and loyalist forces, loyalist women had to fight to remain within good standing in their community while being active in some capacity to the loyalist cause. Women in loyalist communities often engaged in shows of strength, such as military parades and funerals of prominent loyalist men. A small number of women engaged directly in armed paramilitary combat, but they were ostracized from certain parts of their community, while oddly enough gaining the respect of male comrades within loyalist paramilitary organizations. Finding a position that would satisfy community standards made it increasingly hard for loyalist women to move into the "front line" fighting roles that many republican women engaged in. LPOs often discouraged women moving into combat roles until a woman could "prove" herself. If her actions were violent enough to put her on par with male LPO members, she faced ire and consternation from her female comrades and the community at large. Loyalist women had to fight differently than their male compatriots—in a society that had a more firmly entrenched patriarchal culture than that of their republican counterparts.

Involvement in paramilitary groups forced loyalist women to walk a precarious line of being upstanding members of their community while supporting and aiding loyalist paramilitaries, and concurrently upholding their religious beliefs, societal standing and traditional gender roles.[14] Their republican counterparts did not deal with the same religious issues. Although the Troubles started as a nonviolent civil rights protest highlighting the issues Catholics faced, Catholicism rarely stepped into the conflict, and the clergy of the Catholic church acted as negotiators and peacekeepers. On the loyalist side, many Protestant preachers

[14] Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean, *Only the Rivers Run Free*, 266.

were prominent members of the Orange Order, and while they were usually not members of loyalist paramilitary organizations, they supported them through firebrand speeches, which focused on protecting Ulster, protecting the women of Ulster, and protecting their traditions. This left loyalist women to decide how they could further the cause of defending Ulster and the traditional patriarchal concepts it entailed while carrying out paramilitary actions that they felt compelled to do.

Potter's assertion that loyalist paramilitary women did not choose to be actively involved in loyalist paramilitaries robs these women of their agency. While some women may have joined out of familial connections, joining and partaking in loyalist paramilitary organizations and activities was a choice that women consciously made of their own accord. To view it as anything less devalues their actions and the precarious paths they were forced to walk to remain in good standing within their families, communities, churches, and paramilitary organizations. The same can be said about Azrini Wahidin's depiction of women in republican paramilitary groups as accidental activists. Women on both sides of the conflict did not accidentally become members of a paramilitary organization or unintentionally risk their freedom and their very lives. It is important for historians and social scientists to consider women's participation in paramilitary activities as a conscious choice about which organizations to join and what actions to carry out. [15]

Although loyalist communities did not support women as paramilitary fighters as much as their republican counterparts, support did exist to some degree. The loyalist community protected paramilitary women from security forces. Whether the many women who participated in supporting roles or the few who took on more violent roles usually reserved for men, these

[15] Wahidin, *Ex-Combatants, Gender and Peace in Northern Ireland*, 61-64.

women almost always had alibis. Even if the community at large did not agree with loyalist paramilitary women's actions, they dealt with it internally instead of involving outside sources. This is an interesting concept, because as the Troubles wore on, loyalist paramilitary organizations such as the RUC and the UDR often colluded with the British Army. When examining how state forces treated loyalist women, this is a crucial factor to consider.

Before examining how republicans and state forces treated loyalist paramilitary women, it is necessary to look at how male loyalist paramilitary men viewed women within their organizations. It was more difficult for loyalist women to become fully involved in paramilitary organizations than for their republican counterparts, because the system of labor in loyalist paramilitary organizations was more clearly defined along gendered lines. Still, some women pushed through those barriers and took part in paramilitary activity that was not seen as acceptable by the community. Tracey, introduced earlier, felt the need to prove herself to her male comrades. She was a member of the UVF, which was a smaller and arguably more violent paramilitary organization than the UDR. She said that when she joined, she received a lot of pushback from the men, who felt she did not belong there. She said, "I woulda said that most of the men didn't want women involved.... The female's the weaker sex [they think].... I always seem to be the odd one out."[16]

