"NEITHER MEN NOR COMPLETELY WOMEN:" THE 1980 ARMAGH DIRTY PROTEST AND REPUBLICAN RESISTANCE IN NORTHERN IRISH PRISONS

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Introduction

Beginning in February 1980, guards at the Armagh Gaol prison in Northern Ireland

denied the thirty-two republican women prisoners protesting their political status

access to toilet or washing facilities. In further protest against the conditions of the

prison, and more broadly against the British occupation of Northern Ireland, these

women went on what was known as a "dirty protest." On March 20, 1980, Farrell, the

commanding officer of the republican women prisoners in Armagh Gaol, released a

statement detailing the conditions of the women on this protest:

> It is six weeks now since we were forced onto the no-wash [dirty] protest, six
> weeks since we last washed, six weeks since we have changed our clothing. .
> .For six weeks we have lain in these cells surrounded by urine, excrement, and
> used sanitary towels. . .Every day conditions worsen, and every day the screws
> [guards] continue their harassment, six weeks have gone. . .How much longer
> will it be allowed to continue?[1]

For thirteen months, the women engaged in this dirty protest refused to wash

themselves or clean their cells. They smeared their own urine, excrement, and

menstrual blood on their cell walls when their chamber pots overflowed. As

punishment for this protest, prison guards confined the women to their cells for

twenty-three hours each day. The women endured these conditions in the name of the

Irish republican movement. Most of the protesting women had been jailed for

activities related to their involvement in the Irish Republican Army (IRA). They

staged their protest in collaboration with the republican men held at Long Kesh, a

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[1] Women Against Imperialism, *Women Protest for Political Status in Armagh Gaol* (October 1980),
Shelfmark P3039, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library.

prison outside the capital city of Belfast. The Armagh women, and female republican prisoners more generally, had long expressed that their struggle is one and the same as that of the republican men in Long Kesh. However, prior to the 1980 dirty protest their resistance was largely ignored by their contemporaries in the republican movement. It was only after this protest that women were actively and formally included in republican politics. This is despite the fact that women had a long history of active participation in the Irish republican struggle for independence.

This thesis explores the resistance of female republican political prisoners in Northern Ireland during the period known as "the Troubles" (1968-98). This thirty-year period in Northern Irish history is often described as an ethno-nationalist conflict between the Catholic and Protestant residents of Northern Ireland over the country's status as a part of the United Kingdom. Three main theoretical assumptions undergird the overall analysis of this project. First, the project takes prisons as disciplinary institutions integral to the superstructures of the conflict between republicans and unionists communities in Northern Ireland as well as between the Irish republican movement and the British government. Second, the approach understands the conflict as one between a British government-backed settler-colonial project and an Irish republican anti-colonial movement. This approach contrasts sharply with those that view the conflict as the product of ethno-national or sectarian differences and animosities. The third theoretical assumption is that the changing nature of British colonial policies and traditional gender norms within the Irish republican community both shaped the contours of resistance among female republican political prisoners.

As a function of the above-listed objective and theoretical assumptions, this project examines the 1980 Armagh dirty protest as a part of a period of intensified republican prison resistance. An unprecedented level of organization among republican prisoners characterized the five-year period of 1976-81. The central issue at stake was the question of political status for paramilitary prisoners, which British authorities abolished in 1976. Prisoners responded to the loss of their rights as political prisoners with an intensified series of prison resistance campaigns. Of particular interest to this project are three tactics of collective resistance that implicated the body as the central site of resistance: blanket protests, dirty protests, and hunger strikes. It examines the gendered dynamics of these tactics, their historical context, and how the 1980 Armagh dirty protest was particularly successful in gaining attention for women within the republican movement.

Historiography of Women, Republicanism, and the Troubles

Interpretations and histories of the conflict in Northern Ireland are numerous and varied. John Whyte once proposed that "it is quite possible that, in proportion to size, Northern Ireland is the most heavily researched area on earth."[2] Whyte's contribution to this large body of literature was a guide to the most common interpretations of the conflict. Whyte provides four interpretations for the conflict: (1) traditional nationalist; (2) traditional unionist; (3) Marxist; and (4) internal conflict. Each of these interpretations focuses on a single pair of antagonists and simplifies the political,

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[2] John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), viii.

social, and economic conditions in Northern Ireland in which the conflict emerged. The traditional nationalist interpretation views the primary opponents in the conflict as Britain and Ireland. The traditional unionist interpretation focuses on conflict between Southern Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Marxist interpretation eschews political identities and focuses on the conflict between classes. Finally, the internal conflict interpretation relies on sectarianism in Northern Ireland and the Protestant/unionist/loyalist communities versus the Catholic/republican/nationalist communities.[3] Each of these interpretations can be useful for understanding elements of the conflict. Yet each also generally ignores certain crucial forces that played a role in the conflict.

The traditional nationalist interpretation was largely publicized and popularized by the IRA beginning in the 1920s, after the partition of Ireland. Essentially, their view is that the partition of Ireland was done against the desire of the majority of its people.[4] Whyte attributes this interpretation to political activists like Gerry Adams who command power among nationalist communities and appeal to the ideal that the Irish people deserve self-determination. However, he finds little evidence of this interpretation used in academic literature.[5] He also observes a similar trend in traditional unionist interpretations, which view the problem as Protestant insecurity in

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[3] Ibid., 115. For more on labeling of the two communities within the internal conflict explanation, see Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, 18-22 and Máiréad Nic Craith, *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 7-10.

[4] Brian Gormally, Kieran McEvoy, and David Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society: Northern Ireland Prisons," *Crime and Justice* 17 (1993): 59.

[5] Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, 136.

the north and interference from the southern Irish in the affairs of the north. At the

heart of this understanding of the conflict is the idea that Protestants, although a

manufactured majority in Northern Ireland, lived in a constant state of fear and

vulnerability because of the Catholic community and the threat of the Irish Free

State's (later Republic of Ireland's) interference.[6] Traditionalist unionist literature

relies on the idea that nationalists meant to deny unionists the same rights to self-

determination for which they claim for themselves. Despite the differences in these

two interpretations, the idea that there are two distinct peoples in Ireland, unionist and

nationalist (or Protestant and Catholic) pervades them both.

The Marxist interpretation is the only one of these four interpretations that

does not rely on the idea that there are two distinct peoples in Ireland. Instead, this

interpretation relies on the idea that a struggle for a workers' victory in Ireland also

meant the struggle for national independence. In addition to relying on the writings of

Marx and Engels, scholars who adopt this interpretation rely heavily on James

Connolly, an Irish socialist who was executed for his role in the 1916 rising. Connolly

believed the divide between Protestant and Catholic was artificial and distracted from

the true divide among the classes. Marxist scholars of the conflict agree, and focus on

the roots of the conflict as economic disparities among classes. However, the primary

problem with this interpretation was that Protestant workers largely voted in favor of

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[6] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Justice in Northern Ireland Prisons," 62.

British rule, effectively nullifying any chance for a unified workers' front and therefore the efficacy of this interpretation.[7]

This final interpretation of the conflict as internal conflict between two communities is by far the most common among scholars. Scholars who subscribe to the internal conflict interpretation view the largest source of tensions as lying within Northern Ireland itself. While this school of thought did not emerge until the 1960s, it continued to guide scholarship into the 1970s and 1980s.[8] Whyte claims that of the 155 books which he read on Northern Ireland and which were published since 1968, sixty-three percent relied on the internal conflict interpretation.[9] This interpretation relies on the politics of difference in Catholic and Protestant identities, differences which were used to align a Catholic religious identity with an Irish/republican/nationalist political identity or a Protestant religious identity with a British/unionist/loyalist political identity.[10] The primary difference between this approach and the traditional nationalist or unionist approach is its lack of focus on the role of the British and Irish states.

At the time that Whyte published his book, very few scholars were putting forward what he calls "the colonial analogy" as an interpretation of the conflict. This approach frames the conflict as a part of a centuries-long colonial relationship between Great Britain and (Northern) Ireland. Scots and Englishmen in the sixteenth and

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[7] Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland,* 176.

[8] Ibid., 196.

[9] Ibid., 202.

[10] Nic Craith, *Culture and Identity Politics in Northern Ireland*, 6.

seventeenth centuries settled the territory of present-day Northern Ireland in much the

same manner that Scots and Englishmen settled the Americas. The changing formal

relationship between the United Kingdom and (Northern) Ireland does not invalidate

this colonial analogy. The Act of Union (1800), which formally incorporated Northern

Ireland into the United Kingdom, did not necessarily erase Northern Ireland's colonial

status. Such argumentation holds in other settler colonial cases, most notable Algeria

which France formally incorporated as a province.[11] Although the colonial parallel is

valid, Whyte cannot provide a singular reason why scholars tended to avoid it, because

few scholars argued against the case of employing it.[12] The majority remained silent

on the issue.

David Miller was one of the first scholars to break this silence, nearly a decade

after Whyte acknowledged it. Miller's edited volume, *Rethinking Northern Ireland:*

Culture, Ideology, and Colonialism provides a series of essays all of which argue that

colonialism was at the core of the problem or which place these interpretations within

a colonial framework. Miller argues that the major advantage of interpreting the

conflict as a colonial encounter is that it requires analyzing both sectarian/internal

relations as well as class relations and external factors.[13] The colonial interpretation of

the conflict encompasses all of the approaches that Whyte presents and provides the

most comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of the conflict. While

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[11] See David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005)

[12] Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, 178.

[13] Miller, "Colonialism and Academic Representations of the Troubles," 7.

Whyte cannot find any singular reason to explain why scholars avoided this interpretation, Miller attributes the lack of this scholarship to the pervasiveness of colonial ideology that limits and distorts what evidence is used to discuss the Troubles. He also claims that most scholars from British or unionist backgrounds are reluctant to engage in a colonial analysis.[14] However, since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the publication of Miller's volume, there is an increasing amount of literature on the conflict that either approaches it from a colonial perspective or at least does not fall into the dichotomies in the earlier four interpretations

Moving forward this analysis will adopt the colonial interpretation of the conflict. Since the colonial interpretation is the most comprehensive, it must take into account all the interest groups and their dynamics among one another rather than the dynamics between two of them. While this can cause confusion over the labels used to identify each group, it is the only way to take into account internal and external forces in the conflict. Internal conflicts based on difference between two ethnic groups often create the perception of deeply entrenched, nearly unsolvable problems. Using the internal conflict (or to a lesser extent the traditional nationalist, unionist, or Marxist) interpretation to explain the state of Northern Ireland assumes that the conflict will always exist as long as the Catholic and Protestant communities remain. A colonial conflict, however, may be solved by the removal of the colonial power. While this analysis is not concerned with the state of peace in Northern Ireland, nor

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[14] Ibid., 36.

does it propose that any such peace could be reached by the removal of the British government from Northern Ireland, it is worth demonstrating the need to adopt a colonial interpretation of the conflict.

Irish historiography has largely omitted women or has assumed that women's experiences do not differ from those of men. This is true of literature on the overall history of Ireland and of literature specific to the history of Irish republicanism and the Troubles. The first major study of Irish women's history was a collection of essays published in 1978 in *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension*.[15] Since the publication of this anthology, there have been a variety of studies of Irish women's history primarily focused on challenging the traditional perceptions of women's roles throughout Irish history.[16] Historian Myrtle Hill makes a considerable contribution to this "recovery of Irish women's experiences" in her comprehensive study of women in twentieth-century Ireland.[17] Margaret Ward's research on nationalist women was some of the first to discuss how women have been excluded from Irish historiography and how their concerns and experiences differ from those of men.[18] Since the publication

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[15] Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin, eds. *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension* (Galway: Arlen House, 1978).

[16] See Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart, eds. *Irish Women's History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001); Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart, eds. *Irish Women at War: The Twentieth Century* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010); Mary O'Dowd, *A History of Women in Ireland, 1500-1800* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005); Rosemary Cullen Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland, 1870-1970* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005).

[17] Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2003), 2.

[18] Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1989).

of Ward's work, there have been more historians dedicated to the history of women's roles in the Irish republican movement.[19]

Most literature on the experiences of women in Northern Ireland produced prior to the 1998 signing of the peace agreement and formal end of the Troubles was produced by female political activists in Northern Ireland. Prominent socialist and republican activist and former Member of Parliament Bernadette Devlin published her autobiography at the beginning of the Troubles.[20] Devlin's story was one of the first to discuss how the conditions that led up to the Troubles affected republican women. Feminist and playwright Margaretta D'Arcy was the only female republican prisoner to publish her prison writings. She emphasized the historical neglect of women prisoners as one of her motivations: "And since so few books have been written about Irish women's experiences as political prisoners over the last two centuries, I felt it essential to put down my own small experience with all its limitations."[21] Monica McWilliams, the co-founder of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition political party, also wrote about her experiences during the Troubles within the context of the history of Irish women's activism.[22] McWilliams frequently writes on violence against

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[19] See Jason Knirck, *Women of the Dáil: Gender, Republicanism and the Anglo-Irish Treaty* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006); Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish Republican Women, 1900-1922* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2010); Ann Matthews, *Dissidents: Irish Republican Women, 1923-1941* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2012);

[20] Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul* (London: Pan Books, 1969).

[21] Margaretta D'Arcy, *Tell Them Everything: A Soujourn in the Prison of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at Ard Macha* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), 14.

[22] Monica McWilliams, "Struggling for Peace and Justice: Reflections on Women's Activism in Northern Ireland," *Journal of Women's History* 6, no.4 (1995).

women during periods of political conflict in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.[23]

Furthermore, other scholars have used the case of Northern Ireland in a comparative

context to illustrate the difficulties facing women during periods of political conflict.[24]

Although more recent scholarship has begun to consider the experiences of women in

Northern Ireland before, during, and after the Troubles, the historiography continues

to be dominated by men.[25] The literature on prison-related matters during the Troubles

is particularly male-dominated and has consistently ignored or diminished the

contributions of women political prisoners to the republican struggle for Irish

independence.

Journalists like Tim Pat Coogan and David Beresford have been at the

forefront of the production of this prison literature. While Coogan is one of the few

authors who mentions the Armagh dirty protest in his account of the republican prison

struggle, his discussion of the Armagh women is overtly sexist. Coogan frequently

comments on the physical appearance of the Armagh women, describing one prisoner

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[23] Monica McWilliams, "Violence Against Women and Political Conflict: The Northern Ireland Experience," *Critical Criminology* 8, no. 1 (1997); Monica McWilliams and Fionnuala Ni Aolain, "There is a War Going on You Know:' Addressing the Complexity of Violence Against Women in Conflicted and Post Conflict Societies," *Transitional Justice Review* 1, no. 2 (2013).

[24] Cynthia Cockburn, *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict* (London: Zed Books, 1998); Eilish Rooney, "Political Division, Practical Alliance: Problems for Women in Conflict," *Journal of Women's History* 6/7, no.4/1 (1995): 40-48; Smyth, "International Trends, Paying Our Disrespects to the Bloody States We're In," 190-215.

[25] For a suggested reading list on women and the conflict in Northern Ireland See Fionnuala McKenna, "Women and the Conflict – Details of Source Material," CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet), accessed April 10, 2016, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/women/source.htm.
Although CAIN has a page dedicated to women and the conflict as a "key issue," the page detailing the events leading up to the 1981 hunger strike makes no mention of any protests at Armagh Gaol. The exclusion of women from this narrative demonstrates the persistence of a male-dominated history of the Troubles, specifically of prison resistance during the Troubles. See Martin Melaugh, "The Hunger Strike of 1981 – A Chronology of Main Events," CAIN, accessed April 10, 2016, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/hstrike/chronology.htm.

as "the girl with the baby who was…a fine-looking, well-developed, brown-eyed

woman with close-cropped, stylish hair."[26] Like much of the literature on republican

prisoners during the Troubles, Beresford's book focuses on the 1981 hunger strike at

Long Kesh Prison.[27] That hunger strike is undeniably one of the most important events

in the history of Irish republicanism, but much of the literature on the prison struggle

during the Troubles focuses on this strike and other protests at Long Kesh Prison

while ignoring the similar protests at Armagh Gaol. David McKittrick and David

McVea's widely praised history of the Troubles, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, does

not include any mention of protests by the Armagh women.[28] Similarly, Richard

English fails to mention the protesting women in his well-received book *Armed

Struggle: The History of IRA*.[29] Kieran McEvoy also excludes female prisoners in his

authoritative volume *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland.* However,

unlike McKittrick and McVea or English, McEvoy acknowledges the significance and

the need for studies of female imprisonment in Northern Ireland.[30] Female prisoners

are outside of the scope of his analysis purely because he did not have access to them

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[26] Tim Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket: The Inside Story of the IRA Prisoners' 'Dirty' Protest* (New York: Palgrave MAcMillian, 2002), 234.

[27] David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987).

[28] David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: Blackstaff Press, 2002).

[29] Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[30] For a comprehensive study of female political imprisonment in Northern Ireland comparable to McEvoy's study of male paramilitary imprisonment see Mary S. Corcoran *Out of Order: The Political Imprisonment of Women in Northern Ireland, 1972-98* (Portland: Willan Publishing, 2006).

while conducting his research.[31] Allen Feldman was similarly limited to male

prisoners while researching his book *Formations of Violence*, although he does

include a limited discussion of the Armagh women's dirty protest and women's

resistance more generally.[32]

Despite the male-dominated literature on prison-related issues during the

Troubles, there have been a few key studies of female political imprisonment that

inform this project. The first is a journalistic account of the experiences of female

paramilitary prisoners in the 1970s written by Nell McCafferty. McCafferty argues

that prior to the 1980 dirty protest "the women in Armagh…attracted no attention at

all."[33] She was the first to make any mention of the three women who began a hunger

strike in Armagh Gaol in December 1980, concurrent with a hunger strike among

some of the men at Long Kesh Prison. Writing while these protests were unfolding

and ongoing, McCafferty was already keenly aware that the 1980 Armagh dirty protest

was a turning point for women, saying: "As we enter 1981, the situation of women in

Northern Ireland is finally attracting more than symbolic attention."[34] The treatment of

the Armagh women in Coogan (whose text *On the Blanket* was first published in

1980) and McCafferty's work demonstrates some of the challenges of writing about

ongoing political struggles. While Coogan completely ignores the gendered

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[31] Kieran McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Irelandt: Resistance, Management, and Release* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8.

[32] Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 94-99, 174.

[33] Nell McCafferty, *The Armagh Women* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1981), 29.

[34] Ibid., 80.

implications of the dirty protest, McCafferty focuses too closely on the issue as a feminist one. Both texts fall into a trap, identified by Laura Weinstein, of assuming that knowledge of the women's dirty protest does not change the understanding of dirty protests as a tactic of prison resistance or of republican imprisonment as a whole.[35]

Weinstein was one of the first scholars to properly contextualize the Armagh dirty protest within the history of Irish republicanism and the Troubles and illuminate the significance of the protest in recent Northern Irish history. While she draws on Aretxaga's analysis, Weinstein argues that Aretxaga placed too much emphasis on the symbolism of menstrual blood within the Armagh dirty protest, and like McCafferty, she fell into the trap of over-emphasizing the gendered aspects of the protest.[36] Weinstein approaches the resistance of the Armagh women as both a republican issue and a feminist issue. This project adds to her discussion of the multiplicities of identities implicit in the Armagh women's resistance by further contextualizing the Armagh dirty protest within the history of Irish republicanism as an anti-colonial movement and the Troubles primarily as an anti-colonial struggle.

Terminology and Methodology

The issue of individual and communal political identity is central to this study. At various times throughout the Troubles, the British administration used prisons as sites

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[35] Laura Weinstein, "The Significance of the Armagh Dirty Protest," *Éire-Ireland* 41, no. 3-4 (2006): 13.

[36] Ibid., 27.

in which to delegitimize republicanism as a political identity at both the individual and communal level. Consequently, collective acts of resistance among republican prisoners, particularly between 1976 and 1981, were all organized around the issue of political identity. Northern Irish republican identity was a product of both the historical development of Irish republicanism (heavily influenced by Catholicism) and the particular conditions of Northern Ireland's experience with British colonialism. The Armagh dirty protest raised fundamental questions about the compatibility of republican identity with the developing women's movement in Northern Ireland.

The title of this project, "neither men nor completely women" comes from Begoña Aretxaga's study on women, nationalism, and political subjectivity in Northern Ireland and speaks to the complexities of identity for republican women.[37] The Armagh dirty protest was necessarily a part of both the republican movement and the women's movement in Northern Ireland. The male republican leadership who dismissed the protest viewed it primarily as a distraction from the hunger strikes of male prisoners at Long Kesh Prison. For these men, the protest was primarily a feminist issue. Mainstream Irish feminists condemned all forms of political violence (for which the Armagh women were imprisoned) and viewed the Armagh dirty protest primarily as a republican issue. When they began their protest, the Armagh women did not consider their gender as significant; they perceived their struggle as the same as that of the men in Long Kesh.[38] However, their protest was also uniquely shaped by

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[37] Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 138.

[38] Ibid.

their position as women within a male-dominated colonial prison system and a male-dominated republican movement.

Discussions of political identities in Northern Ireland demand a note on terminology, primarily the clarification of the categories of British/Protestant/loyalist/unionist and Irish/Catholic/republican/nationalist. Primordial national identity is an inherently divisive and exclusive concept in Northern Ireland that contributes to the false narrative of the Troubles as an ethno-nationalist or sectarian conflict. The conflation of Catholic identity with Irish/republican/nationalist identity and Protestant identity with British/loyalist/unionist identity contributes to that false narrative. In this study, I only use Catholic and Protestant as indicators of community identity when religious identity was central to state policies, particularly when the British state enacted discriminatory laws against the Catholic minority specifically because of their Catholic identity. The majority of this analysis focuses on Irish republicanism, and I use the term republican to refer to individuals and organizations affiliated with the IRA, those who self-identify with the republican cause, and those whose primary objective is a free and united Ireland. While some studies on Northern Irish identity differentiate between republican and nationalist, an exploration of the specific differences between republican and nationalist identities is largely outside of the scope of this analysis. A lengthy discussion of the specific similarities and differences between loyalism and unionism is not necessary for this study. I generally use the term unionism when referring to the political ideology that supports the union between

Great Britain and Northern Ireland. When discussing the events of the Troubles, I use the term loyalist to refer to particular groups that identified as loyalists rather than as unionists. Similarly, I do not use the term feminist to describe individuals or organizations unless they explicitly identify with feminist ideology, although I take an overall feminist approach to this project. This study focuses on republicanism and feminism as coexisting and sometimes contradictory political ideologies, so some oversimplifications of other identities is inevitable. However, I endeavor to avoid obfuscating identities or perpetuating inaccurate equivalencies between political ideologies whenever possible.

In addition to the secondary sources outlined in the historiography above, my research draws on both published and unpublished primary sources. The published primary sources are primarily memoirs and autobiographies of prisoners and republican activists including Gerry Adams (the current President of Sinn Féin, the largest republican political party in Northern Ireland), Bobby Sands (the leader of the 1981 hunger strike at Long Kesh Prison), and Bernadette Devlin. I also engage with a body of unpublished sources accessed through the Northern Ireland Political Collection at Linen Hall Library in Belfast, Northern Ireland. These sources fall into three broad categories. The first category is British documents on the management of the prison system. Most of these documents were published by various offices and politicians within the British administration in Northern Ireland. Many documents published in the late 1970s and early 1980s detail the structure of prison life and special policies for protesting prisoners. The second category is republican material on

the prison struggle, which includes reports, pamphlets, and posters published by Sinn

Féin, other republican organizations, and certain groups within the women's

movement. Like scholarship that engages with paramilitary imprisonment in Northern

Ireland, the majority of these documents focus on the men of Long Kesh Prison.

However, documents published by women's organizations highlight the struggle of the

Armagh women. Finally, the third category of primary sources consists of unpublished

statements, letters, or journals of republican women who were either political

prisoners themselves or interacted with the prison system through their imprisoned

male relatives.

Thesis Overview and Significance

This project is divided into four chapters, which can broadly be divided into two parts.

The first part, chapters one and two, provides the context for this study and focuses on

the history of the colonial relationship between Great Britain and (Northern) Ireland

and the development of the Northern Irish prison system. In chapter one, I trace the

origins of the British involvement in Ireland, beginning with the twelfth-century

Anglo-Norman invasions. I highlight key changes in Great Britain's colonial

relationship with Ireland, including the plantation system of the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries, the Act of Union (1800), and the partition of Ireland (1921). I

also trace the development of Irish republicanism, particularly since the beginning of

the twentieth century. Finally I discuss the role of women in Irish republicanism,

arguing that traditional gender norms for Irish republican women are based on images

of the ideal Irish woman informed by conservative Catholic values. In chapter two, I discuss the prison system in Ireland, focusing on three Northern Irish prisons: Crumlin Road Gaol, Armagh Gaol, and Long Kesh Prison. I emphasize how changing prison structures in the late-twentieth century represented changes in the British administration's approach to managing the conflict. These changes were also reflected in emergency legislation passed throughout the Troubles. In order to discuss these changes, I follow McEvoy's categorization of three distinct models for prison management during the Troubles: reactive containment (1969-75), criminalization (1976-81), and managerialism (1981-2000).[39]

The second part of this project is comprised of chapters three and four. It focuses on republican prison resistance, particularly among the men of Long Kesh and the women of Armagh. In chapter three I argue that prison resistance during the period of reactive containment was primarily focused on strengthening community identity and advocating for better treatment and conditions within the prison system. In 1976, when the British government abolished political status and transitioned into the period of criminalization the tactics and objectives of republican prison resistance changed considerably. I focus on three collective tactics of resistance popular during this period: blanket protests, dirty protests, and hunger strikes. I argue that between 1976 and 1981, the prison was the primary site of confrontation between the British state and Irish republicans. This chapter also examines on the body as the central site of prisoners' resistance and how the gendered body was implicated differently in men's

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[39] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 11-19.

and women's resistance. Finally, in chapter four I focus on the effects of the 1980

Armagh dirty protest, paying particular attention to how republicans, feminists, and

other political groups perceived this protest. I argue that this protest was a significant

turning point in the history of women's involvement in the Irish republican movement

and in the republican prison struggle during the Troubles.

      I argue that resistance among the Armagh women was neither entirely a

republican issue, nor solely a feminist issue; it was necessarily both. The Armagh dirty

protest highlighted contradictions within Irish republicanism and feminism and

demonstrates the complex nature of identity for women in anti-colonial struggles.

Male republican leadership encouraged republican women to engage in the struggle

through their roles as dictated by the influence of Catholicism on republicanism and

the history of women's involvement in the Irish republican struggle. Conservative

Catholic norms valued women's roles within the home, so political mobilization

among republican women that invoked their roles as wives as mothers was acceptable.

However, political mobilization that transgressed these traditional gender roles was

not. By displaying women's sexuality through the centrality of the body as a site of

resistance and the presence of menstrual blood, the Armagh dirty protest transgressed

traditional republican gender roles. Therefore, republican leaders did not initially

support the protest.

      The reluctance of republican leaders to support the women's protest represents

the tendency of anti-colonial movements to recreate the same forms of oppression

perpetuated by colonial institutions.[40] When the tactics or goals of an anti-colonial movement come into conflict with those of a contemporaneous women's (or feminist) movement, women are coerced or forced into silence for the good of "The Cause" which is "always male…[and] must never be betrayed [or] represented as anything but wholly good and legitimate."[41] In the case of Irish republicanism, "The Cause" is a free and united Ireland, one which has not yet been achieved in Northern Ireland. The case of the Armagh dirty protest demonstrates a moment in which a feminist issue became a prominent part of a dominant anti-colonial movement. The inclusion of the Armagh women's resistance within dominant republican discourse was ultimately a result of the combination of the political conditions of the Troubles in 1980-81, the particular tactic of a dirty protest, and collaboration between the women and key actors within various republican institutions.

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[40] Ailbhe Smyth, "International Trends, Paying Our Disrespects to the Bloody States We're In: Women, Violence, Culture, and the State," *Journal of Women's History* 6, no. 4 (1995): 200.

[41] Ibid., 196.

Chapter 1: Reframing the Troubles as an Anti-Colonial Struggle

Introduction

This chapter provides the historical background on the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Central to this contextualization is the development of Irish republicanism and the

changing position of women vis-à-vis the conflict. The chapter begins by examining

the historical relationship between Great Britain and Ireland, tracing the establishment

and transformation of the colonial relationship between the two societies from the

early-modern period through the partition of Ireland in 1921. The partition of Ireland

is central pivot in the overall trajectory of the conflict as produced the structural,

institutional, and social underpinnings of the conflict in Northern Ireland which this

thesis takes as its case study. The chapter then provides an overview of the events of

the late-1960s that led to the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland between

Catholic and Protestant communities, and the ensuing British military occupation.

Since this thesis analyzes republican women political prisoners in this conflict, this

first chapter ends with a discussion of the development of Irish republicanism as a

political movement and the historical roles that women played in republican struggle

for liberation from British rule.

(Northern) Ireland as a British Colony

The origin of the British presence in Ireland is typically identified with the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman invasions.[42] These early invasions focused on land acquisition and settlement, and established a feudal lordship between Ireland and England. Following a failed rebellion against the crown in 1534, the Parliament of Ireland declared Henry VIII of England as King of Ireland, and all inhabitants of the country were made subjects of the crown.[43] The ruling Tudor monarchs were faced with the challenge of integrating Irish clans into the English ruling system. Concomitantly, religious conversion of the native Irish from Catholicism to Protestantism was added as a central concern.[44] The Tudor monarchs attempted to integrate Irish clans into the English ruling system through a legal mechanism called "surrender and regrant," which allowed clan chiefs to guarantee their property under English common law, provided they professed loyalty to the crown.[45] Clans who refused to participate in this system had their land confiscated and used to set up plantations throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The modern colonial relationship between Great Britain and Ireland was primarily shaped by this plantation system.[46]

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[42] Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), vii-viii.

[43] The sixteenth-century British conquest of Ireland (also called the Tudor conquest) marked a turning point in the British monarchy's approach to Ireland. The attempts to establish English rule in Ireland through a feudal relationship failed, so beginning with Henry VIII, the Tudor monarchs launched a series of military invasions throughout the sixteenth century that brought Ireland under the full control of the British monarchy. See Ciaran Brady, *The Chief Governors: The Rise and Fall of Reform Government in Tudor Ireland, 1536-1588* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 1-11.

[44] Pamela Clayton, "Religion, Ethnicity, and Colonialism as Explanations of the Northern Ireland Conflict," in *Rethinking Northern Ireland: Culture, Ideology and Colonialism*, ed. David Miller (New York: Longman, 1998), 48.

[45] Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 45.

[46] Liam Kennedy, "Introduction: Ulster Since 1600," in *Ulster Since 1600: Politics, Economy, and Society*, eds. Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

The southern province of Munster featured the first of these plantations. Yet, it was in the northern province of Ulster that the crown established the most economically exploitative plantations. Members of the British government strategically identified land within Ulster to allocate to British settlers and establish new towns that gave Protestants control over the majority of land.[47] By 1640, the native Irish controlled less than 20 per cent of all available land in Ulster, and their settlement was restricted to less fertile land.[48] Thousands of British settlers were brought to the north of Ireland under this plantation system, and as landowners they had greater rights under English common law than did their Irish tenants. Aside from physically consolidating English rule in Ireland, the plantation system also sought to further assimilate the native Irish to English culture through religious conversion.

It was under this plantation system that institutionalized discrimination against Catholics in favor of Protestants began. Increasingly harsh economic restrictions on Catholic communities and general discrimination led to the 1641 Irish Rebellion. Catholics who used to be a part of the landowning class led the rebellion. They feared further anti-Catholic policies, and thus attempted to seize control of the British administration.[49] The leaders of the rebellion planned a series of insurrections against British forts throughout Ireland, with the ultimate goal of seizing control of Dublin Castle, the seat of the British monarchy. The rebels successfully gained control over

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[47] Canny, *Making Ireland British,* 189.

[48] Thomas Bartlett, "Politics and Society, 1600-1800," in *Ulster Since 1600: Politics, Economy, and Society*, eds. Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.

[49] Canny, *Making Ireland British,* 467.

much of Ulster, but they were unsuccessful in seizing Dublin Castle.[50] The rebellion was quickly met with resistance from the British military and defeated.

The aftermath of the 1641 rebellion helped push England, Ireland, and Scotland into multiple civil wars.[51] In Ireland, particularly in Ulster, the controlling Protestant minority recognized that the rebellion marked an unprecedented unity among the Catholic community, and they feared another rebellion. Their fear was exacerbated by the political turmoil in England and abolition of the monarchy. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 came the guarantee of Protestant land titles and the passage of Penal Laws designed to force Irish Catholics and dissenting Protestants to convert to the Protestant Church of Ireland. These measures reassured Ulster Protestants that political, social, and religious authority remained with them.[52] Their rule was uncontested for nearly a century until the 1798 Irish Rebellion, which broke out amid a global revolutionary moment. The ideals of the French and American Revolutions heavily influenced the organizers of this rebellion, the Society of United Irishmen. The group was the first to call for unity among farmers and peasants of all religions to fight for independence from the British ruling class.[53] The British defeated the 1798 rebellion through military violence and by encouraging divisiveness among the Catholic and Protestant members of the United Irishmen.[54] In the wake of the

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[50] Bartlett, "Politics and Society, 1600-1800," 29.

[51] Ibid., 32.

[52] Bartlett, "Politics and Society, 1600-1800," 36.

[53] McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles,* 68.

[54] Bartlett, "Politics and Society, 1600-1800," 41.

rebellion's demise, sectarian tensions in Ulster grew. As a result of this failed attempt at cultivating a class-based opposition to the British, Irish republicanism emerged to become the dominant ideology of opposition to British unionism.

The British response to the 1798 rebellion resulted in a new relationship between Great Britain and Ireland, codified in the Act of Union of 1800. The act created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. For some historians, this act ended the colonial relationship between Great Britain and Ireland because the two were formally united and (in theory) all citizens on the island of Ireland obtained rights as citizens of the United Kingdom.[55] More recent scholarship questions whether the union marked the end of Great Britain's colonial relationship with Ireland.[56] These scholars emphasize the unaltered power relations between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland throughout the nineteenth century as evidence of a continued colonial system. The spread of the representative principle and an electoral system was well underway in Great Britain by the nineteenth century. The resulting policies in Ireland gave the majority Catholic population dominance in local politics and opportunities to advocate for home rule. However, the Catholic majority had little power to affect change at the national level during the nineteenth century. The Act of Union abolished the Parliament of Ireland and moved governance of Irish affairs to London. The Parliament of Great Britain was expanded to include some representatives from

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[55] See Joseph Ruane, "Colonialism and the Interpretation of Irish Historical Development," in *Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology Through Irish Case Studies*, eds. Marilyn Silverman and P.H. Gulliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London: Athlone Press, 1993).

[56] See David Miller, ed., *Rethinking Northern Ireland: Culture, Ideology and Colonialism* (New York: Longman, 1998).

Ireland, but the majority of Irish parliamentary boroughs were disenfranchised. The act therefore deepened, entrenched, and institutionalized the unequal relationship between Protestants (as a settler population and metropole power) and Catholics (as the native population).[57]

The Origins of the Troubles: World War I and Partition

It was not until the early-twentieth century that the Parliament of the United Kingdom seriously took up the question of home rule for Ireland (the "Irish Question").[58] Great Britain, like much of the world, experienced a greater level of destruction during World War I than ever before. The destruction of the war was particularly harsh on Ireland because of the legacy of the Great Famine, a period of mass starvation, disease, and emigration from Ireland between 1845 and 1852.[59] The economic devastation of the war also aggravated a growing class divide among the descendants of the plantation settlers. Viewing the British government as upholding the status quo, Protestants who were not a part of the landowning elite were increasingly less likely to support the unionist agenda in Ireland than their landowning counterparts.[60]

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[57] Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, "Irish Nationalism and the Conflict in Northern Ireland," in *Rethinking Northern Ireland: Culture, Ideology and Colonialism*, ed. David Miller (New York: Longman, 1998), 57.

[58] Thomas Hennessey, *Divided Ireland: World War I and Partition* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 3.

[59] See R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams, eds. *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History, 1845-52* (Dublin: Liliput Press, 1994).