Eventually they began to accept her, but at first most men in the UVF did not want her involved in operations. She said, "They don't think that's a woman's place. Like I was told one time I should be at home washing dishes. That's the place to keep a woman, chained to the kitchen sink! [She laughs.] Aye, dead on. I says "get stuffed, wash them yourself" …. I got an

[16] Alison, "Gender, Small Arms and the Northern Ireland Conflict," 235.

awful stick off men for, as they said, carryin' on the way I was doin…. I was a girl, I should be sittin' knittin' washin' dishes and rearin' [children].[17]

It is clear from Tracey's comments that men did not feel she belonged in the organization, at least not at the level she obtained. The loyalist needs to "protect" women in the same way they were fighting to "protect" Ulster carried over into their view of women in loyalist paramilitary organizations. Since very few loyalist women were involved in the capacity that Tracey was, it is difficult to find women who can say they received the same pushback. McEvoy interviewed a former male UVF member named "Jerry" and asked him his view on women in loyalist paramilitary organizations. He stated, "On a personal level, I might be seen as, you know, sexist for saying this. But it's not from my perspective, there is just something about a woman being involved in illegal activity that doesn't ring very well with me. You know? It is just something I have on a personal level."[18]

When McEvoy asked Jerry to expand on this further, as to where his beliefs came from, he stated,

> It's the Protestant/unionist thing that's deeply probably ingrained within myself as well. Even when I was breaking the law I was questioning the morality of doing so. So it's, it's probably just some traditional thing within my own psyche. That would make it even more difficult to come to terms with if, for instance, my wife was involved in it. You know?[19]

Chloe reiterated this point. She mentioned that loyalist paramilitary men did not ask women to do militant things. When asked why, she responded "Because we were women. It's very simple, because you were women. We were to be protected."[20]

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[17] Ibid., 236.
[18] McEvoy, "Telling Untold Stories," 160.
[19] Ibid., 162.
[20] Ibid.

It is abundantly clear that loyalist paramilitary men did not think, in general, that women had a place in loyalist paramilitaries in anything other than supporting roles. These decisions seemed to be embedded in the patriarchal, religious, and political leaning within the Protestant/loyalist community. Men saw themselves as the protectors, and for women to step into those roles was emasculating to them, and meant they were unable to do what they should in protecting both "their women" and Ulster. An interesting counter narrative that could be part of the reason that loyalist paramilitary men were so vehemently opposed to loyalist women's involvement was because of the type of women they perceived to be involved in paramilitary actions and organizations. In this case, loyalist men saw that there were a larger number of republican paramilitary women, and that those women carried out a variety of tasks, including what they would define as front-line action. Loyalist women, according to loyalist men, were more proper and ladylike, and therefore would not engage in political and paramilitary violence like their republican counterparts. This is an interesting notion that goes back to how the unionists came to be in Ulster to begin with, when Scots were moved to Ulster to "tame the wild Irish Catholics." This belief was apparently still strong in loyalist communities and may also lend credence to the idea of why loyalist men, who felt the need to protect "their women," viewed republican paramilitary women as viable targets.

Surprisingly, a few loyalist paramilitary women interviewed by McEvoy commented on republican women, with one woman stating that loyalist women "weren't as cruel." Others stated that republican women were forced to join paramilitary organizations. This poses the question, did that woman know that a small number of her female comrades had carried out violent actions that were just as cruel as the republicans she spoke of? It is difficult to quantify how much loyalist paramilitary women knew of others' involvement, especially if it was the limited number

of women who broke acceptable Protestant standards and engaged in political and paramilitary violence. What can conclusively be said is that gendered lines were much clearer in loyalist paramilitary groups, where men for the most part, felt that women had no place in actively participating in armed violence, and were only there for secondary and supportive roles.[21]