[60] David Miller, "Colonialism and Academic Representations of the Troubles," in *Rethinking Northern Ireland: Culture, Ideology, and Colonialism,* ed. David Miller (New York: Longman, 1998), 10.

Republican activists took advantage of weakened support for British control of Ireland during World War I. Republicans began coordinating a rebel force, and on the morning of April 24, 1916 they launched an armed insurgency based in Dublin. The rebels declared their goal as establishing an independent Irish republic. Organizers of the 1916 Easter Rebellion, as this insurrection came to be known, assumed that the British military would be distracted by the ongoing war. The British military faltered initially, but recovered quickly, and put the Easter Rebellion to an end just six days after it began. The leaders of the rebellion were sent to Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin, and fourteen men were executed for their roles in the rebellion.[61] These executions of the dramatically changed the attitude of the Irish people towards those who fought in the rebellion and reaffirmed republicanism within the Irish national consciousness as the greatest hope for independence. Soon after, on July 1, 1916 the British government deployed the 36th Ulster Division to fight in the war. The division sustained over 5,000 causalities over three days of the Battle of the Somme. That experience and the attention it was given helped deepen the commitment of Ulster unionists.[62] This was particularly important given that by the end of the war, Protestant support for unionism was wavering in all of Ireland with the exception of Ulster.

While Ulster Protestants fought and died in the name of Great Britain during World War I partly as an affirmation of their Britishness, Ulster Catholics refused to fight partly as an affirmation of their Irishness. Many Catholic republicans joined

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[61] The Office of Public Works for the Government of Ireland, *Kilmainham Gaol Visitors' Guide* (Dublin: Office of Public Works, 2015).

[62] Hennessey, *Divided Ireland,* 192.

together in 1917 to form the Irish Republican Army (IRA) as a revolutionary paramilitary organization dedicated to achieving independence for Ireland. In 1919, the dominant Irish republican political party, Sinn Féin, broke away from the Parliament of the United Kingdom and established the Dáil Éireann (Assembly of Ireland) of a newly declared Irish Republic.[63] Concurrent with this act of political defiance, the IRA waged a guerrilla war against British rule inaugurated in 1919 by the Irish War of Independence.[64]

Faced with the socioeconomic dislocation of the war, deepening divisions among the Irish unionists, and unprecedented steps taken by Irish republicans, the British attempted a new strategy to secure their rule over the whole of Ireland. The Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the 1920 Government of Ireland Act to try and stop the violence and maintain control. The act established limited home rule institutions across Ireland and separated the thirty-two counties into two subdivisions. The six north-eastern counties were to become Northern Ireland and the remaining larger portion of the island was to form Southern Ireland.[65] Both subdivisions were intended to remain part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Yet as the Irish War of Independence continued throughout 1920 and 1921and republicans gained support, the British government was forced to reconsider its goals.

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[63] Bill Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 44.

[64] Michael Hughes, *Ireland Divided: The Roots of the Modern Irish Problem* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 44-57.

[65] Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War*, 67.

The government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and Irish

representatives from the Dáil Éireann agreed to a treaty to end the war on December 6,

1921. The Anglo-Irish Treaty officially ended the Irish War of Independence and

provided for the establishment of an Irish Free State in what the 1920 act declared

Southern Ireland.[66] Many republicans did not support this treaty for fear it would

prevent Ireland from ever being united. The split between the pro-treaty and anti-treaty

republican forces led to an Irish civil war, predominantly split along the lines of north

and south drawn in 1920 by the British. The pro-treaty forces in the south were

supported by the British and split from the IRA, which became exclusively anti-treaty

in 1922. The anti-treaty IRA forces were concentrated in the north, and were opposed

by both the British and the Irish Free State. The Irish Civil War ended in 1923 after

the official establishment of the Irish Free State with a pro-treaty victory.[67]

The partition of Ireland was the realization of the republican struggle for the

Irish in the south, who began identifying more as nationalists rather than as

republicans. Others continued to support the republican cause and maintained that

partial independence of Ireland was inadequate. The post-1921 period thus featured

the radicalization of Irish republicanism under the leadership of the anti-treaty IRA,

which maintained that the Irish Free State government was illegitimate. This major

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[66] The Anglo-Irish Treaty provided for the creation of an Irish Free State that included all of Ireland and would be established as a dominion within the British Empire within the next year. However, the partition of the 32 counties of Ireland as created under the 1920 Government of Ireland Act dictated that Northern and Southern Ireland be treated as separate entities. Southern Ireland was to become the Irish Free State, and Northern Ireland would opt out of the treaty and remain a part of the United Kingdom.

[67] However, it is important to note that the Irish Free State did not truly gain full independence from the British until 1949 after the passage of the Republic of Ireland Act that declared Ireland a republic and created the contemporary governance structure of the Republic of Ireland.

split between the priorities of the residents of the Irish Free State and those of the

residents of Northern Ireland continued throughout heightened violence in the late-

twentieth century.

Civil Rights Turned Armed Resistance, 1968-72

For the centuries that all of Ireland was a British colony, a Protestant minority had

political power over a Catholic majority. The British deliberately drew the border

demarcating Northern Ireland to restructure that relationship and give Protestants the

majority in the six counties. That majority controlled the Northern Irish Parliament

through the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) from the formation of Northern Ireland

through the late 1960s.[68] Because the UUP represented a majority, the party appeared

to be democratically governing from Stormont, the seat of the parliament. In reality,

the government instituted policies of political, economic, and social discrimination

against the Catholic minority.[69] The UUP-controlled government began instituting

laws in 1948 to expand public health service, bolster public education, and increase

the number of public sector jobs. The legislation that created this new "welfare state"

produced a Catholic middle class that did not exist in prior decades. Many of the

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[68] The terms Protestant and Catholic, while often used to encompass divisions between political groups in Northern Ireland, are not synonymous with unionists and loyalist or nationalist and republican. Here these terms are used to reflect the religious ideology of the UUP as the dominant political party and the discriminatory laws they enacted against the Catholic population of Northern Ireland. While most unionists and loyalists were Protestants and most nationalists and republicans were Catholics, these identities cannot and should not be conflated.

[69] The Executive Committee of the Privy Council was the name of the government of Northern Ireland created by the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, which also created the Parliament of Northern Ireland as a home rule legislature. These institutions are generally referred to together as Stormont, which refers to the estate in which they met outside of Belfast, Northern Ireland.

members of this middle class were disillusioned because many Catholics still experienced social, political, and economic discrimination. They could not end this discrimination through confronting the UUP through formal political processes, so they turned to other forms of mobilization, most notably paramilitary organizations and civil rights organizations.[70]

Paramilitary organization among Irish republicans dates back to the early-twentieth century, when the IRA was first formed. The ideology of the IRA changed with the political situation in Ireland, most notably when the group adopted a strictly anti-treaty ideology during and directly after the Irish Civil War. Even with the civil war defeat of the IRA, the organization maintained that the Free State was illegitimate and the only way to achieve a truly independent Irish republic was through military means.[71] The interwar IRA suffered from marginalization in the Free State, factionalization within its membership along class lines, and limited military possibilities.[72] With the outbreak of World War II, the IRA strengthened its military power (partially through links with German intelligence) and launched bombing campaigns in Great Britain and the Irish Free State. During World War II, the neutral Irish Free State feared that IRA activity within its borders and in Great Britain would threaten the country's political stability, so the state forcefully regulated and repressed

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[70] Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalities: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2005), xii-xiii.

[71] Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War*, 43.

[72] English, *Armed Struggle,* 49-51.

IRA activity.[73] Even so, the IRA's membership continued to expand throughout World War II, and they began to organize new types of military campaigns.

The most important IRA military campaign introduced during the war was an armed campaign in Northern Ireland, known as the Northern Campaign. This campaign consisted of a series of attacks planned between 1942 and 1944 against local police forces and other key targets in the north. Just over ten years later, the IRA launched the Border Campaign, also in Northern Ireland. This marked the third IRA offensive campaign in the north (the first was during the Irish War of Independence).[74] The Border Campaign was a military failure, and when it ended in 1962, the IRA was left with very few resources or supporters.[75] It appeared as if militant republicanism could not bring about independence for the north. However, the persistence of the IRA in the early-twentieth century had helped produce the conditions from which emerged a civil rights movement, a revived paramilitary organization, and the Troubles as a whole.

This rising civil rights movement was led by the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) and Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). The DHAC and NICRA organized a march in Derry on October 5, 1968 demanding an end to the discrimination of the Catholic majority by the Protestant controlled local authorities.[76] Protestors were met with force from the local police, the Royal Ulster

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[73] Ibid., 53-55.

[74] Ibid., 73-75

[75] English, *Armed Struggle,* 81.

[76] Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalities*, 18.

Constabulary (RUC). The confrontation left dozens hospitalized and ignited three days

of rioting in Derry. Catholics barricaded themselves in the Bogside neighborhood of

the city, throwing stones and petrol bombs at RUC forces.[77] This confrontation

between Catholics and the police is often cited as the start of "the Troubles," the 1968-

1998 period of organized armed resistance by the Irish population of Northern Ireland

against discriminatory laws and the larger system of British rule. After these riots

broke out, the response to increasingly organized Catholic resistance was met with

increased British state violence.

　　　　The British response to continued civil rights marches and organized actions

brought about the second fundamental shift in the colonial relationship between Great

Britain and Ireland during the twentieth century. The British government instituted

Operation Banner in 1969, sending British troops to back up the RUC. This policy

officially inaugurated the British military occupation of Northern Ireland.[78] The

occupation was evidence of increasingly drastic attempts by the British to control the

resistance movement in Northern Ireland and secure it as a peaceful state within the

United Kingdom. Within Great Britain, the violence in Northern Ireland was perceived

similarly to colonial insurrections the British had faced elsewhere.[79] The trajectory of

the IRA also changed drastically at this time. While the organization was all but

destroyed in 1962, the British occupation reignited the need for paramilitary

organization among republicans. In 1969, shortly after Operation Banner, some

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalities*, 134.

[79] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 67.

republicans split off from the IRA and formed the Provisional IRA (PIRA). The

Provos, as they were sometimes known, had many of the same goals as the old IRA.[80]

PIRA was the largest faction of the IRA throughout the Troubles. The organization

became increasingly associated with the Irish republican political party Sinn Féin,

although the long-term strategy of the PIRA was primarily based on a five-fold plan

for waging guerilla war.[81] The Provos, like their predecessors, remained first and

foremost a militant organization.

      As the IRA's goals and tactics were increasingly radicalized, the British

inaugurated their policy of internment on August 9, 1971 through Operation

Demetrius. Internment, the policy of arrest and imprisonment without charge or trial,

was a renewed attempt by the British to control political dissidence in the north and

repress the IRA. Over the three days of Operation Demetrius, the British government

sent thousands of police and soldiers to arrest over 340 suspected IRA members.

While most were released less than three days after their internment, some were sent

to interrogation centers or prisons for weeks, months, or years.[82] Over these same

three days British paratroopers killed eleven Catholic civilians in the Ballymurphy

area of Belfast. The Ballymurphy Massacre was the first evidence of an upsurge in

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[80] Richard English, *Armed Struggle*, 109.

The PIRA was formed in 1969 and saw itself as the successor to the original IRA. The members referred to their organization as simply the Irish Republican Army. Most scholars use the acronym IRA in place of PIRA when speaking about the organization during the Troubles. Unless otherwise indicated, where this paper follows that nomenclature, and IRA is used in place of PIRA.

[81] Brenden O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 23.

[82] McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles,* 79.

British state violence after the introduction of internment. Operation Demetrius was largely a failure, as information on the activities of known or suspected IRA members was outdated. Nevertheless, the IRA continued its domestic bombing campaign, now more heavily supported by working-class Catholic communities than ever before.[83] Internment also prompted the IRA to go on the offensive, and they launched a bombing campaign in England, which lasted until 1975 and included some of the most deadly and most publicized IRA attacks throughout the Troubles.[84]

Increased IRA attacks abroad also correlated with increased violence by the British military in Northern Ireland. On January 30, 1972, a day now known as Bloody Sunday, NICRA organized a march of thousands of Catholics who had been living in unfair conditions in Derry's Bogside neighborhood. Although the march began peacefully, British paratroopers opened fire on the crowd before they could leave the Bogside. Fourteen people were shot and killed in the confrontation. Bloody Sunday was the single bloodiest day of the Troubles. It also marked the start of the bloodiest year of the conflict; over five hundred more people were killed in 1972 than any other year of the conflict.[85]

This escalation of violence coupled with the failed attempts to deter republican activity through internment encouraged the British to reevaluate their approach to the conflict in general and to republican political dissidence in particular. The Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the Northern Ireland (Temporary Provisions) Act of

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[83] Ibid., 81.

[84] English, *Armed Struggle,* 167.

[85] Mcittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 88-89.

1972, indefinitely suspending the Stormont government and giving the British

Parliament full legislative control over Northern Ireland. The British government,

seated at Westminster, took full control over Northern Irish municipal and security

concerns. Home rule in Northern Ireland as seated in the Stormont government came

to an end on March 28, 1972, after fifty years of Protestant unionist dominance and

just months after Bloody Sunday. This restructuring of the relationship between Great

Britain and Northern Ireland once again put the Irish under direct British military and

civilian control.[86] Initially, Great Britain had hoped to phase out the system of direct

rule and come to a politically diplomatic solution to the conflict with both the IRA and

unionist groups. However, as violent confrontations escalated through 1972 and over

the next few years, that plan quickly dissolved.

Attempts at Ceasefire and Diplomatic Agreements, 1975-98

In 1975, the IRA declared a ceasefire that reflected of a desire among both the British

government and paramilitary organizations to deescalate violence after the difficult

years of the early 1970s. The IRA ceasefire ended in 1981 in response to two hunger

strikes by republican prisoners at Long Kesh Prison outside of Belfast in 1980 and

1981. Bobby Sands, the most famous of these hunger strikers, began the 1981 strike

on March 1st of that year. His strike lasted sixty-six days, and ended in his death,

shortly followed by the deaths of nine other prisoners who had joined his strike.[87]

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[86] John Jackson, "Many Years on in Northern Ireland: The Diplock Legacy," *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly,* 60, no. 2 (2009): 215.

[87] English, *Armed Struggle*, 194.

These strikes were accompanied with similar strikes among the women of Armagh Gaol, who used both hunger strikes and "dirty protests" to advocate for their rights.

The prison strikes were a major turning point in the IRA agenda, and the end of this second strike began the IRA's "long war." The organization reasserted that it was "only through the struggle waged by the Irish Republican Army that we [Irish republicans] win national freedom and end division and sectarianism in Ireland."[88] That struggle was primarily a war of attrition with the British state. This attempt to re-ignite the conflict characterized IRA strategy throughout the 1980s.

However, a major diplomatic development constrained support for the IRA long war strategy among some republicans. The United Kingdom and Ireland signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, which allegedly sought to implement a diplomatic solution to the conflict in the north. The agreement gave the Republic a significant consultative role in the running of Northern Ireland. Direct rule technically remained in place, but Northern Ireland was jointly administered by the British and Irish governments, and its status could not change without a majority vote.[89] This agreement was widely accepted among politicians in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It was nevertheless rejected by Northern Irish republicans who were not willing to concede that Northern Ireland remain a part of the United Kingdom. The IRA continued its war of attrition policy until the final ceasefire in 1997, which was a part of the larger peace process that led to the signing of the Good

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[88] Ibid., 212.

[89] McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles,* 189.

Friday Agreement in 1998. The agreement, which marked the official end of the

Troubles and inaugurated a new phase in British-Irish relations that many characterize

as post-conflict transformation in Northern Ireland.

Women and Republicanism in (Northern) Ireland prior to the Troubles

Throughout this history of Irish republican struggle against British colonialism,

women's rights remained secondary to the struggle for national independence. Despite

being ignored by many historians until the late-twentieth century, women have a long

history of engagement in the republican struggle for independence. Women's roles

have predominantly been written about in their own memoirs, or memorialized in

popular culture. Popular culture helped develop several tropes about women that

shaped their accepted role in republican groups and the struggle for independence

through early rebellions and into the Troubles. These tropes tended to fall into

categories of goddesses, mother, maiden, or maniac.[90] These images carried strength

and authority and were interrelated in complex relationships between culture, religion,

literature, and politics. The tropes of mother and maiden were influenced by women's

perceived role in the home and the Catholic ideal that required women (and men) to be

virgins at marriage. The maniac trope developed as an undesirable alternative to this

ideal Irish woman. Women considered maniacs were portrayed as irrational and

uncontrollable. They transgressed social and sexual norms and were neither maidens

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[90] Mary Helen Thuente, "Liberty, Hibernia and Mary Le More: United Irish Images of Women," in *The Women of 1798*, eds. Daire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (Dublin: Four Courts Printing, 1998), 9.

nor mothers.[91] Throughout of all of tropes, women were made to be symbols of an oppressed nation.

Women remained predominantly symbols in the 1798 Rebellion. Images of women as "daughters of liberty" or "patriotic virgins" played key roles in political rallies around the time of the rebellion.[92] The United Irishmen's images of women reinforced the tropes of maiden and mother as integral to the success of the republican agenda while simultaneously excluding women who transgressed those roles from that agenda. The symbolic importance of women did not, however, result in any real concern for women's rights. The United Irishmen also campaigned for emancipation from British rule, a goal that inherently included emancipation for women. However, they did not explicitly campaign for equal rights for women.

After the Act of Union of 1800 republican demands for emancipation continued, but the role of women was left unchanged. The obligations of republican women became epitomized in an ideology of "virtuous republican femininity," completely predicated on their roles as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters.[93] This ideology gave women some degree of authority, but also kept them in a symbolic and supportive role to men. Men fulfilled their civic obligations through militarized politics and armed struggle. Rebellion was men's work. It was a small but vocal minority of women who were making their voices heard in the context of the national

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[91] Thuente, "Liberty, Hibernia and Mary Le More," 25.

[92] Ibid., 19.

[93] Nancy J. Curtin, "Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity," in *The Women of 1798*, eds. Daire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong (Dublin: Four Courts Printing, 1998), 45.

struggle.[94] That minority became particularly important as the relationship between Great Britain and Ireland changed in the early-twentieth century.