Enemy Paramilitaries and State Treatment of Loyalist Women

Now that there is an understanding of how loyalist women saw themselves, how their culture perceived them, and how their male comrades saw them, the question must be asked, how did republican paramilitary men and women perceive them? Republican paramilitary members, while having their own share of patriarchal ideas, had a higher level of equality for women within the conflict. Republican paramilitary members targeted people based on whether they were loyalists, state forces, or informers. They paid little attention to what gender the person they injured or killed was. An example of this is Margaret Thatcher. Republican paramilitaries did not seek to kill her because she was a woman, but because she was the British Prime Minister. Republican paramilitary members saw anyone opposed to them as a viable target. There is little to no academic discussion on if the murderers ever considered the gender of their victims. Certainly, according to the death tolls, republican paramilitary groups killed the largest number of people in the Troubles, although many of these were civilian casualties in bombs and botched shooting operations. Although it is possible that loyalist paramilitary men targeted republican paramilitary women for stepping outside of their gendered sphere, or as an emasculation tactic against republican men, republican paramilitaries do not seem to have acted in these ways. Republicans targeted loyalist men and women alike for their opposition to a United Ireland.

[21] Ibid., 163.

Fewer loyalist paramilitary women died than men, but this is most likely because loyalist paramilitary women did not engage in conflict in the same ways that loyalist men did.

Understanding how state forces viewed loyalist women is the last component in understanding how loyalist society viewed paramilitary women in the context of conflict. Both republican and loyalist paramilitaries used women to get through checkpoints and pass soldiers undetected, often while transporting weapons or intelligence. State forces stopped republican women far more often than loyalist women because they viewed republicans as the enemy. Because loyalist paramilitary women's roles did not generally change over the course of the Troubles, British security forces saw them as less of a threat and thus, they continued to arouse less suspicion. Miranda Alison's *Gender, Small Arms and Northern Ireland* provides one instance of how a British soldier reacted to a loyalist paramilitary woman. A female UVF member, "Ann" recounted her experience. Alison explained the situation as told to her by Ann.

> In one incident she had to dispose of a gun, with a soldier standing nearby, in the middle of a fraught situation where her female companion had been shot in the back when their car got caught in crossfire between the IRA and the British Army.... Even when the British military knew women were involved in such activities they were not always clear about how to respond to this – perhaps particularly when dealing with Protestant women, given the at least tenuous (though inconsistent) relationship of mutual support between the state security forces and loyalist paramilitaries. The soldier witnessed Ann run past him as she shouted ''we're Protestants, leave us alone!'', concealing the gun under a coat until she threw it over a wall. She reported that the soldier appeared shocked and seemingly didn't know what to do, but he later testified against her in court. However, Ann told the judge she had been forced to carry the weapon and ... the judge in her case dismissed the charges, telling her to go home and look after her children.[22]

It is important to understand how differently state forces treated loyalist paramilitary women compared to their republican counterparts. Investigations into the level of collusion between the British Army, the RUC, and loyalist paramilitaries remain ongoing, but researchers

[22] Alison, "Gender, Small Arms and the Northern Ireland Conflict," 227.

have found evidence of collusion, and in some cases overlapping membership.[23] Loyalist paramilitary women had more in common with the security forces than their republican counterparts. Often, the security forces were Protestants, and identified as British. This makes considering a female loyalist paramilitary woman as an armed combatant more difficult, because they often had women in their lives who were akin to the women they would be arresting. Loyalist women were also much more likely to be seen as being forced to carry a weapon, or having no knowledge of paramilitary activities due to the insular nature of their domestic role, so charges against them would not stick, and they would be returned to their "rightful" place at home with their children.

In conclusion, loyalist paramilitary women had different battles to deal with than their republican counterparts. Understanding how to perceive themselves within their community and paramilitaries was often difficult, as the ideas were in direct contrast with each other. Loyalist women's assigned place in paramilitaries relied on stringent and defined gendered roles within loyalism. Their community and church standing often rested on how they conducted themselves while still being true to the cause of defending Ulster. Further, loyalist paramilitary men had an almost unanimous opinion on what was acceptable behavior for women, and would, in some cases, use physical force to maintain this order. While loyalist paramilitary women did not have the same range of action and movement as their republican counterparts, they were still integral to loyalist paramilitaries, and without them, these women argue that the paramilitary movement would not have remained sustainable throughout the duration of the Troubles. This leaves the

[23] At the time of writing, few academic publications have conclusively proven collusion. However, numerous news journalists in Northern Ireland have published their evidence in various Northern Irish and British news publications. For an example, see: Susan Hines-Brigger, "Report Claims Collusion Between British Army and Northern Ireland Loyalists," *St. Anthony Messenger* 111, no. 1 (June 1, 2003): 9; *Unquiet Graves,* dir. Sean A. Murray (UK: Sean A. Murray, 2018).

question, why were loyalist women not included in conflict resolution and peace negotiations, and how did their absence affect the tenuous peace process, and potentially lead to a continuation of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland?

CHAPTER 4: AFTER THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

This thesis has examined loyalist and republican paramilitary women's motivations for joining paramilitary groups, the activities they carried out, how they perceived themselves, and how others viewed their involvement. By many historical accounts, the Troubles effectively ended with the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998. What is often less discussed are the peace talks that directly preceded the GFA, the negotiations during the earlier years of the Troubles, and the St. Andrews Agreement of 2006. While it is not immediately visible on the surface, both loyalist and republican paramilitary men participated in, or at least influenced the success or failure of these agreements. To what extent were paramilitary women included? The United Nations has passed several resolutions stating that women deserve a place at the table when it comes to peace talks and negotiations.[1] This chapter questions whether a hypothetical seat at the table would be enough for the women involved in paramilitary organizations or whether that would amount to tokenism.

Of the twenty internally elected members from all parties to take part in the Good Friday negotiations, only three were women. Internally elected means that members of the party voted on who they wanted as their representatives. Two women came from the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, a non-sectarian group. The other was Siobhan O'Hanlon from Sinn Fein, the political wing of PIRA. On the loyalist side of negotiations, no women were included. The only female signatory of the Good Friday Agreement was Mo Mowlam, the home secretary of Northern Ireland at the time. Before the lack of paramilitary women at the Good Friday

[1] The most prominent being: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, *On Women, Peace, and Security*, S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000); additionally, Timothy Patrick Coogan's *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace* provides a useful overview of the barriers to a peace accord that needed to be overcome..

agreement is examined, it is first helpful to see what roles paramilitary women played in the two preceding peace accords.

The idea that women are peacekeepers and negotiators who are better suited to explain the emotional aspect of conflict detracts from any importance that paramilitary women could bring to the table. Those women who took part in active armed combat did not see themselves as victims, in fact most women in unionist and nationalist communities did not view themselves as victims, but rather as fighters and survivors. To relegate the title of victim to these women robs them of the agency that they fought for within their respective communities.

The first peace accord to take place in Northern Ireland after the onset of the Troubles was the Sunningdale Agreement. Before explaining what the Sunningdale Agreement was, it is important to note why it failed. Many academics, in upholding the silence that surrounds loyalist paramilitary women, exclude their participation entirely and attribute loyalist opposition to the agreement to the Ulster Workers' Council strike.[2] The part that remains missing is the very integral role that loyalist women played in that strike. The Sunningdale agreement was supposed to create a devolved government in Northern Ireland, and it provided a framework for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to one day become united as one country. Unionists and loyalists felt betrayed by the politicians they voted to represent them, as they felt that allowing the Republic of Ireland any say in matters of Northern Ireland was yielding too much power to nationalists, and selling out loyalist views, and, indeed, Ulster itself. Loyalist paramilitaries, both men and women, vehemently disagreed with this peace accord. It was finally put to rest due to the Ulster Workers' Council strike. This is where loyalist women seem to disappear from the narrative. Sandra McEvoy was able to ask former loyalist paramilitary

[2] Nagel, "The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition," 20.