Within the context of World War I, Irish women organized into social, political, and military associations for the first time. Military organizations were particularly difficult for women to form because they had to fight against the stereotypes that women were either too weak for military work or that those who engaged in this work were unfeminine.[95] Some women, predominantly working-class women, overcame these stereotypes and fought next to men. It was also during these formative years of the early-twentieth century that women became attracted to political ideologies gaining popularity in Ireland. Women increasingly aligned themselves with suffragist, nationalist, unionist, or republican agendas.

One of the most influential women's groups formed during this period was a republican group called *Cumann na mBan* (The Irish Women's Council). *Cumann na mBan* was founded in 1914 as support group aligned with the IRA in the 1916 Easter Rebellion, during the War of Independence, and during the Civil War.[96] The IRA referred to these fighters as the "women's brigade" and used their skills as a part of their armed resistance to British rule. During the Civil War, the IRA also relied on these women to protect and store arms, a duty they continued to perform throughout

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[94] Hill, *Women in Ireland,* 51.

[95] Ibid., 69.

[96] Politically neutral and pro-unionist women's associations were also formed during this time. For more information on one of the most active pro-unionist groups see Diane Urquhart, "*Ora et Labora:* The Women's Legion, 1915-18," in *Irish Women at War: The Twentieth Century*, eds. Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 1-16.

the Troubles.[97] The women of *Cumann na mBan* were fully active participants in the War of Independence and Civil War, but as is the case in many national liberation struggles, women were excluded from politics that set the framework for the Anglo-Irish Treaty and partition of Ireland.[98]

Women across Ireland were split along pro-treaty and anti-treaty lines in the years after partition. Women in the newly created state of Northern Ireland remained part of an ongoing struggle for national liberation. While women in the newly created Irish Free State had technically realized the end goal of their national liberation struggle, they were again left out of politics. The role of women in the Free State was perceived as domestic and familial, and the Constitution of the Irish Free State dictates a narrow view of Irish womanhood, based on patriarchal ideals meant to confine women to the home. Article 41 of the Constitution states that "the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved," defining woman as almost interchangeable with wife and mother.[99] Motherhood was upheld as the principal and most natural duty for women in the Irish Free State. The same was true in Northern Ireland, as well as in the United States and much of Western Europe.[100]

Unlike the experiences of the minority of women who participated in armed struggle in the early-twentieth century, the discussion of woman's role in the state in

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[97] Matthews, *Dissidents,* 31-32.

[98] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 87.

[99] Irish Constitution, art. 41, sec. 2. http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html#part13.

[100] Hill, *Women in Ireland,* 107.

the Irish Constitution points to the position of the majority of women in the state. The

perception of women was primarily shaped by class, location, and sociopolitical

context.[101] The possibility of a unified Irish women's movement beyond small

politically active groups was made virtually impossible after the partition of Ireland as

women's groups split across and within political ideologies.[102] Republican women

continued to believe that the only way to achieve liberation was to achieve the

liberation of the nation, even if the dominant republican paramilitary and political

groups paid little attention to their cause.

The Women's Movement in Northern Ireland, 1968-98

Between the 1922 partition of Ireland and the outbreak of the Troubles in the late

1960s, the social and political status of women in Northern Ireland remained fairly

constant. Aside from upsets in their traditional roles within the home during World

War II, women were still primarily perceived as wives and mothers.[103] Their

revolutionary activities of the early-twentieth century seemed relatively forgotten until

the heightened tensions of the Troubles once again called upon women to be fully

active participants in the fight for national liberation. Women were as active in the

civil rights marches of 1968 that sparked the beginning of the Troubles as they were in

previous rebellions. Women like Bernadette Devlin led marches demanding equality

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[101] Ibid., 16.

[102] Matthews, *Dissidents*, 232.

[103] Very little scholarship specific to women in Northern Ireland in the period between partition and the civil rights movements of the 1960s exists. For more information on Women in Ireland during WWII and in the immediate post-war period see Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 114-136.

for Catholics and emancipation from British rule. During these formative years of the

civil rights movement, the rhetoric of the unified national struggle continued. For men,

this rhetoric encouraged active participation in the struggle for the liberation.

However, women were still encouraged to fulfill their duty as republican mothers and

sacrifice their sons, husbands, and brothers to the national cause.[104]

Women were also pressured to neglect concerns that were not shared by men

in favor of the unified national struggle, which generally included issues of domestic

abuse and access to women's healthcare. Domestic abuse was an issue for women,

regardless of political or religious affiliation, but it was not part of public life or the

larger republican struggle and was therefore largely ignored. Women who were

victims of rape or who transgressed sexual norms by working as prostitutes were

similarly left out of the republican call for equality.[105] Because many women felt their

concerns were ignored by men, the republican cause was not always their primary

concern. However, they were discouraged from fighting for issues marked specifically

as "women's issues," which makes it difficult to extract a unified women's movement

from larger social justice movements in this period.[106] Issues that could have

potentially served as the impetus for a women's movement were co-opted by the

larger political trends towards republicanism among Catholics and unionism among

Protestants. Poverty was an issue that had the potential to bring together a unified

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[104] Curtin, "Matilda Tone and Virtuous Republican Femininity," 33.

[105] Eileen Fairweather, Róisín McDonough, and Melaine McFadyean, *Only the Rivers Run Free, Northern Ireland: The Women's War* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 41-43.

[106] Hill, *Women in Ireland,* 158.

women's movement but was politicized as a sectarian issue. Poverty affected both

working-class Catholic and Protestant women differently than it affected men because

women were left to bear the bulk of the responsibility of caring for children with few

resources. [107] However, as housing and employment discrimination against Catholics

intensified and the issue of poverty became a sectarian one, and women were unable to

entertain the possibility of uniting.

The role of women in the republican struggle for liberation in Northern Ireland

has been analyzed by scholars who write on the experiences of women in periods of

violence. Ailbhe Smyth argues that problems perceived as women's issues are

deliberately excluded from male political causes, especially in anti-colonial struggles.

The cause is always male and "must never be represented as anything but wholly good

and legitimate, even when—especially when—it is founded on the silent acquiescence

of women and the smell of their fear."[108] This dynamic is especially salient when

national liberation from colonial domination is presented as universally noble while

ignoring women's liberation from patriarchal domination. Nationalist movements

often recreate systems of colonial domination that subjugate women even after they

achieve independence, as was the case in the Irish Free State. For women in Northern

Ireland, the acknowledgement that women's equality to men was explicitly important

to national liberation did not occur in the early years of the Troubles. The absence of

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[107] Fairweather, McDonough, and McFadyean, *Only the Rivers Run Free,* 15.

[108] Smyth, "International Trends, Paying Our Disrespects to the Bloody State We're In," 196.

this conversation was not due to a lack of participation by women but rather the subjugation of women's voices in the republican movement.

The first major mobilization of women as women and as active agents in the republican struggle during the Troubles was the Falls Road Curfew protests in July 1970. The curfew prevented women in the predominantly Catholic neighborhood from buying necessities, so women outside the curfew zone responded by marching down the Falls Road and distributing basic goods. On July 3, 1970, over 3,000 women joined this effort and broke the curfew.[109] This protest was organized by women because the curfew disproportionately affected them as wives and mothers. However, this mobilization is generally grouped together with the civil rights' protests of these early years of the Troubles as evidence of republican mobilization against the British military occupation. While the Falls Road Curfew disproportionately affected women, others policies like internment primarily targeted men. While an increasing amount of republican men were being sent behind bars in the mid-1970s, women were left behind to organize on behalf of their male relatives. Women formed the Relatives' Action Committee (RAC) in 1976, which became the single largest group advocating for the release of political prisoners.[110] They still saw both of these roles as supportive to the male struggle, predominantly because women did not perceive themselves as being on the frontlines of the fighting. All but one of the eleven victims of the Ballymurphy Massacre were men, as were all of the fourteen victims of Bloody

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[109] McWilliams, "Struggling for Peace and Justice," 22.

[110] Ibid., 23.

Sunday. That perception began to change in 1977 when the first woman was shot dead while using a garbage bin lid to warn her community of the army's entrance, a common practice for women. Women began to realize that they were at the forefront of the struggle, and like men, they could be arrested or killed.

Women who were arrested and held as political prisoners began to see a similar shift in their role around the time of the founding of RAC. Women in prisons were subjected to the same treatment as men and resisted in many of the same ways as men. However, their resistance only began to be perceived as an equal part of the republican struggle by the male republican community after the 1980 no-wash protest in Armagh Goal. That protest marked a major shift in the relationship between male and female republicans predicated on the IRA's reaction to the escalation of the conflict through the expansion of the colonial prison system. After 1980, the British changed their policies towards political prisoners, and republicans changed their policies towards the inclusion of women in their struggle. The 1980s were characterized by unprecedented attention to and inclusion of women in the IRA and the political agenda of Sinn Féin. That change could not have been brought about without the collective resistance of women in Armagh Gaol and their collaboration with male prisoners.

Conclusion

The historical roots of the Troubles are to be identified in the colonial relationship between Great Britain and Ireland, and more specifically Northern Ireland. Certainly,

religious and national identities of the communities involved in the violence were

important to the conflict. Yet at its core, this was not a religious or sectarian conflict. It

was a conflict born out of a settler colonial project and centuries of political,

economic, and social inequality. The ideology of republicanism played a major role in

the organization of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland against unfair

treatment. This chapter has explained the origins of that ideology in the Irish

rebellions of 1798 and 1916 and the connections between those rebellions and the

Northern Irish republican struggle for independence. Finally, this chapter discussed

the role of women in that struggle and the common perception that women's liberation

was less significant than the liberation of the nation. The next chapter focuses on the

legal mechanisms and physical structures that the British built in Northern Ireland in

order to maintain their control, specifically within the colonial prison system.

Chapter 2: The Development of the Northern Irish Prison System and British Prison Management Models during the Troubles

Introduction

This chapter explores the physical and legal structures of the prison system in

Northern Ireland as elements of the overall apparatus of the British occupation. It

begins by tracing the historical development of Irish prisons prior to the partition of

Ireland (1921) and up to the onset of British military occupation of Northern Ireland in

1969. The second part of the chapter highlights the administrative policies and

approaches to prison management throughout the Troubles, primarily in relation to

how they dealt with paramilitary prisoners and political violence. These administrative

policies can be broken down into three models that categorize prison policies between

1969 and 2000: reactive containment (1969-75), criminalization (1976-81), and

managerialism (1981-2000).[111] These models affected the legal mechanisms that were

created to define and manage political violence throughout the Troubles. They were

also shaped by the physical structure of British prisons in Northern Ireland, which

differed from the structure of prisons constructed prior to the partition of Ireland.

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[111] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment,* 11-19.

Three prisons were key sites of incarceration and confrontation throughout the Troubles: Armagh Gaol, Crumlin Road Gaol, and Long Kesh Prison. This final part of the chapter discusses the changing conditions in these prisons and how these administrative models affected the overall position of prisons within the republican struggle for independence.

The Panopticon Prison Model in the United Kingdom and Ireland

In the late eighteenth century, social theorist Jeremy Bentham designed a prison in which all inmates could be observed by a single guard without the inmates knowing whether or not they were being watched.[112] He envisioned this panopticon as a large circular building with prisoners' cells along the circumference and a guard station in the center. Bentham's philosophy on the architecture of prisons as well as the treatment of prisoners influenced the passage of the 1779 Penitentiary Act, which introduced state prisons in Great Britain for the first time.[113] Ireland was a British colony in the late-eighteenth century, and this law was equally influential in Ireland as it was in Great Britain.

Bentham's panopticon model was applied in a variety of ways in the construction of prisons while the whole of Ireland was a client state of the Kingdom of England. There were three large prisons that were all built in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin, Armagh Gaol in Armagh, and Crumlin Road Gaol in Belfast. All of these prisons followed a form of Bentham's

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[112] Janet Semple, *Bentham's Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 45.

[113] Ibid.

model as the most efficient mechanism for maintaining security in prisons.[114] All

praised by elected officials and government leaders for their modernity when they

were built, the conditions in these prisons deteriorated quickly in the early-twentieth

century. Kilmainham Gaol closed its doors in 1924 after the formation of the Irish

Free State, but Armagh and Crumlin Road remained open until the late-twentieth

century. Conditions in Northern Irish prisons (Armagh and Crumlin Road) during the

Troubles prompted the British administration in Northern Ireland to construct two new

prisons near Belfast. The first of these was HM Prison Maze (also called Long Kesh or

the Maze) opened in 1971. The second was HM Prison Maghaberry, opened in

1986.[115] The structural differences between these prisons and those built in the

eighteenth and nineteenth-century panopticon style reflected the overall differences in

the way that the British administration approached the management of (Northern)

Ireland as one of its colonies.

In 1796, the Dublin local government opened Kilmainham Gaol (officially

named County of Dublin Gaol). The prison had two large rectangular cell blocks, three

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[114] Ibid., 33-34.

[115] Her Majesty's Prison Magilligan was another prison opened in May 1972 in County Londonderry that was especially similar to Long Kesh at the time of its construction. The early prison structure consisted of Niseen huts that were replaced with H-Blocks similar to those built at Long Kesh. This prison is not included in this analysis because the political prisoners housed here were moved to Long Kesh in 1976-77, and the prison began housing only ordinary criminals convicted of non-terrorist offenses. The major republican acts of resistance took place at Long Kesh, Crumlin Road, and Armagh, and all of these prisons have since been shut down. Magilligan is still operational, but unlike Maghaberry, the prison did not receive any political or non-conforming prisoners in the later decades of the Troubles. These distinctions are important to note and separate Magilligan from the prisons discussed in this analysis.

See McEvoy *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 18; Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 55.

stories high, whose doors opened into the central area.[116] It was the Irish prison that

most closely followed Bentham's plan. In 1862, the east wing opened, also with three

floors positioned around a large central area. The ninety-six cells in the east wing were

added in response to the rising prison population, because the prevailing belief at the

time was that silence and separation were the keys to reforming criminals.[117]

Government officials at the local and national levels praised Kilmainham for its

modernity and security in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but conditions

inside the prison were harsh, especially during the Great Famine.

Throughout its history, Kilmainham housed ordinary criminals as well as

political prisoners. The prison population predominantly consisted of individuals

convicted within County Dublin, but Kilmainham also served as a waystation for

convicts from all over Ireland who were awaiting transportation to Australia.[118] There

was no separation between men, women, and children or between violent and

nonviolent criminals. By the time the first parliament of the Irish Free State closed the

prison in 1924, it had become the single most important site of the republican struggle

for independence.[119] Kilmainham Gaol's significance to the South's independence

demonstrated the significance of prisons in the overall republican struggle. Even after

Kilmainham closed and the Irish Free State was created, prisons in Northern Ireland

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[116] Pat Cooke, *A History of Kilmainham Gaol: 1796-1924* (Dublin: Government of Ireland Stationery Office, 1995), 6.

[117] The Office of Public Works for the Government of Ireland, *Kilmainham Gaol Visitors' Guide*.

[118] Cooke, *A History of Kilmainham Gaol,* 9.

[119] Ibid., 34-35.

continued to be an important site where the colonial relationship between the British and Irish was negotiated.

The panopticon style applied at Kilmainham Gaol differed from the style applied at Armagh Gaol and Crumlin Road Gaol, the two major prisons built in the north of Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both Armagh Gaol and Crumlin Road Gaol were built in a radial style. These radial style prisons were controlled from a small circular room from which long wings originated. The full length of each wing could be observed from the central circle, maintaining the core goal of the panopticon model. Separate wings meant that categories of prisoners could be more effectively segregated from one another than they could in a prison that was one large room. Separation of prisoners by age, gender, and type of crime became increasingly important in the twentieth century. During the Troubles, separation based on political or paramilitary affiliation also became widespread.

Armagh Gaol was designed in the late-eighteenth century by two of Ireland's most renowned architects, Francis Cooley and William Murray. Construction of the prison began in 1780 on the site of former army barracks in the town of Armagh, in the south-central region of Northern Ireland. The prison was built the radial style, with two wings coming from the central circle, one two story wing (A wing) and one three story wing (B wing), containing a total of 140 cells.[120] Although the prison is often called Armagh Women's Gaol, it was not until 1924 that the prison was specifically designated for women, even as it continued to house some male prisoners. The

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[120] Raymond Murray, *Hard Time: Armagh Gaol, 1971-1986* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1998), 8.

remainder of the men who had been housed at Armagh were moved to Crumlin Road

Gaol, the main prison in Belfast. The prison was expanded during the Troubles, when

a third cell block (C wing) was constructed in 1976 specifically to hold political

prisoners. This building contained 30 cells and was completely separate from the

prison's central circle. Because Armagh was designated specifically as a women's

facility, it was often the only prison in Northern Ireland that was not severely

overcrowded. In January 1972, it housed 125 prisoners, only 14 of whom were

women.[121] By April 1980, Armagh housed a total of eighty-three prisoners, sixty-eight

women and fifteen men.[122] Armagh Gaol was closed in 1986, and the remaining

women were moved to a facility that was a part of the newly constructed Maghaberry

Prison.[123]

The second prison in Northern Ireland to adopt a radial style was Crumlin

Road Gaol, built in Belfast between 1843 and 1845. Crumlin Road consisted of four

wings (A, B, C, and D) each three stories high and all radiating from a central circle.

Until Crumlin Road transitioned to an all-male prison in 1924, A and D wings housed

women, while B and C wings housed men. By the start of the Troubles, Crumlin Road

had become the primary male remand prison (for those awaiting trial and/or

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[121]Murray, *Hard Time*, 15.

[122] Women Against Imperialism, *Women Protest for Political Status in Armagh Gaol*, 2.

[123] Maghaberry Prison was opened in 1986 in city of Lisburn, Northern Ireland, just eight miles from Belfast. The prison was designed to replace the prisons that had been used throughout the Troubles, specifically Armagh Gaol and Crumlin Road Gaol. The prison complex actually contains two separate prisons: one a medium-security men's prison for conforming sentenced political prisoners and ordinary criminals serving long sentences, and the other a women's prison that houses all conforming and nonconforming political prisoners and ordinary criminals.

sentencing) in Northern Ireland and the prison with the worst conditions.

Nonconforming political prisoners, meaning those who disrupted everyday prison life,

were housed in A and C wings, ordinary criminals were housed in B wing, and

prisoners serving life sentences or those who had informed on their own paramilitary

groups were housed in D wing. Crumlin Road's official capacity was 433, but it was

almost always overcrowded. In November 1980 the prison housed 512 prisoners. Over

a decade later in January 1993, it housed 542 inmates, more than one hundred

prisoners over capacity.[124] Crumlin Road Gaol formally closed in 1996, but after

extensive renovations, it reopened as a museum and conference center in late 2012.

Unlike Irish prisons constructed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

those constructed in the twentieth century did not follow Bentham's panopticon style.

Increased isolation of prisoners and advances in surveillance technology, especially in

the latter half of the twentieth century, fundamentally changed the form and function

of many prison systems worldwide.[125] In Northern Ireland, developments of prison

structures were driven both by global prison developments and the political climate of

the Troubles. As discussed below, British responses to the Troubles can be divided

into distinct phases of strategies and policies of incarceration. As part of those

dynamics, the British opened Long Kesh Prison in 1971 and Maghaberry Prison in

1986 to replace the older prisons and respond to the rapid rise in the prison population.

Long Kesh opened during the early years of the Troubles, when the British

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[124] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 54.

[125] Lorna A. Rhodes, "Changing the Subject: Conversation in Supermax," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no.3 (2005): 389.

administration was primarily focused on containing the violence. Maghaberry opened

over a decade later, when the focus shifted towards de-escalating the violence and

reaching a diplomatic solution to the conflict. The physical structure of both of these

prisons differed from that of Kilmainham, Armagh, or Crumlin Road and was directly

connected to changing British policies for managing violence during the Troubles.

Northern Irish Prisons during the Troubles

HM Prison Maze, opened on August 9, 1971 specifically to cope with the influx of

political prisoners after the introduction of internment. Initially, Long Kesh was a

prisoner of war (POW) style camp built on a former World War II airfield. The

camp's compounds consisted of three Niseen huts in a row and one positioned

perpendicular across the front of the row. Each hut housed approximately thirty

prisoners, and they were divided according to the prisoners' self-designated

paramilitary affiliations.[126] Between 1975 and 1978 the prison converted to a more

conventional cellular style, and eight self-contained H-Blocks were constructed

adjacent to the Niseen huts. Each block consisted of two parallel sections, intersected

by a shorter central section to create the letter "H" from which the blocks derived their

names. The parallel sections were divided in to four wings (A, B, C, and D), each

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[126] Laura McAtackney, *An Archaeology of the Troubles: The Dark Heritage of Long Kesh/Maze Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 142.

containing twenty-five cells.[127] This design was chosen, in part, to increase the isolation of prisoners, although overcrowding often undermined any attempts at extreme isolation. At any given point between 1976 and 1986, there were approximately a thousand prisoners in the H-Blocks, which exceeded the facility's optimum capacity of 744 prisoners.[128] Particularly after 1976, Long Kesh became the designated prison for nonconforming male prisoners, while Crumlin Road predominantly housed ordinary male criminals and Armagh predominantly housed women, both political prisoners and ordinary criminals.

While Long Kesh was built to cope with the increasing prison population in the early 1970s, that population did not encompass everyone who came into contact with the criminal justice system. Thousands of individuals were also detained as suspected terrorists in police stations and interrogation centers across Northern Ireland. In rural parts of the country, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the British army held detainees in local RUC stations. In urban areas, detainees were held in specially designated interrogation centers beginning in the early 1970s. These interrogation centers were housed in army barracks or headquarters and differed from the similarly used RUC stations both in size and structure. There were three main interrogation centers used throughout the Troubles: Castlereagh Interrogation Centre in Belfast, Gough Barracks in Armagh, and an unnamed facility in Ballykelly (County Derry).[129]

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[127] Northern Ireland Office, *Regimes in Northern Ireland Prisons: Prisoners' Day to Day Life with Special Emphasis on Maze and Armagh,* (1980), Annex B, Shelfmark P2862, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library.

[128] Ibid., Table 1; Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 54.

[129] Unlike RUC stations, interrogation centers were operated in relative or complete secrecy, so it is possible that there were additional centers whose existence still remains unknown. Castlereagh

The largest of them was Castlereagh Interrogation Centre, which opened in 1977 in a

building previously used as RUC and army barracks.

Like the H-Blocks at Long Kesh, Castlereagh was designed to increase the

sense of both physical and psychological isolation among those held there. Neither the

cells nor the interrogation rooms had any windows, and detainees were often denied

any communication with family, friends, or legal counsel.[130] A 1993 report published

by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights described the conditions in Castlereagh

as "oppressive, indeed Victorian" and "devoid of the most basic mechanisms for

insuring that abuse of the detainees does not take place."[131] Castlereagh closed in

1999, but it remains at the center of various allegations of maltreatment, abuse, and

torture made by detainees (both republican and loyalist) against RUC officers and

British soldiers. The tactics for managing the prison system changed at various

junctures during the Troubles, but like Long Kesh, the physical structure of

Castlereagh reflected the British administration's overall approach to the management

of the prison system at a particular moment in time. The specific goals of that

approach will be discussed later in this chapter. However, there was one additional

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Interrogation Centre became known within the international community in 1978, when Amnesty International published a report on allegations of mistreatment of detainees at Castlereagh and various RUC stations. The interrogation center in Ballykelly remained secret until 2013, when staff at The Pat Finucane Center, a legal aid non-profit, uncovered its existence in newly declassified British documents.

[130] Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and Andrew Mumford, "Is Torture Ever Justified? Torture, Rights and Rules from Northern Ireland to Iraq," in *War, Torture and Terrorism*, eds. Anthony F. Lang Jr. and Amanda Russell Beattie (New York: Routledge, 2009), 61.

[131] Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Human Rights and Legal Defense in Northern Ireland: The Intimidation of Defense Lawyers, the Murder of Patrick Finucane* (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1993), 27.

prison built by the British administration during the Troubles, and its structure differed from the panopticon style prisons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and from both the compounds and H-Blocks at Long Kesh.

HM Prison Maghaberry was built in the mid-1980s and consists of two separate facilities, one for men and the other for women. Like Long Kesh, the construction of Maghaberry was related to changing British policies for managing prisons and the conflict as a whole. The structure and administration of Maghaberry are very similar to those of other prisons throughout the United Kingdom. This normalization of Northern Irish prisons represented a new phase in the British government's approach to the conflict that was aimed at deescalating violence. Gradually prisoners, political and ordinary, were moved to Maghaberry as other facilities were closed. The women's facility at Maghaberry opened in 1986 and formally replaced Armagh, which closed that same year. The men's facility opened in 1987, and gradually replaced Crumlin Road, which officially closed in 1996. Long Kesh closed in September 2000, and Maghaberry became the only high-security prison in Northern Ireland.[132] According to the Irish Republican Prisoner Welfare Association, Maghaberry currently houses nineteen republican political prisoners, and two additional prisons house eleven others.[133] The differences in the prison structures built following Bentham's model and those built by the British during the Troubles were results of developments in technology, the need for more modern facilities, and

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[132] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 54-55.

[133] The Irish Republican Prisoner Welfare Association's Facebook page, accessed March 20, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/irpwa/?fref=ts.

the changes in the prison administration models during the Troubles. Ultimately, they

constituted the physical apparatus of occupation.

Between the partition of Ireland and the start of the Troubles, British prison

policies in Northern Ireland mirrored their policies in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The primary focus was on ordinary criminals, colloquially called ordinary decent

criminals (ODCs), and Crumlin Road was by far the largest prison.[134] It was not until

1969 when the British government began its military occupation of Northern Ireland

that prison policies in Northern Ireland began to differ from those in the rest of the

United Kingdom. During the Troubles, the British used three models for prison

management: reactive containment (1969-75), criminalization (1976-81), and

managerialism (1981-2000).

Reactive containment lasted from 1969 through 1975 and was characterized by

military-led initiatives to curtail politically motivated violence.[135] The first major

policy under this model was Operation Banner, which began the British military

occupation of Northern Ireland. Many of the policies passed under reactive

containment were enforced by the military. The introduction of internment in 1971

was one of the most significant hallmarks of reactive containment because it

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[134] "Ordinary decent criminal" is local slang for criminals not affiliated with any paramilitary
organization. The term gained popularity during the Troubles, when referring to non-paramilitary
prisoners as "decent" was meant as a commentary on the ways in which paramilitary prisoners were
treated differently from ordinary criminals.

For more on the criminal activity of ODCs see Jon Moran, "Paramilitaries, 'Ordinary Decent Criminals'
and the Development of Organised Crime Following the Belfast Agreement," *International Journal of
the Sociology of Law* 32 (2004).

[135] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 204-205.

dramatically increased the prison population and the likelihood of imprisonment for

paramilitary members. The result of these policies was a sharp increase in state

violence, which contributed to a shift in prison management policies. Beginning in

1976, the British operated under a model called criminalization. Therein, the prison

administration treated paramilitary prisoners the same as ODCs, thus stripping their

behavior of its political significance. Criminalization dominated the late 1970s, lasting

from 1976 through 1981.[136] Under the third model, managerialism, the British

administration attempted to align their prison policies in Northern Ireland with those

in the rest of the United Kingdom. This model was focused on distancing the prison

system from ongoing political disputes as much as possible. Managerial policies began

in 1981 and continued through the signing of the peace agreement into the early

twenty-first century.

The Laws of Occupation: Emergency Powers in Northern Ireland

While there were specific policies implemented as a part of each of these prison

management models, they were all directed by key laws that remained in place

throughout the Troubles. These laws controlled all citizens of Northern Ireland,

regardless of whether they were affiliated with a paramilitary organization. The

emergency legislation passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom in the early

1970s established the powers that the British army and RUC had over the citizens of

Northern Ireland. This legislation applied to people of all political affiliations, but the

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[136]McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 227.

policies targeted republicans. Emergency powers expanded British authority over all Northern Irish institutions, but they had the most profound effects on the criminal justice system.

The first of these laws was the Northern Ireland (Temporary Provisions) Act 1972, which introduced direct rule in Northern Ireland. This act suspended the Stormont government and established the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) to govern all Northern Irish affairs, including the prison system.[137] The NIO retained control of the prison system until 1995, when the office turned over control to the newly established Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS). The establishment of direct rule and creation of the NIO marked an important turning point in the relationship between the British and Northern Irish governments, as well as British approaches to paramilitaries, prisoners, and the overall management of the violence. After establishing direct rule, the British government passed a series of laws establishing emergency powers in Northern Ireland, which applied only in Northern Ireland and gave the British army and RUC expanded powers to detain and interrogate suspected paramilitary members as terrorists.

The Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the first series of emergency laws in 1973. The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act (EPA) outlined

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[137] The Northern Ireland (Temporary Provisions) Act 1972 effectively gave control over all Northern Irish governance to the Parliament of the United Kingdom seated at Westminster by indefinitely suspending the authority of the Stormont government. That government was completely abolished one year later with the passage of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973. The act also affirmed Northern Ireland's status as a part of the United Kingdom and limited the channels through which Northern Irish citizens could potentially vote to amend or terminate Northern Ireland's status within the United Kingdom.

emergency powers granted to security forces (British soldiers and RUC officers)

within Northern Ireland; these powers did not apply in Great Britain. The act was

amended six times before it was completely repealed on February 19, 2001.[138] Two

EPA statutes were passed in 1973, were included in every subsequent version of the

act, and are significant to this analysis. The first statute presented a list of illegal

organizations. The second created a court system for crimes related to paramilitary or

political violence. Both of these statutes, like the EPA as a whole, targeted the

republican community. Five of the six organizations classified as illegal in the EPA

were republican organizations, both paramilitary groups like the IRA and *Cumann na*

mBan and non-violent political parties like Sinn Féin. The only loyalist organization

on the list was the Ulster Volunteer Force, a paramilitary organization. The 1973 EPA

allowed British soldiers and RUC officers to detain individuals for up to three days

without charge in RUC stations or interrogation centers.[139] The EPA also established

the Diplock courts, a highly controversial system of courts in which the right to trial

by jury was suspended for crimes defined as terrorism.[140] While Diplock courts were

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[138] Subsequent versions of the EPA were passed in 1975, 1978, 1987, 1991, 1996, and 1998. The initial EPA repealed the Special Powers Act 1922, the Detention of Terrorists (NI) Order 1972, and the Criminal Justice (Temporary Provisions) Act (NI) 1970.

[139] Amnesty International, *Northern Ireland: Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Northern Ireland (28 November 1977-6 December 1977)*, accessed April 10, 2016, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ issues/police/docs/amnesty78.htm#contents.

[140] Charles Carlton, "Judging without Consensus: The Diplock Courts in Northern Ireland," *Law & Policy Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1981): 232.

Diplock courts were named for Lord Diplock, the leader of a 1972 parliamentary commission that published a report outlining recommendations on how the British government should confront political violence. In that report, he recommended that a system of courts be established specifically to adjudicate crimes related to paramilitary violence. The report also recommended the suspension of the right to trial by a jury within this system.

formally abolished in 2006, trials without juries remain in use for certain cases a

decade later.[141]

The defendants tried before Diplock courts were all accused of crimes that

constitute terrorism as it was in the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions)

Act 1974 (PTA).[142] The first PTA was enacted by the Parliament of the United

Kingdom in response to an ongoing IRA bombing campaign in Great Britain.[143]

Unlike the EPA, the PTA applied to all parts of the United Kingdom. However, like

the EPA the act targeted republican paramilitary and political groups.[144] The act made

soliciting or providing financial support to these organizations, attending any of their

meetings, or publicly displaying any signs of support for them offenses carrying a

maximum penalty of ten years' imprisonment and an undetermined fine. Additionally,

the act included exclusion orders that could be used to prevent certain individuals from

entering or leaving the United Kingdom, Great Britain, or Northern Ireland. Finally,

the PTA expanded the powers of arrest and detention. Under the PTA, the British

army and RUC officers could arrest individuals without a warrant on suspicion that

they were guilty of an offense or "concerned in the commission, preparation, or

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[141] Lisa Miriam Jacobs, "It's Time to Leave the Troubles Behind: Northern Ireland Must Try Paramilitary Suspects by Jury Ratehr Than in Diplock-type Courts," *Texas International Law Journal* 45, no. 3 (2010), 662.

[142] Subsequent versions of the PTA were passed in 1976, 1984, and 1989. The act was repealed in 2000 and replaced with the more permanent Terrorism Act 2000 and later the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005.

[143] On November 21, 1974, IRA bombs set in two Birmingham pubs killed 21 people and injured an additional 182. The Birmingham pub bombings, as these incidents have come to be known, were the direct impetus for the PTA.

[144] Josephine Doody, "Creating Suspect Communities: Exploring the Use of Exclusion Orders in Northern Ireland," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 4, no. 1 (2012), 81-85.

instigation of acts of terrorism."[145] While the PTA decreased the maximum period of

initial detention with charge to 48 hours, the Home Secretary for Northern Ireland

could extend that period for up to an additional five days. In practice, the PTA gave

unchecked power to British soldiers and RUC officers to detain individuals with little

or no connection to paramilitary groups, and that power was compounded in Northern

Ireland because of the EPA.

      The emergency legislation that the British government passed in the early

years of the Troubles expanded British control over Northern Irish institutions and

framed the relationship between security forces (British soldiers and RUC officers)

and Northern Irish citizens, particularly those in the republican community. These

laws also reflected the ways in which the relationship between the British government

and Northern Ireland changed during the Troubles. Like the structure of Long Kesh

Prison and Castlereagh Interrogation Centre, these laws were either unique to

Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Act 1972 and EPA) or were used more often in

Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom (PTA). The emergency

powers outlined in the Northern Ireland (Temporary Provisions) Act 1972, EPA, and

PTA governed Northern Ireland throughout the Troubles and into the early twenty-

first century. They created the framework within which three models for prison

management during the Troubles emerged. The remainder of this chapter focuses on

those three models: reactive containment, criminalization, and managerialism and how

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[145] Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1974, sec. 7, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/56/section/7/enacted.

policies of each period reflected shifts in the strategies that the British government used to manage prisoners and more broadly, the conflict as a whole.

Prison Management during the Troubles: Reactive Containment, 1969-75

Reactive containment policies focused on counterinsurgency, and relied heavily on military force. The security measures introduced at this stage of the conflict were harsh, but they did not deny the political nature of paramilitary violence targeted at state forces, civilians, or other paramilitary groups.[146] This model began with the 1969 military occupation of Northern Ireland. From then on the military continued to factor heavily in subsequent policies. British soldiers were responsible for converting old army camps, most notably Long Kesh, into barracks to house new prisoners. They also provided security support to the civilians administering the prisons.[147] The most significant reactive containment policy was the introduction of internment in 1971. The introduction of direct rule in March 1972 became another key policy of reactive containment, and it was one of the policies that remained in place throughout the Troubles.[148] While the British army stopped using interment in 1975, this practice more directly affected the lives of all Northern Irish citizens, especially those affiliated with or sympathetic to republican organizations, than did direct rule.

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[146] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 68.

[147] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 208.

[148] Direct rule was established through the passage of the Northern Ireland (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1972. See the full text of the act for more information, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmso/tpa1972.htm.

Internment, the power to arrest, detain, and imprison an individual without charge, was legal in Northern Ireland decades before the beginning of the Troubles. The Parliament of Northern Ireland (at the time controlled by the Ulster Unionist Party) established the legal basis for internment with the 1922 Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland), shortly after the country was established as a part of the United Kingdom. However, powers of internment were rarely used until August 9, 1971. On that day the British army launched Operation Demetrius and detained hundreds of suspected paramilitary affiliates and supporters in Belfast. This operation was justified on the legal basis of the act, which granted the British army the right to arrest without warrant anyone whose behavior led to the suspicion "that he has acted or is acting or is about to act in a manner prejudicial to the preservation of the peace or maintenance of order."[149] Operation Demetrius had two parts: first arrest and detention of suspects at three regional holding centers (in the city of Belfast, County Down, and County Derry), and second the interrogation of detainees followed by either release or internment at the newly opened compounds at Long Kesh.[150] Many of those detainees were released from holding centers after a few hours or days, but

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[149] Internment without trial had been introduced in Northern Ireland on three previous occasions (1931-34, 1938-45, 1956-61) under the authority of the Minister for Home Affairs in the Stormont government. For more information see Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Acts (Northern Ireland) 1922, reg. 23, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ hmso/spa1922.htm.