women what their thoughts and actions against the Sunningdale agreement entailed. McEvoy states, "The loyalist Association of Workers (which had a significant number of women members) and the region's two main LPO's, the UDA and the UVF," endorsed and aided the strike.[3] Loyalist women went on strike, and eventually, the Belfast shipyard and aircraft factories were closed, the Ballylumford power station shut down, and numerous small businesses shuttered.[4] Women in the UDA played an integral role in pressuring other loyalist community members to support the strike, as well as keeping supplies flowing into their hardline loyalist neighborhoods and boosting morale. Without the support of loyalist paramilitary women, it is possible that the Sunningdale agreement would have worked. To discount the possibility of women perpetuating as well as resolving conflicts discredits their agency, their ability to influence others, and to influence their communities at large. Another gap that exists when looking at the Sunningdale agreement is how loyalist paramilitary women felt about it, and how it influenced their decisions to either join paramilitary organizations or increase their activity within paramilitary organizations. By excluding their narrative, it allows for the historical interpretation that the negotiation was chaired entirely by men because women had lower stakes in the conflict. As McEvoy observes,

> To date, there has been no publicly acknowledged articulation of the views of loyalist women who have supported and participated in loyalist paramilitary organizations on such agreements. In over thirty years of conflict, senior policy makers and political party leaders have either excluded such women wholesale, from their thinking on conflict and its resolution or have assumed that their views mirrored that of their male counterparts. The empirical study conducted [McEvoy's study] reveals these women's own ideas regarding their governments [sic] attempts to bring peace to their province and the lengths that many women went to in order to prevent their passage or to make the post agreement environment untenable.[5]

[3] McEvoy, "Telling Untold Stories," 186.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 184.

Loyalist women's active opposition to the Sunningdale agreement is largely why it failed. The negotiations for this agreement occurred in 1973 and 1974. During this time, issues relating to the ongoing split between the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA, hindered republican paramilitaries' ability to use Sinn Fein as a political party at the negotiation table. This, of course, limited all republican paramilitaries from being directly involved with the talks, although they were widely discussed throughout PIRA. Some loyalist paramilitary women cited the Sunningdale Agreement as the reason why they became more engaged in paramilitary activity. In 2006, one woman, "Chloe" said her involvement increased because, "As I say, we felt at risk, you know? We felt hard done by. You could see your whole culture and your whole way of life just going down the drain and becoming a united Ireland. You know? You could just see that. You can see that to this very day we are all still very, very frustrated. You could see that then; you can still see it."-[6]

According to Chloe's comments, she still saw the peace negotiations as a threat to her way of life. In the time between the Good Friday Agreement and the interview, her views had not changed. As other loyalist women said, they were the backbone; however, because the all-male leadership that took part in the Sunningdale Agreement did not have any representation of women, there was at least some level of consensus.

In the minds of paramilitary women, there were only trivial differences between the failed Sunningdale Agreement of 1974 and the failed Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. Though a strike did not end the Anglo-Irish Agreement like the Sunningdale Agreement, it was just as strongly opposed by both constituencies. Again, female combatants did not have a seat at the negotiating table. Margaret Thatcher did, but not because she was a woman, rather because she

[6] Ibid., 189.

was the British Prime Minister. Many loyalist women felt betrayed by the British governments apparent acquiesce to nationalist and republican terms. They again stated that they wanted no input from Dublin in the relations of Ulster. Rather than a strike to break the Agreement, mass protest was used to show displeasure. Loyalist women took the forefront in many of these protests. While they were not given the platform to give speeches and express their thoughts, they continued on as members of loyalist paramilitaries and rallying fellow unionists and loyalists around the cause of making sure the Anglo-Irish agreement would not pass.

Republicans were integral to the talks at this point; however, issues still existed with recognizing Sinn Fein as a legitimate party stemming from their policy of absenteeism. This policy would end for the Dáil Eireann in 1986 but continues in Westminster to present day. Due to this absenteeism, they had less of a bargaining position than unionists and loyalists who had the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). While loyalist women were integral in stopping the Anglo-Irish agreement, their roles were split along gendered lines. In which the men negotiated, and women rallied public support. Besides rally, loyalist paramilitary women were involved in disrupting public transportation, air travel, and shuttering shops.[7] By this point, republican paramilitary women were known publicly to be part of the struggle, but their impact on the Anglo-Irish Agreement has not been adequately studied. What can be said is the concerns of republican paramilitary women were not made into pressing issues, even though they were brought to the table by their male peers.