[150] *The Compton Report*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1971, accessed April 10, 2016, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmso/compton.htm.

Most internees were sent to Long Kesh, but some were sent to Crumlin Road Gaol or HMS *Maidstone*, a Royal British Navy ship anchored at the port in Belfast. As a part of Operation Demetrius *Maidstone* was used to hold internees in two of its bunkhouses. Gerry Adams was first interned on the *Maidstone* between March and June of 1972 before he was interned at Long Kesh in 1973.

thousands spent weeks, months, or years in prison until the policy of internment ended in December 1975.

In the first six months after Operation Demetrius, a total of 2,447 people were detained across Northern Ireland, and 1,513 of these individuals were interned in various Northern Irish prisons (934 were released after detention at RUC stations or interrogation centers).[151] Detention in holding centers was usually limited to five days, but neither detention nor internment in prisons had a specified term limits. The 1922 Special Powers Act stated that any person detained by the proper authorities could be "detained in any of His Majesty's prisons as a person committed to prison on remand, until he has been discharged by direction of the Attorney General or brought before a court of summary jurisdiction."[152] In practice, prisoners on remand had no way of knowing how long they would be imprisoned. Internment could also evolve into formal imprisonment, as was the case for Gerry Adams. Adams was first interned on HMS *Maidstone* between March and June 1972; he was rearrested in July 1973 and interned at Long Kesh. In September 1973, Adams participated in an escape attempt for which he was formally sentenced to time in prison. He remained in prison at Long Kesh as a paramilitary prisoner with SCS, not as an internee, until his release in 1976.[153]

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[151] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 72.

[152] Civil Authories (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland) 1922, reg. 23, accessed April 10, 2016, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmso/spa1922.htm.

[153] Gerry Adams, *Cage Eleven: Writings from Prison* (Dingle, Ireland: Brandon Books, 1990). Adams was arrested again in 1978 and charged with, but never convicted of membership in the IRA, a crime that constituted terrorism.

Gerry Adams was one of the most prominent republican leaders, but powers of internment also disproportionately affected the entire republican community. British soldiers arrested 342 republicans during Operation Demetrius, but did not arrest a single loyalist. Between 1971 and 1975, a total of 2,060 suspected republicans and 109 suspected loyalists were interned in prisons like Long Kesh.[154] Thousands more were detained, interrogated, and released from holding centers. Many of those detained or interned had little or no political commitment to republican organizations and ideals, but the experiences of those individuals and their communities increased politicization and overall recruitment to the IRA and other paramilitary or political republican organizations.[155] The high rate of internment also put more republicans into contact with the prison system, either as prisoners themselves or as relatives and friends of someone in prison. As a result, prisons became an important sites within the overall republican strategies for opposing British rule.

Under reactive containment policies, internees were given certain rights not given to other prisoners. In 1972, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland William Whitelaw extended similar rights to prisoners convicted of terrorist crimes.[156] These prisoners had special category status (SCS), which gave them *de facto* POW status and some of the privileges of POWs as stipulated in the Geneva Convention.[157] While

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[154] McEcoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 212.

[155] Ibid., 213.

[156] McEcoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 217.

[157] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*, August 12, 1949, available at http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/375?OpenDocument.

internees did not formally have SCS, they had many of the same rights as those

prisoners who did, even those interned in the year before SCS was established. On

May 15, 1972 Billy McKee began a hunger strike with forty other republican prisoners

at Crumlin Road Gaol demanding political status.[158] When Whitelaw established SCS,

McKee was close to death, and Whitelaw and the rest of the British administration

feared the potential backlash from republican communities. Secondly, Official IRA

(OIRA) leadership had insisted on political status as a precondition for their 1972

ceasefire, so Whitelaw hoped that SCS would help lead to a diplomatic solution to the

conflict.[159] Finally, from a prison management perspective, it was impossible to keep

the increased prison population in limited cellular space, so housing them as POWs in

compounds was a practical short-term solution.[160]

SCS created three categories of prisoners: ordinary decent criminals (ODCs),

prisoners on remand (those who had been interned without trial), and paramilitary

prisoners with SCS.[161] Both internees and prisoners with SCS were held in the

compounds at Long Kesh, which physically reflected the implications of the reactive

containment model. Prisoners housed in these makeshift accommodations had

"relative freedom" when compared to those previously held in Crumlin Road or those

later held the H-Blocks. But the Compounds also suffered from "discipline problems

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[158] Coogan, *On the Blanket,* 61.

[159] Ibid., 60. The Official IRA (OIRA) was another faction of the IRA that split in 1969, when the Provisional IRA (PIRA) was formed. In 1972, the Official IRA (OIRA) announced a ceasefire, but the Provisional IRA (PIRA) dismissed the truce and continued its bombing campaigns in Northern Ireland and across Great Britain.

[160] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland*, 217.

[161] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 70.

and control issues" because the structure did not adequately ensure the prison's

security.[162] Despite housing large groups of prisoners in the compounds, the prison

system was not well equipped to handle the increased prison population. Beginning in

1972, the administration took steps to decrease the number of prisoners and move

away from extra-judicial anti-terrorism strategies such as internment. Diplock courts

were established partially to reduce the use of interment without trial. In theory, this

was a legal victory for the republican community that had previously been

disproportionately subjected to a system of internment completely devoid of the

possibility of a trial. However, the move towards legal mechanisms did not ensure that

all were treated equally before the law. The 1973 Emergency Provisions Act defined

certain crimes as terrorism, but "serving members of any of Her Majesty's regular

naval, military, or air forces" could not be accused or convicted of these crimes.[163] The

1974 Prevention of Terrorism Act expanded the scope of crimes that constituted

terrorism. Through these laws, the British government effectively granted impunity to

its soldiers and security forces for acts of violence such as Bloody Sunday, while

simultaneously defining acts of republican resistance as terrorism.[164]

　　　　Overall, the reactive containment model expanded the British presence in

Northern Ireland, both militarily and politically, and dealt with paramilitary violence

as terrorism. This model of prison management was based on the recognition of the

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[162] McAtackney, *An Archaeology of the Troubles*, 20.

[163] Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act of 1973, part 1(3.5)
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/ 1973/53/contents.

[164] On January 30, 1972, British soldiers opened fire on a peaceful protest against internment in the Bogside area of Derry, killing fourteen. This incident is referred to as Bloody Sunday,

political nature of the prisons codified with the establishment of SCS.[165] This recognition was important to republicans because it legitimated their actions as a part of an ongoing political struggle. Secretary of State Whitelaw established SCS in order to placate republicans on hunger strike, encourage an IRA ceasefire, and manage the influx of prisoners. The role of the military in the prison system, the granting of SCS, and the establishment of Diplock courts all particularly targeted and separated the republican prisoners from the general prison population. These policies brought more of the republican community into contact with the prison system and allowed republican prisoners to organize from within prisons and coordinate with IRA activities across Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Despite its goals, the period of reactive containment featured an increase in violence. 1972 was the single deadliest year of the Troubles—472 people, including 321 civilians, died as a result of violence perpetrated by paramilitary groups and state forces.[166] The majority of these victims were members of the republican community, who were far more likely to be the targets of these policies than members of the loyalist community.[167] The failure of the reactive containment model resulted in a change of management style.

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[165] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 225.

[166] Fionnuala McKenna and Martin Melaugh, "Violence – Significant Violent Incidents During the Conflict," accessed April 10, 2016, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/majinc.htm.

[167] Four civilians were shot dead and another sixty injured during the 1970 Falls Road curfew. One year later, another eleven civilians were killed during the Ballymurphy Massacre. On Bloody Sunday, British soldiers shot twenty-six civilians, leaving fourteen dead. These were the deadliest confrontations between British soldiers and civilians, and all of the civilians injured or killed in these confrontations were from republican (and Catholic) communities.

Prison Management during the Troubles: Criminalization, 1976-81

If the reactive containment model was centered on the recognition of the political

nature of paramilitary violence, the next model, criminalization, was based on the total

erasure of the idea of political violence. Under criminalization, the British approach to

the overall conflict continued to be based on total military and administrative control.

Yet, the approach to prisoners changed dramatically. Prisons became key sites to

"break" prisoners rather than places to contain them.[168] This significant strategic shift

began largely as a result of the 1975 Gardiner Report, which gave recommendations to

the British government on how to deal with "terrorism and subversion in Northern

Ireland" in the "context of civil liberties and human rights."[169] These

recommendations included abolishing SCS and Diplock courts. The abolition of these

mechanisms was intended to "redefine political violence as simple criminal activity"

therefore delegitimizing any behavior that was associated with paramilitary groups.[170]

Criminalization policies depended on the idea that political prisoners would lose

support if their behavior was treated like that of any other criminal.

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[168] Kieran McEvoy and Peter Shirlow, "Understanding Political Imprisonment: Northern Ireland and the International Context," in *Beyond the Wire: Former Prisoners and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland,* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 28.

[169] In 1975 in response to frequent allegations of maltreatment and abuse by British soldiers, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland appointed a committee to investigate these alleged abuses. The committee published their findings in the Gardiner Report, which (among other recommendations) recommended that SCS be abolished.
See the full text of the Gardiner Report for more information: http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmso/gardiner.htm.

[170] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 56.

The most important criminalization policy was the end of SCS, which took effect on March 1, 1976. After that date any individual convicted of an offense defined as terrorism by the EPA was to be treated as an ODC in terms of trial, sentencing, and imprisonment. However, Diplock courts remained a feature of the criminal justice system throughout the period of criminalization. Although the Gardiner Report recommended that Diplock courts be abolished, the Secretary of State decided instead to reinterpret them "as standard criminal courts so that those sentenced by them were 'common criminals,'" rather than "terrorists."[171] Yet, there were considerable differences between the Diplock courts and ordinary courts, most notably the lack of a jury in Diplock courts. The continued use of Diplock courts demonstrated that paramilitary prisoners were still treated differently from ODCs, even if that difference was not explicitly acknowledged through SCS.[172]

The implementation of these new policies for managing political prisoners was concurrent with the 1976 opening of the H-Blocks at Long Kesh. Long Kesh's Compounds continued to hold the rapidly declining number of SCS prisoners and internees, while the H-Blocks held anyone convicted and sentenced after March 1, 1976.[173] With the abolition of SCS, Long Kesh effectively became two prisons, referred to by the prison administration as "Maze Compounds" or "Maze Cellular," but still collectively referred as Long Kesh by prisoners. Scholars who study republican prisoners in Northern Ireland have focused on the H-Blocks as the key site

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[171] Ibid., 75.

[172] Women Against Imperialism, *Women Protest for Political Status in Armagh Gaol*, 5.

[173] McAtackney, *An Archaeology of the Troubles*, 21.

for the new policies of criminalization to be implemented and for resistance among the prison population. The new physical institution of the H-Blocks resulted in "extreme individualization and a refusal on the part of the prison administration to recognize [a prisoner's] organizational affiliation," all of which were direct assaults on personal identities, particularly republican identities.[174] The H-Blocks were more than just new prison buildings, they "were constructed specifically to curtail the subversion of increasingly troublesome politicized prisoners."[175] The H-Block structure was integral to uniform enforcement of prison rules across all prison populations because it physically removed SCS prisoners from communal-style living in the compounds to cellular-style living in line with the treatment of ODCs.[176] The implications of criminalization policies at Long Kesh transformed it into one of the key sites of republican resistance to the ongoing British occupation of Northern Ireland.

However, no such argument has been made about the relationship between criminalization policies and the physical structure of Armagh Gaol or the treatment of female prisoners. Like the H-Blocks at Long Kesh C wing at Armagh Gaol was opened1976 and deviated from the previous structure of the prison because it was separate from the main prison structure and focused on isolation of prisoners.[177] It was originally designed to hold SCS prisoners. After 1976 those prisoners dramatically decreased in number, especially among the female prison population. However, unlike

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[174] Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 152.

[175] McAtackney, *An Archaeology of the Troubles*, 154.

[176] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 236.

[177] Murray, *Hard Time*, 51.

the relatively lax conditions that SCS prisoners experienced at Long Kesh's

compounds, prisoners in Armagh's C wing were subject to conditions much more like

those in the H-Blocks. The similar conditions and experiences of prisoners in the H-

Blocks at Long Kesh and in C wing at Armagh demonstrates the relationship between

criminalization policies and the structure of both the Long Kesh's H-Blocks and

Armagh's C wing.[178]

Criminalization policies did little to actually reduce the prison population.

Between 1976 and 1979, over 3,000 people were charged with crimes of terrorism.[179]

The overall approach of the criminalization period towards these prisoners was to

destroy their will to participate in paramilitary violence, particularly republican

paramilitary violence targeted at the British state. Interrogation centers became more

central to the prison structure than the previous holding centers used during the early

1970s had been. Interrogation tactics also became increasingly violent and

humiliating. RUC officers and British soldiers interrogated detainees using tactics that

are generally referred to as the "five techniques." The five techniques were developed

in the early-1970s and included prolonged wall-standing, hooding (placing a dark

hood over the detainee's face), subjection to white noise, deprivation of sleep, and

deprivation of food and drink.[180] Beyond these five techniques, interrogators used

beatings, threats, and humiliation to coerce or force confessions. Sexual humiliation

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[178] This particular point will be further examined in chapter 4.

[179] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 78.

[180] Ibid., 59-60.

and the threat of rape were also often used specifically against female detainees.[181]

The exact number of suspects who were held in interrogation centers or RUC stations

is not clear, but of the 3,444 suspects whose interrogations were documented between

January and November 1977, 515 made allegations of maltreatment.[182] Beginning in

the mid-1970s, allegations of brutal tactics, coerced confessions, and torture at

interrogation centers, particularly at Castlereagh Interrogation Centre, were

increasingly common.[183]

The widespread use of the five techniques represented a fundamental flaw in

criminalization policies. The Gardiner Report had recommended the abolition of SCS

and Diplock as a way to bring the emergency powers governing Northern Ireland more

in line with criminal justice policies elsewhere in the United Kingdom. However, the

focus on prisons as a site to break the will of political subversives resulted in

increasingly violent tactics of interrogation and treatment of prisoners. These policies

began to deviate from internationally agreed upon standards of human rights.[184]

Because of this deviation, the republican community mobilized around the issue of

prisoner rights and the plight of republican prisoners began to attract international

attention, most notably from the European Court of Human Rights.[185] Although

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[181] Amnesty International, *Northern Ireland: Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Northern Ireland (28 November 1977-6 December 1977)*.

[182] Ibid., 11.

[183] For personal accounts of experiences at Castlereagh Interrogation Centre, see Women Against Imperialism, *Women Protest for Political Status in Armagh Gaol*, 8-11.

[184] Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall, "Criminal Justice in a Divided Society," 79.

[185] In 1976, the European Commission of Human Rights ruled that the five techniques amounted to torture. The case went in front of the European Court of Human Rights in 1978, which ruled that the techniques breached the European Convention on Human Rights and were "inhumane and degrading,"

criminalization policies attempted to delegitimize the prisoners' political identity,

republican prisoners remained convicted for their political identity, and this period

was characterized by unprecedented levels of collective organization by political

prisoners. It was that collective resistance, which will be discussed in the next chapter,

and international pressures that directly led to the end of the period of criminalization

and the beginning of a new prison management model that continued through the end

of the Troubles.

Prison Management during the Troubles: Managerialism, 1981-2000

The final shift in prison management models during the Troubles, managerialism,

fundamentally represented the British administration's acceptance that the prison

system was not a mechanism that could be used to defeat political violence.[186]

Managerialism within the prison system primarily affected the ways in which prison

administration approached the issue of SCS. During the reactive containment period,

the political status of prisoners was implicit in policies and explicit after the granting

of SCS. The goal of the criminalization period was to strip prisoners of political status

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but did not amount to torture. For more information see *Ireland v. The United Kingdom*, Application no. 5310/71, (ECHR 18 January 1978).

[186] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 250.
 Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall previously wrote about this period as one of "normalization." In this text, McEvoy refers to this period as "managerialism." He makes this distinction partially to reflect the connection between changing policies in prisons and in the British administration's overall approach to the Northern Ireland conflict. Gormally, McEvoy, and Wall (1993) describe the normalization model as a partial reversal of the criminalization model because it aimed to recognize groups of politically motivated prisoners as separate from OCDs. In his later work, McEvoy analyzes prison policy from 1981 onward and concludes that there was still a "refusal to internalize the reality of political motivation [for violence]," which reflected the continuation of some criminalization policies. For these reasons, he uses the term managerialism to reflect a more accurate characterization of prison policies after 1981.

and delegitimize their violence by comparing it to ordinary criminal activity. In both

of these periods, the ideological ramifications of the classification of political violence

were key to the development of prison management policies. However, under

managerialism, the overall strategy shifted to a "sensible, narrow dialogue focused

upon the minutiae of prison life rather than the grand questions of political status."[187]

This approach was aligned with approaches to prison management across the United

Kingdom.

  The most important characteristic of managerialism was a continued adherence

to the criminalization of paramilitary violence, which reflected a continued refusal to

acknowledge political motivation. Additionally, prison administration sought to put

limitations on the power of paramilitaries within the prisons, partially because of fear

of collective organization, after several successful strikes and protests in 1980 and

1981. Part of limiting the power of paramilitary prisoners and depoliticizing the

implications of their crimes meant moving prisoners from the harsh conditions of the

H-Blocks of Long Kesh to the more normal conditions in the newly constructed

Maghaberry Prison.

  Maghaberry Prison was opened in 1986-87 as a physical manifestation of

managerialism's goals and policies. It replaced the institutions that represented

previous approaches to prison policies and created a prison structure that was focused

on ODCs rather than political prisoners. The H-Blocks constructed with the

criminalization model in mind were "an articulation of a new regime, a statement of

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[187] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 251.

the ability of the prison authorities to control the prison populace."[188] The structure of

Maghaberry Prison does not reveal much about managerialism, but the decision to

construct this completely new prison when the facilities at Long Kesh were

theoretically useable reveals the prison administration's need to dissociate itself from

the political significance of Long Kesh. The especially oppressive conditions of the

Long Kesh Compounds at H-Blocks, as well as the political significance of the site

where ten men died during the 1981 hunger strike made Long Kesh a unique locus of

memory in Northern Ireland. Moving into the managerial model, the prison

administration needed to ideologically and physically remove itself from the memory

of the past violence inflicted on the republican community.

Ultimately, managerialism did not completely depoliticize paramilitary

prisoners, even though prisons were no longer the site of large confrontations between

prisoners and guards as they were during the periods of reactive containment and

criminalization. The gradual removal of paramilitary prisoners from Long Kesh to

Maghaberry and the attempt to focus on the everyday operations of the prison rather

than larger questions about political violence both contributed to the de-escalation of

violence that this model helped facilitate. However, the de-escalation of violence in

prisons was also connected to the de-escalation of violence in the conflict as a whole.

Managerialism as it was applied in the prison system reflected an overall shift in the

approach to the conflict. Rather than seeking some kind of permanent resolution to the

conflict, the British administration sought to normalize relations among the ruling

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[188] McAtackney, *An Archaeology of the Troubles*, 77.

government and citizens of Northern Ireland, as well as between republican and

loyalist communities. These policies and the cooperation of republican paramilitary

groups led to the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which formally ended

the Troubles but did little to establish strong or lasting peace.

Conclusion

This chapter has given a historical overview of the structure and political significance

of prisons in Irish society, beginning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Continuing into the Troubles, this discussion shifted to focus on the prisons

constructed in Northern Ireland by the governing British administration. Elements of

the structure of these prisons, most notably the H-Blocks at Long Kesh and C wing at

Armagh, represented a fundamental break from the prison structures popular in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The structure of these prisons reflected of overall

British strategies for managing the conflict, which were represented in laws of

occupation, most notable the Emergency Provisions Acts and Prevention of Terrorism

Acts. These strategies were also reflected in the British administration's varying

approaches for managing the prison system and controlling paramilitary violence. The

majority of this chapter focused on the three models for prison management employed

by the British administration in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 2000: reactive

containment, criminalization, and managerialism, outlining the policies and goals of

each of these models. The next chapter will move to a discussion of the republican

prisoners who were subjected to these models and who fundamentally shaped them through collective acts of resistance.

Chapter 3: Collective Acts of Resistance among Republican Prisoners in Long Kesh Prison and Armagh Gaol

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the physical and legal structures of the British colonial prison system in Northern Ireland, demonstrating how policy changes affected the prison system and the state of the conflict as a whole. This chapter turns attention to the conditions of the republican prisoners who were subject to the changing structures of the prison system throughout the Troubles. This chapter will trace the development of collective tactics of resistance among male and female republican prisoners,

focusing on blanket protests, dirty protests, and hunger strikes. This discussion is focused on the period of criminalization (1976-81) because republican prisoners were most active in organizing collective acts of resistance in response to the abolition of special category status (SCS), the most significant criminalization policy. Finally, this chapter will focus on the gendered treatment of republican women in prison and how women organized in ways that were both similar to and different from men. This chapter ends with a discussion of the 1980 Armagh Dirty Protest, the first moment when dominant republican organizations viewed republican women's prison resistance as equally significant as republican men's prison resistance.

Power, Collective Identity, and the Body in Republican Prison Resistance

The British administration built prisons in Northern Ireland that isolated and dehumanized prisoners with the goal of breaking down communal identities. Yet within that system prisoners resisted such goals as a means of survival, of asserting political identity, and of reclaiming power within an oppressive system. For republican prisoners, resistance was primarily a mechanism through which they asserted their political identity as a means of opposing systems of British dominance. Republican prisoners used a variety of collective tactics of resistance in the 1970s and early 1980s. In all of them, the body was the central site of resistance. The physically oppressive and restrictive nature of prisons meant that, in many cases, the use or sacrifice of the body was the only means through which prisoners could reclaim space within the prison. The ways in which prisons used their bodies as sites of resistance were similar among all republican prisoners, both men and women. Three factors primarily shaped

tactics of collective resistance among republican prisoners: power relations within the prison system, a sense of collective identity among the prisoners, and the body as the ultimate site of resistance. However, the reactions to those tactics outside of prisons were heavily influenced by social and cultural norms anchored in traditional gender roles which differentiated men from women in a variety of ways.

The first factor that influenced tactics of prison resistance was power relations within prisons. Northern Irish prisons were fundamentally a site of confrontation between the British state and Irish republicans. As discussed in the previous chapter, British soldiers and Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) officers targeted the republican community through emergency legislation that defined crimes of terrorism and granted powers of internment. Although loyalist paramilitary members were also subjected to imprisonment and internment, they were imprisoned at a much lower rate than republican paramilitary members. Between 1971 and 1975, when the British army actively used the power of internment, the number of interned loyalists at any given point stabilized around fifty. In contrast, the average number of interned republicans during that same period exceeded 550 until the British government began releasing internees in phases in July 1974.[189] While these numbers only account for internees, rather than sentenced special category status (SCS) prisoners, the total number of loyalist prisoners remained relatively low. This disparity in numbers limited loyalist prisoners from organizing en masse and helps explain why prisons did not become important sites of organization for the loyalist community. Instead, prisons

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[189] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 212.

became sites in which the power relations that defined the conflict were replicated at

the micro level: a struggle between British colonial administration and Irish republican

resistance. This direct confrontation between agents of the British state and members

of republican paramilitary organizations helped transform prisons into sites for the

production of Irish republican collective identity.

The second factor that influenced tactics of republican prison resistance was

the ability for prisoners to form a sense of community. Republican prisoners formed a

sense of collective identity through learning Irish Gaelic and using the language to

communicate with one another. They also shared pieces of *scéal* (news) to keep them

connected to one another and to the republican community outside of prisons. These

elements of communal identity formed the basis for organized collective action among

the prisoners. Within republican prison communities, identity was not a static,

predetermined condition that had a casual influence on collective action. Rather,

republican identity was both a condition for and a product of collective action, and

both that identity and action changed frequently.[190] Collective identity within prisons

was also influenced by the social and cultural contexts of the broader republican

community, especially with respect to the ideology of Irish Catholicism.

Ideologically, republicans located their imprisonment as a part of a centuries-

long struggle against British colonialism. Northern Irish republican identity at the

beginning of the Troubles was heavily influenced by the writings and stories of past

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[190] Craig Calhoun, "The Problem of Identity in Collective Action," in *Macro-Micro Linkages in Sociology*, ed. Joan Huber (London: Sage Publications, 1991), 59.

republican revolutionaries.[191] The history of the early twentieth century, particularly the 1916 Easter Rebellion, was especially important to republican identity. This is not to say that the republican identity was exactly the same as it was in the earlier twentieth century. Northern Irish republicanism was uniquely affected by the context of British colonialism and political violence.

A third factor that influenced tactics of collective action among republican political prisoners was the role of the body as the ultimate site of resistance. The British prison administration exerted power over prisoners both by creating a physical space that allowed for constant observation and by controlling the bodies of the individuals within that system through intense isolation. The imprisoned body became a space upon which violence was enacted, but also a mechanism for resistance or "weapon of proximity."[192] However, the body was more than just a proximal weapon for prisoners, it was tied to their political identity and was key to their acts of collective resistance. The body was central to forms of resistance that constituted self-sacrifice, including blanket protests, dirty protests, and hunger strikes.

There were two periods of republican prison resistance between 1971 and 1981 that corresponded with the changing models for prison management during that period. Under reactive containment (1971-75), resistance among prisoners was focused on treatment during detention and living conditions within the prisons. Prison

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[191] Mary Corrigan, *Out of Order: The Political Imprisonment of Women in Northern Ireland, 1972-1998* (Portland: Willian Publishing, 2006), 137.

[192] María Xosé Agra Romero, "Escaping/Transgressing the Feminine: Bodies, Prisons and Weapons of Proximity," *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 39, no. 3 (2014): 120.

resistance during this period primarily served as a means of forming and solidifying a collective sense of identity among the prisoners. In 1976, when the British abolished SCS and shifted their management model to criminalization, prison resistance focused on the issue of political identity. Prisons did not become central to the overall republican campaign until after 1976 when SCS was abolished and most male political prisoners were moved from Crumlin Road Gaol and the Cages at Long Kesh to the H-Blocks at Long Kesh. Between 1976 and 1981, prisons became the most important site of confrontation, resistance, and identity formation for Northern Irish republicans. However, collective acts of resistance among republican prisoners between 1976 and 1981 were only possible because of the sense of community formed among the prisoners during reactive containment.

Prison Resistance during Reactive Containment, 1969-75

As discussed in chapter two, reactive containment was the first prison management model used by the British to control political violence during the Troubles. Reactive containment policies focused on using prisons as sites in which to contain political violence until a diplomatic solution to the conflict could be reached. Paramilitary prisoners enjoyed SCS for the majority of the time period covered by reactive containment and most male prisoners were housed in the compounds at Long Kesh.[193]

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[193] McAtackney, *An Archaeology of the Troubles*, 148.
 Male political prisoners were housed in three different prisons throughout the period of the Troubles, Crumlin Road Gaol, Long Kesh Prison, and Maghaberry Prison. This analysis is focused on prisoners held in Long Kesh because it was the prison designated for nonconforming prisoners who had refused to follow orders in other prisons or who were leaders in the republican struggle.

This collective style housing allowed republican prisoners to form a community with a distinct identity while they were in prison. As exemplified in the words of Gerry Adams, "Generally we just do our own thing," prisoners were given a high level of autonomy.[194] Prisoners were separated by paramilitary affiliation, which helped cultivate communities within the prison. The republican community (as well as other paramilitary communities) operated under a strict hierarchy: the prisoners elected officers (Commanding Officers, OCs and Intelligence Officers, IOs) to bring forward their demands to the prison administration. Interaction between prison staff and prisoners was limited to communication between the staff and these representatives.[195] Paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland arrived at prisons with a "ready-made collective organization" based on their shared political ideals and goals, as well as their shared understanding of organization.[196] This structure was key to the development of a collective identity within republican prison communities that was both similar to and distinct from their identity outside of prisons.

In the months immediately following the introduction of internment in 1971, prisons briefly became central to the republican struggle. Reactive containment policies were designed to acknowledge the political nature of the conflict, so the

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[194] Adams, *Cage Eleven*, 21.
Gerry Adams was first interned on *HMS Maidstone* in March 1972. He was re-arrested and interned at Long Kesh in July 1973. He was sentenced to further time in prison at Long Kesh after aiding in a republican escape attempt in September 1973. Throughout his imprisonment at Long Kesh, Adams served as Commanding Officer (OC) for the republican prisoners in the Cages. Adams has served as the President of Sinn Féin (the leading political party in the Republic of Ireland) since 1983.

[195] Adams, *Cage Eleven*, 24.

[196] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 43.

political identity of internees was not in question and they had *de facto* prisoner of war

(POW) status. However, republican prisoners who had been convicted of crimes and

sentenced to time in prison did not have POW status. In protest against the lack of

political status, republican prisoner Billy McKee led forty men in a hunger strike at

Crumlin Road Gaol between May and July 1972. This strike was supported by some

IRA leadership outside of prisons, and the Official IRA (OIRA) made political status a

condition of their 1972 ceasefire.[197] This hunger strike and the OIRA support of that

strike were instrumental in Secretary of State for Northern Ireland William Whitelaw's

decision to grant special category status (SCS) to all prisoners convicted of terrorist

crimes. Between 1972 and 1975 when republican prisoners had SCS, prisoners were

not central to the overall republican campaign. SCS was a major victory for republican

prisoners, and the rest of their resistance focused on forming a sense of community

within the prisons and on internal issues such as living conditions.

　　Republican prisoners in Crumlin Road, Armagh, and Long Kesh formed a

sense of communal identity by sharing *scéal* ("news") with one another and by

teaching each other the Irish Gaelic language. Prisoners shared *scéal* about fellow

prisoners, prison guards, and the situation outside of prisons in order to keep

themselves connected to one another and to the broader republican community.

Sometimes they shared *scéal* verbally, but they also created systems for smuggling

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[197] English, *Armed Struggle*, 157-158.

The OIRA was a faction of the IRA formed during the 1969 split that also resulted in the formation of the Provisional IRA (PIRA). The PIRA rejected the OIRA's 1972 ceasefire and continued its bombing campaigns across Great Britain and Northern Ireland until 1975, when the PIRA also declared a ceasefire.

small notes around and out of the prisons to keep their information secret from prison

guards. Adams describes his days as a political prisoner in the Cages at Long Kesh as

predominantly arranged around "manufacturing *scéal,* receiving *scéal,* discussing

scéal, and passing on *scéal*."[198]

In addition to sharing *scéal*, prisoners taught one another the Irish Gaelic

language, which reasserted their Irish identity in opposition with the British and gave

them a way to communicate among one another that was not understood by prison

guards.[199] As Bobby Sands said in his prison writings, "the screws [prison guards]

didn't like [Irish] Gaelic being shouted about the wing or its use in conversations. It

alienated them, made them feel foreign and even embarrassed them."[200] Using Gaelic

upset the power relations between "the screws" and prisoners and was also closely

connected to other aspects of collective identity, especially religion.[201] Modern Irish

Gaelic is rooted in the oldest forms of the language spoken by the native Irish, dating

back to the sixth century CE. The majority of native Irish spoke Gaelic until the

seventeenth century, when British colonial endeavors spread English as the main

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[198] Adams, *Cage Eleven*, 20.

[199] Coogan, *On the Blanket*, 89.

[200] Bobby Sands, *Writings from Prison* (Cork, Ireland: Mercier Press, 1998), 31.

Bobby Sands was an active IRA member who died in Long Kesh while on hunger strike in 1981. Sands was first imprisoned in the Cages at Long Kesh in April 1973, sentenced to five years imprisonment for his IRA activity. He was released in 1976, but was rearrested in 1977 and sentence to fourteen years imprisonment for possession of a gun used in a battle with the RUC. Sands served his time in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh where he led the 1981 hunger strike that ended in his death and the deaths of nine other prisoners.

[201] As Joseph Maguire, another prisoner on the H-Blocks commented, "It's all Gaelic in the H-Blocks….there is a lot of religion in the Blocks…they never miss the Rosary every night in Gaelic." Coogan, *On the Blanket*, 16.

language of governance and communication and Gaelic usage sharply declined.[202] By

the end of the nineteenth century, Gaelic was considered a "half dead language"

primarily spoken in small communities known as *Gaeltachts*.[203] Irish Gaelic was an

integral part of the independence movement in the early-twentieth century. The

government of the Irish Free State made Irish language education compulsory in 1922,

and this decision began a revival of the language in independent Ireland.[204] In

Northern Ireland Gaelic became particularly associated with the republican movement,

and the language was not taught in schools. The revival of the language was closely

associated with its use during the Troubles, and Gaelic as it exists in contemporary

Northern Ireland was heavily influenced by its widespread use within the prisons.[205]

Gaelic was used to both historicize and reframe the prison struggle; republican

prisoners sometimes referred to their internal communities as "Jailtachts," a play on

the Gaelic word *Gaeltacht*.[206] Ultimately the language evolved as it was spoken and

used among prisoners, and its meaning was shared by the entire republican

community, connecting them to the prisoners' struggle.

 Despite the fact that the prison struggle was not central to the republican

struggle during this period, the outside community was connected to the prison

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[202] John J. Laukaitis, "The Politics of Language and National School Reform: The Gaelic League's Call for an Irish Ireland, 1893-1992," *American Educational History Journal* 37, no. 1 (2010): 221.

[203] Ibid., 222.

[204] Ibid., 224.

[205] Olaf Zenker, "Linguistic Relativity and Dialectical Idiomatization: Language Ideologies and Second Language Acquisition in the Irish Language Revival of Northern Ireland," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (2014): 63.

[206] Feldman, *Formations of Violence,* 211.

system. When members of the republican community outside of prisons engaged with the prison system during this period, they did so through the lens of human rights, not political identity. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), the organization that lead civil rights marches in the late 1960s, led the anti-internment campaign as a civil rights issue, not a political issue. In an emergency bulletin published in 1971, NICRA urged all people to "avoid sectarian confrontation or conflict like the plague" and instead attend public demonstrations against internment where "it matter[ed] not…to what part or organization one belongs or to none."[207] National and international attention was also focused on the treatment of detainees arrested during Operation Demetrius, the British military operation that reintroduced interment and resulted in the detention of 342 suspected republicans between August 9 and August 11, 1971. In November 1971, months after the operation, Amnesty International published a report detailing the experiences of nine men who had been detained during the operation.[208] These nine men accused the British soldiers who detained them of torturing them. The Amnesty International reported corroborated their claims, arguing that the so-called "five techniques" used against detainees constituted torture.[209] The Amnesty report was the first formal recognition of the

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[207] Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), *Emergency Bulletin—Dated: First Day of Internment, Monday 9th August 1971*, Periodicals, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library.

[208] Amnesty International, *A Report on Allegations of Ill-Treatment made by Persons Arrested under the Special Powers Act after 8 August, 1971* (accessed April 10, 2016), http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/intern/docs/ amnesty71.htm.

[209] Amnesty recommended that the European Commission on Human Rights institute action against the United Kingdom in order to stop these practices. In 1976, the Commission ruled that these techniques did amount to torture, and the case went in front of the European Court of Human Rights. In 1978, the court ruled that the techniques were "inhumane and degrading" but did not constitute torture.

republican struggle within the international community. The concerns expressed in the report about the treatment of detainees demonstrated the concerns of the republican community, focused on the treatment of individuals within the prison system.

That focus on the treatment of prisoners was central to collective acts of resistance during the period of reactive containment. The compounds at Long Kesh were overcrowded, food was scarce, and living conditions were particularly harsh in the winters. Prisoners organized among themselves to campaign for better living conditions, going so far as to set fire to some of the cages in the winter of 1974.[210] Because prisoners had SCS, they did not have an immediate need to legitimate their political identity within the prisons. The combination of SCS and the IRA's strategic view that the prison struggle as not particularly significant to its overall strategy meant that republican prisoners framed their resistance in terms of forming a community and improving their living conditions. Those tactics, their relationship to the overall republican struggle, and their political implications all fundamentally changed after the abolition of SCS in 1976 and the construction of the H-Blocks.