By 1994, PIRA and the Combined Loyalist Military Command issued separate ceasefires. Despite sporadic acts of violence, both sides seemed to be on the path to a peace accord. On the republican side, Sinn Fein had a women's department, which was involved in the negotiations

[7] Ibid., 193.

from the earliest days. Loyalist groups did not have as many inroads for women to enter politics, and as such, women were underrepresented. The Troubles officially ended with the Good Friday Agreement. One often overlooked and under-researched aspect of the Troubles is combatant women's participation in the peace process. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) was one of twenty cross-community groups included in peace negotiations. The only other woman from a political party, and the only paramilitary combatant to be included, was Siobhan O'Hanlon of Sinn Fein. This highlights the many issues regarding women's work in peace negotiations and conflict management. The traditional stereotype of women as negotiators is that they are excellent peacekeepers and weak negotiators. While Robert Ulrich Nagel, an American scholar, seeks to understand why former paramilitary women were not included in the Northern Irish peace accords, he seemingly neglects the thought process of women outside of governmental roles, as well as how women are perceived in terms of peace talks and conflict negotiations. Two points need to be analyzed. The first comes from Nagel, who states:

> Exclusion [of women] is further justified by claims that peace agreements are neutral in nature and human rights are all inclusive, consequently there is no need to emphasise women. Furthermore, exclusionists argue that women are not inherently more peaceful than men, that women leaders constitute an elite no different from men, as well as that local culture must be res pected and that women's participation risks alienating parties, thus risking the process itself.

Nagel disagrees with this statement at face value, but continues, saying, "Some might question whether or not the presence of women at negotiating tables is of relevance."[8] From the works of McEvoy, Gilmartin, Alison, Wahidin, and Potter, this does not seem to be the consensus among scholars who have studied women in paramilitary organizations in Northern Ireland. The postulation that women have the same capacity to be violent as men is interesting, when later in the same article, Nagel claims that "the inclusion of women strengthens peace

[8] Nagel, "The Northern Ireland Women Coalition," 16.

processes" because "women often bring an understanding of root causes to the table."[9] Why should we assume that women understand the causes of conflict better than men do? As shown previously, many people joined paramilitary organizations for the same reasons. They were fighting for the same things, so surely, they must have had the same understanding of the root cause. Perhaps Nagel thinks that women understand the root causes because they are victims at the receiving end. That is a masculinized understanding of war, particularly in nontraditional war like the Troubles. Nagel further suggests that women "can testify to the impact of conflict on daily life, relating the everyday experience of the general population."[10] This seems to say that women are inherently more empathetic and understand with greater depth than men what conflict means. Yet men, as well as women, are able to see the devastation that conflict brings to everyday life and the population.

Nagel also argues that women tend to "focus on practical issues such as quality of life, human security, health care and concerns for victims instead of control over political power."[11] There is a twofold problem with this assertion. It assumes that only women care about victims and that women are inherently more peaceful and empathetic than men. It also insinuates that women are the only ones to care for practical solutions within conflict negotiations, based on the same misconception. Furthermore, the idea that men are the only sex to want to wield political power is implausible. Both combatant women and women in general have the same capacity as men to desire political power. While often they have been in the minority, that has less to do with their desire to achieve political power than with the patriarchal barriers that stand in the way. Nagle goes on to claim that women "recognise the importance of building relations and exhibit

[9] Ibid., 18.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

strength in being attentive, moderate and consensus oriented."[12] Interpreting this sentence highlights how this statement inherently relies on hyper-masculine ideals: "The women make good housewives because they recognize the importance of building relations and exhibit strength in being attentive, moderate, and consensus oriented." That sentence, by adding housewives, makes as much sense as including it in why women are important in conflict negotiation. If these are the reasons why women are valued at negotiating tables, are they meant to sit there in their finery and remain demure? In Northern Ireland, it has been proven beyond question that women from both republican and loyalist areas stepped outside of their gendered spheres to engage in armed conflict to fight for what they believed in. To describe them as being attentive and moderate is sexist. Therefore, literature that discusses women in conflict negotiations needs to be reviewed. To view women at the negotiating table as moderate when they literally killed people, made bombs, and allowed for and contributed to the continuation of a thirty-year ethnonational conflict is a slap in the face to the sacrifices that they made. Regardless of whether their choices were correct, they were without question not moderate. To assume that they should remain moderate and more concerned with building bridges rather than making their points is rooted in hyper masculine ideas about women's place in conflict and conflict negotiation.

Nagel further asserts that "women are more willing to extend the talks to parties partly because of their own experience of exclusion…. Women's inclusion enhances the democratic legitimacy of the process, and women are able to employ strategic essentialism in choosing the identity of mothers that bridges across borders, ethnic cleavages and political divides by sharing relatable experiences about grief, family and hope for change."[13] This postulation is incredibly

[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

problematic. Consistently throughout dialogue with former female paramilitaries, both loyalists and republicans had to fight against the societal notion that their roles were primarily as mothers. To engage in paramilitary activity, they had to shrug off the notion that their most important roles were home with the family. For it to be asserted that women can be decent negotiators, they must draw on being mothers and use grief to bridge divides. This assumes something about both genders that are problematic. It assumes that men cannot understand grief in the same ways that women do, and therefore are incapable of bridging divides. For women, it assumes that they are driven solely by their emotions and their ability to relate to others based on what is considered feminine attributes. Nagel continues, stating, "Importantly none of these arguments reverts to the assumption that women are inherently more peaceful."[14] The last portion of Nagel's postulation is in direct contrast to his earlier four points. While his previous points do not outright state that women are inherently more peaceful, they draw on the assumptions of what are traditionally defined as feminine attributes. This completely ignores the fact that women were actively involved in armed conflict and deserved a place at the negotiating table based on that standard alone. He continues to say, "Men's dominance in paramilitary organizations, giving them access to and influence on decision making, rendered politics a male dominated, macho conservative arena [that women] shied away from."[15] While there is some validity in this statement, as paramilitaries were male dominated, it does not, by any means, mean that women "shied away" from politics or from making difficult decisions. It can be said that women were vastly underrepresented at conflict negotiations, but not because they lacked skill as negotiators, but rather because patriarchal men blocked them from participating.

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 23.

Regardless of the semantics of women's place at the negotiating table, primary sources tell us how some of those women were treated. Pearl Sagar and Monica McWilliam, both members of the NIWC and noncombatants, made up two-thirds of the women involved in the Good Friday negotiations. "Pearl Sagar was told by Jim Rodgers [of the UUP] to 'Sit down and shut up' and Ian Paisley Jr. went even further voicing cow noises when Monica McWilliams spoke on the contested issues of parades and marches."[16] These women were working in pursuit of peace across all parties and were treated with extreme disrespect by unionist politicians. This is in line with how unionists and loyalists viewed traditional gender roles. Out of the final elected negotiators of the Good Friday Agreement, no former loyalist paramilitary women were present, and no unionist women were elected to participate in peace negotiation. On the republican side, Siobhan O'Hanlon did take part in the peace talks, making up 1/20th of the votes. She was the only former female paramilitary to have a part in the negotiations.

The obvious exclusion of women from peace talks and conflict negotiations leads to bigger questions. While paramilitary women were integral to both sides of the conflict, why did they not receive equal recognition in the peace process? The republican paramilitary women whom Gilmartin interviewed for his monograph rarely mention O'Hanlon and her role in the Good Friday Agreement. They refer instead to the Sinn Fein party leaders Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. While women, as stated previously, were active in all areas of leadership, they were not afforded the same capabilities when it came to negotiating peace. Many republican paramilitary women pointed to the fact that Sinn Fein had to appear as a "respectable" organization, not just one made up of former paramilitaries. One woman, "Theresa," expressed

[16] Ibid., 25.

outright ire at people who came into Sinn Fein and made themselves out to be quite important. She stated

> Well, I actually found myself having to pull myself back in from feeling bitter because then you had all these people coming on the scene [after the 1994 ceasefire] and you were thinking 'where did all these ones come from all of a sudden'. So you had all these people saying [sarcastically] *'oh I work in Gerry Adams' office'* and I was saying to them 'where the fuck was yous [sic] during the war?', god forgive me because we *could not, could not* get women towards the end of the 1980s; we simply couldn't. They were few and far between.[17]

The change in direction of a secretive grassroots campaign moving into constitutional law and national limelight became an issue within the ranks of former republican paramilitary women. They felt sidelined from the process. In fact, in the wake of the GFA, domestic violence rose in Northern Ireland, in both loyalist and republican communities. One woman, "Linda" stated,

> Things haven't changed all that much, especially for women. Women are still victims of domestic abuse, victims of violence, women are still struggling to get equality in this society, it's all still there. People are talking about this new era [for women]; it's not there for a lot of people.... Maybe you see some high-profile women who are in [formal] politics but what about the other women out there.[18]

Even after the conflict was over, women still knew the location of weapons, and that threat carried over into domestic life. Nagel's assessment of what does and does not make a good negotiator when it comes to women is inherently gendered. Rather, excluding former paramilitary women from both sides of the conflict led to resentment, a rise in domestic violence, the creation of dissident paramilitary groups, and a continuum of violence. Loyalist and republican paramilitary women need more than a seat at the table in negotiations--they need a place in history that does not limit them to obscure studies and footnotes. Both republican and loyalist paramilitary women were integral to the conflict. This leads us back to the question, if

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[17] Gilmartin, *Female Combatants,* 116.
[18] Gilmartin, *Female Combatants* 92; Alison, "Gender, Small Arms and the Northern Ireland Conflict", 221-222.

women were integral in the continuum of violence and held their places as people fighting for what they believed in, why did they not have a seat at the negotiating table as former combatants? Until historians recognize women's role in armed conflicts, our understanding will remain woefully incomplete.

EPILOGUE

Whether because of violence, internment, or loss, the lives, actions, and choices of the women who engaged in paramilitarism and terrorism during the Northern Irish Troubles changed irrevocably throughout the course of the conflict. Loyalist paramilitaries, Irish republicans, and the British Army destroyed countless lives through bombing, shooting, and general acts of violence. None who lived through these decades would ever forget the trauma of the Troubles. Though the women who engaged in republicanism had, as a rule, more public visibility, journalistic accessibility, and media coverage than the women who served in loyalist paramilitaries, those loyalist women who took up arms against what they perceived as an encroaching Irish threat need to have their voices heard.

The difficulties of accessing and parsing the accounts of women are twofold: first, the more prominent and vocal men, especially within Loyalism, filter out many of the experiences of women; second, contemporary accounts and academic analyses following the Good Friday Agreement tend to ignore many women who were involved in terrorism and paramilitary activities. Thus, much of the information available to researchers, not to mention the public, is at best inaccurate and at worst a harmful lie that furthers the historical erasure of these women.

The Troubles in Northern Ireland had their origins nearly a millennium earlier and occurred in an area slightly smaller than Connecticut. The full ramifications of this conflict will remain partially obscured as long as the organizations that carried out terrorist attacks and individual atrocities survive, and as long as the perpetrators of violence remain in positions of local and national government. For the women of loyalism and republicanism, the Troubles pointed to larger issue: of sectarianism within communities, of the dissemination of official and unofficial propaganda, and an existential question of identity as it related to them as women.

Would Ulster hold fast to Mother Britannia or would it provide the blood needed to make Cathleen Ni Houlihan young again?

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