Criminalization and Resistance among the Men of Long Kesh, 1976-81

Prison conditions and prison resistance changed radically when the British introduced the criminalization model for prison management. Criminalization policies were based

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Amnesty International, *A Report on Allegations of Ill-Treatment made by Persons Arrested under the Special Powers Act after 8 August, 1971* (accessed April 12, 2016), http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/intern/docs/ amnesty71.htm.

[210] Adams, *Cage Eleven*, 36-46.

on the erasure of the political nature of the violence as a means to delegitimize

paramilitary activity. The prison system was reimagined as a site of power that was

designed to isolate and individualize the prisoner, stripping (in most cases) him of any

political or collective identity.[211] The H-Blocks, which were central to the prison

structure under criminalization, were designed with this goal in mind. Life for

prisoners in the H-Blocks was very different than life had been for prisoners in the

Cages.[212] Political prisoners in the Cages had been afforded certain rights not given to

prisoners in the H-Blocks such as the right to wear their own clothing, the right to

abstain from prison work, and the right to free association. Nevertheless, republican

prisoners in the H-Blocks continued to cultivate a sense of collective identity, both by

sharing *scéal* and by teaching one another the Irish language. The cellular design of

the H-Blocks was meant to isolate prisoners from their political communities, but even

while prisoners were confined to their cells, they shouted Gaelic lessons at one

another. Language had the power to transcend the physical isolation of the H-Blocks

and work towards overcoming the violence enacted upon the body within the prison

while cultivating a collective identity. Through both of these tactics, communication

became the key to maintaining a sense of community under intensely isolating

circumstances.

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[211] McAtackney, *An Archaeology of the Troubles*, 77.

[212] Ibid., 151.
Although the H-Blocks were opened in 1976, the Cages continued to hold small groups of segregated bodies of prisoners. In 1981, there were 300 prisoners in the Cages, but by 1988 they were all released or transferred and the Maze Compound (as that portion of Long Kesh Prison was called by the prison administration) officially closed.

Both the Irish language and *scéal* became even more important to prisoners in the H-Blocks than they had been to prisoners in the Cages or in other prisons. Sands, OC of the republican prisoners on the H-Blocks, described sharing s*céal* as the highlight each day, "The way a good bit of *scéal* could liven up the wing was unbelievable."[213] Much of that news was passed onto prisoners in letters from their loved ones, although letters were frequently censored or withheld altogether by the prison administration. This informal news sharing network was important for the prisoners not only because it solidified their sense of community, but also because it acted as a way in which they could reclaim physical space within the prison. Notes and diary entries were smuggled between prisoners and out of the prison, hidden within the bodies of the prisoners themselves. Through this process, the prisoners' bodies became the final ground for resistance.[214]

Republican prisoners capitalized on this strong sense of community and communal identity in order to engage in collective acts of resistance, the majority of which were organized around the issue of political status. On September 14, 1976, Ciaran Nugent became the first paramilitary prisoner sentenced after SCS was abolished. Unlike his comrades who still enjoyed their rights as political prisoners (many were kept in the Cages and others were moved to the H-Blocks), Nugent was treated like any other ordinary criminal. Both as a personal act of defiance and in conforming with IRA policy on resisting criminalization, Nugent refused to wear a

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[213] Bobby Sands, *Writings from Prison* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1998), 31.

[214] Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 199-201.

prison uniform and thus be branded as an ordinary criminal instead of a POW, and

began the blanket protest. Simply stated, blanket protests were protests in which

prisoners refused to wear their uniforms. Political prisoners had the right to wear their

own clothes, so refusal to wear the prison uniform was a refusal to conform to

criminalization policies aimed at treating paramilitary prisoners like ODCs. By 1980,

there were over 400 men and women "on the blanket" who had adopted Nugent's

method of protest.[215] Prisoners on the blanket (also referred to as the blanketmen)

often participated in mass work stoppages, again asserting their rights as political

prisoners. The instructions for anyone participating in these protests were simple:

"Don't wear the uniform…Don't work. Political prisoners don't do menial type of

work they [the prison administration] want you to do."[216]

　　　　While there were other rights that prisoners lost after SCS was removed (such

as the right to exemption from prison work), the blanketmen chose to organize their

protest around the issue of the prison uniform because it was the most basic

mechanism by which prisoners were integrated into the penal system and the most

visual indicator of political status. Without the uniform, prisoners existed in a separate

group from ordinary criminals in which their collective political identity was

legitimized. Had they agreed to wear the uniform, they would have been giving over

their bodies, the only space they had left to claim, to British policies of

criminalization. In the words of Sands, "They can do what they will with me, but I will

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[215] Coogan, *On the Blanket*, 94.

[216] Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 154.

never bow to them or allow them to criminalise me."[217] While protests prior to 1976

were organized around prison conditions or ill-treatment by prison administration, the

primary motivation behind tactics of resistance between 1976 and 1981 was the

refusal to accept criminalization and the steadfast dedication to the collective (and

individual) political identity of republican prisoners.

The prisoners' protest did not go unnoticed by the prison administration, and

the guards used a variety of punishments to try and force prisoners to abandon their

protest. Since prisoners were required to wear their uniforms when leaving their cells,

those participating in the blanket protests were confined to their cells for twenty-four

hours a day. As the blanket protests and work stoppages continued, prison officers

used increasingly violent and humiliating punishments to force prisoners to abandon

their protests and accept their status as ODCs. The most frequent form of punishment

was to be put "on the boards" in a cell devoid of everything but a wooden board to

sleep on and a Bible. Beatings were increasingly frequent, and strip searches were

conducted deliberately to humiliate prisoners.[218] By early 1978, prisoners expected to

be beaten anytime they left their cells, which was generally restricted to visits with

family or use of common areas for personal hygiene.

After two years of continuous blanket protests in Long Kesh, the prison

administration had not changed its position on the prison uniform. Criminalization

policies remained unchanged. In March and April of 1978, prisoners escalated their

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[217] Sands, *Writings from Prison*, 43.

[218] Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 174-176.

protest and began refusing to leave their cells to wash themselves. Prison officers

responded by refusing all prisoners access to toilets and washing facilities. Slowly

prisoners began "dirty protests," where they refused to wash themselves or their cells,

and they covered the walls of their cells in bodily fluids. The dirty protest at Long

Kesh began partly as a defensive mechanism to escalating control within the prisons.

In April 1978, prison guards locked the leaders of the dirty protest in solitary

confinement. Prisoners responded by smashing the furniture in their cells, so guards

removed the furniture. When the dirty protest began, prisoners were left with nothing

but mattresses and blankets in their cells.[219] Protesting prisoners at Long Kesh lost

some of their privileges such as receiving packages or listening to the radio. They

were also entitled to fewer letters and visits, and less free time for association than

conforming prisoners.[220] The dirty protest was also partially an escalation of their

collective resistance that had begun with the blanket protests.[221] However, while the

dirty protest elicited responses from prison guards and officials in the form of

increasingly violent confrontations, the prison administration as a whole remain

unchanged.

The 1980-81 Republican Hunger Strikes and Resistance as Self-Sacrifice

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[219] Coogan, *On the Blanket*,

[220] Northern Ireland Office, *Day to Day Life in Northern Ireland Prisons* (1981), 14. Shelfmark P673, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library.

[221] Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 171.

Six years after the blanket protests and work stoppages began and two years after the

dirty protests began, the British model of criminalization persisted. Both the blanket

protests and dirty protests had exhausted their capacity as forms of resistance and had

resulted in cycles of violence between prisoners and guards. Nugent, the first prisoner

to go on the blanket, describes his days on the blanket as filled with violence from

guards: "There was always beating except when the priest [came]. If was not due you

[could] hear the man next door or down the corridor getting it; that's if you were not

getting it yourself."[222] Prisoners occasionally fought back against these beatings and

started altercations with prison guards.[223] The physical harassment of prisoners also

increased, predominantly through the routinization of strip searches.[224] In early 1976,

the IRA leadership from within Long Kesh wrote a letter to the IRA Army Council

(the internal governing body of the IRA at the top of the organization's hierarchy),

asking the IRA to support prisoners and target prison guards outside of prisons.

Between 1976 and 1979, IRA members killed nineteen prison guards outside of the

prisons.[225] These killings demonstrated both the IRA's support for the prison struggle

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[222] Coogan, *On the Blanket*, 96.

[223] Ibid.

[224] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment,* 85.
In a statement published by the Relatives' Action Committee in May 1980, one republican prisoner in the H-Blocks described his experiences with strip searches: "The most important thing on everyone's mind now is the searches. In recent weeks, the screws [guards] have begun a very degrading search…Here they actually probe about inside men's bodies by pushing their fingers, tweezers, or other objects up men's back passages. The number of men receiving these searches is growing every week….the crew is carrying out more and more searches…and the screws use everything possible as a weapon against us." Relatives Action Committee, *Prison Struggle* (May 1980), Periodicals, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library.

[225] Patrick Bishop and Eamon Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London: Corgi Books, 1987), 351.

and one of the ways in which these protests escalated the violence between prison guards and prisoners (or those acting on behalf of prisoners).

Within the prisons, the administration did not stop guards from beating protesting prisoners, which reflected their desire to end the protests. However, the prison administration did not want to end the protests by giving into the prisoners' demands and acknowledging their political status. On March 26, 1980, two years after the dirty protests began, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Humphrey Atkins, issued a statement affirming the administration's steadfast refusal to give into the protesting prisoners. The statement affirmed that there would be "no concession on the central issue of special category status [and] no special category status for persons charged on or after 1 April 1980."[226] The only concessions the prisoners had won through blanket protests and dirty protests were two visits each month instead of one, a letter in and out of the prison weekly rather than monthly, and daily exercise.[227]

In the fall of 1980, seven prisoners at Long Kesh further escalated the tactics of collective resistance being used by republican prisoners. Those seven men began a fifty-three day hunger strike in protest of unchanged prison conditions and the continued denial of SCS. The strike began with the blanketmen and centered around five demands: 1) the right to wear civilian clothes, 2) the right to abstain from prison work, 3) the right to free association among prisoners, 4) reversing of remission time added because of earlier protests, and 5) the right to have regular visits, receive

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[226] Northern Ireland Office, *The Dirty Protest—Maze and Armagh Prisons* (April 1980), NIO/12/183A, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland.

[227] Ibid.

packages, and access recreational and educational resources.[228] These demands were similar to the demands made by the blanketmen and the men on the dirty protests, but the hunger strikers articulated them more clearly than they had before. Essentially, these five demands constituted the rights granted to prisoners under SCS. The strike ended in December 1980 without fatalities and with the British promise of prison reform; it seemed like a victory for the prisoners and the republican community as a whole.

Prisoners initiated this hunger strike both because hunger strikes were an important part of the Irish history of resistance and because it was a further escalation of their resistance tactics that placed their bodies at the center of collective tactics of resistance. Hunger strikes were used in Ireland as early as 1917. In September of that year a republican prisoner Thomas Ashe, one of forty republican prisoners in Dublin's Mountjoy Prison on hunger strike, died after being force fed by prison authorities.[229] Between August 1918 and October 1923, Irish republican prisoners organized over thirty hunger strikes in prisons across Ireland. In 1923, six months after the end of the Irish Civil War, prisoners at Mountjoy began a hunger strike aimed at securing their release and rallying the republican community outside of prisons to continue to fight for full independence for Ireland. At its height, that strike included approximately 8,000 prisoners in ten prisons and internment camps.[230] In 1972, IRA members imprisoned in Northern Ireland began using hunger strikes in Crumlin Road Gaol.

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[228] Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 218.

[229] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 75.

[230] Ibid., 76-77.

That strike was one of the primary reasons that the Secretary of State for Northern

Ireland granted paramilitary prisoners SCS. Like the connection made between the

prison struggle and the historical importance of prisons to the republican movement,

hunger strikes were a tactic familiar to the republican community. Both of these

connections dated back to the 1916 Easter Rebellion and its aftermath. The 1980-81

hunger strikes at Long Kesh drew on this history but also addressed the specific

political conditions of the Troubles.

While the 1980 hunger strike ended without any major victories for protesting

prisoners, the leaders of the republican prisoners in Long Kesh did not abandon the

tactic. In 1981, prisoners planned another hunger strike without external consultations

with IRA or Sinn Féin leaders. As the republican OC, Sands decided to lead the

hunger strike himself. The second hunger strike began on March 1, 1981, exactly five

years since SCS was abolished. That same day, Brendan MacFarlane, the prisoner

elected to replace Sands as republican OC, declared an official end to the dirty

protests.[231] By 1981, the community outside of prisons was well aware of the struggle

going on within the H-Blocks. Sands was elected as a Member of Parliament while on

hunger strike, demonstrating the recognition of the prison struggle by the greater

republican community.[232] Sands died on May 5, 1981 after 66 days on hunger strike;

his death was quickly followed by the deaths of nine other hunger strikers. After his

death Sands became known throughout Ireland, and his sacrifice came to represent the

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[231] McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 94.

[232] Gerry Adams, foreword to *Writings from Prison,* by Bobby Sands (Cork: Mercier Press, 1998), 10.

epitome of republican struggle. His writings were smuggled out of the H-Blocks and distributed among republican communities. He was memorialized in murals all over Belfast (most notably on the side of Sinn Féin's headquarters in West Belfast), and he became the most well-known martyr for the republican cause.

The deaths of the ten hunger strikers in 1981 were the most apparent examples of self-sacrifice as a form of resistance. All three of the collective tactics of resistance used by republican prisoners between 1976 and 1981 all used the body as the central site of resistance and therefore relied on some degree of self-sacrifice. These collective tactics of resistance also turned the body into a weapon of political violence.[233] As prisoners continually refused to conform to the rules of the prison regime, they were subject to increasingly violent treatment that targeted the vulnerability of their captive bodies within the prison system. Blanket protests, dirty protests, and hunger strikes all relied on the body as a tool, directly countering the violent treatment of the body by the prison regime. First, this resistance exposed the body of the prisoner by removing his clothing (blanket protests), then by surrounding himself in bodily fluids (dirty protests), and finally by sacrificing the body itself (hunger strikes).[234] The increased exposure of the body in these tactics of resistance correlated with an increased sense of self-sacrifice. Violence enacted upon the body of the prisoner during this period was analogous with violence enacted upon the republican community as a whole.

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[233] Megan A. O'Branski, "'The Savage Reduction of the Flesh;' Violence, Gender and Bodily Weaponisation in the 1981 Irish Republican Hunger Strike Protest," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 7, no. 1 (2014): 104-105.

[234] K.M. Fierke, *Political Self-Sacrifice: Agency, Body and Emotion in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 120.

Sands captured this connection in a 1981 statement to *Republican News*: "I am a political prisoner, a freedom fighter. Like the lark, I, too, have fought for my freedom, not only in captivity, where I now languish, but also on the outside, where my country is held captive."[235] The prisoners were a symbol for Northern Ireland's imprisonment, and their struggle against the prison regime was inseparable from the republican struggle for Irish independence.

The 1981 hunger strike was a defining moment in the republican resistance to the British occupation both inside and outside of the H-Blocks. While the hunger strike grew out of republican prisoners' refusal to wear prison uniforms, it was about much more than prisoners' clothing. The uniform represented the acceptance of the British government's definition of republicans as criminals. The blanket protests, dirty protests, and hunger strikes between 1976 and 1981 were ultimately struggles for the right to identity and autonomy for republican prisoners. That struggle reflected the struggle of republicans within Northern Ireland as a whole. Consequently, between 1976 and 1981, prisons were the most important site of republican resistance to British rule in Northern Ireland. The self-sacrifice of the protesting prisoners, particularly the martyrdom of the ten hunger strikers in 1981, was instrumental in forcing the British administration to reevaluate its overall approach to managing the conflict. After the 1981 hunger strike, the British administration abandoned criminalization policies and began to reform the prison system. Most importantly, the prison administration gradually returned the rights and privileges of SCS to republican prisoners. The British

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[235] Fierke, *Political Self-Sacrifice,* 120.

also began to normalize their approach to prisoners, adopting the model of managerialism and attempting to treat them more like other prisoners without completely erasing their political identities. After 1981, the British no longer viewed prisons as sites in which to fight against political violence. Instead, managerial policies focused on internal relations between prison guards and prisoners. Tactics of collective resistance, blanket protests, dirty protests, and hunger strikes, were ultimately successful in gaining rights for prisoners, solidifying republican identity, and raising support for the republican cause among a greater population and with powerful institutions. But the men of Long Kesh were not alone in their struggle.

Resistance among the Women of Armagh Gaol, 1971-86

While the men in Long Kesh were organizing strikes and protests, women were being held in Armagh Gaol in central Northern Ireland. These women were also mobilizing to claim their rights as political prisoners and further the republican cause. However, their resistance is often overlooked. Much of this has to do with the media and scholarly emphasis on the men's 1981 hunger strike. Women political prisoners were subject to relatively the same prison conditions as men, especially when those conditions were shaped by the policies of reactive containment or criminalization. Women engaged in tactics of resistance similar to those of men, and they were similarly effective in achieving their goals. Far fewer women than men were held as political prisoners, and their role in the resistance was seen as secondary to the role of men as it had been since the eighteenth century. This dynamic persisted until the 1980

dirty protest, which shifted that rhetoric and helped change the perception of women within the republican movement.

Although Armagh was designated as a women's prison in 1924, the facility continued to house men until it closed in 1986. Many of the men housed in Armagh during the Troubles were moved there out of necessity. In 1971, as internment increased the prison population, over 300 men were transferred to Armagh. This move created difficult conditions for the women, whose movement was restricted to ensure separation between male and female populations.[236] Women resisted systems of oppression in similar ways to men. They promoted education and training, including Gaelic classes. While men focused their education on politics, women focused on skills such as cooking, handicrafts, and laundry, meant to prepare them for their lives in the home or working in domestic services. When the administration introduced substantive educational programs into the prison, they were generally introduced as remedial classes to prevent women from falling further behind on such studies.[237] The difference in the daily activities of the men and women in prison was reflective of widely accepted gender norms that acknowledged the political nature of men, but limited the role of women to the private sphere. This difference did not mean that the Armagh women were not politically aware or active. The women conceived their struggle as the same as the men's struggle.[238] They drew on stories of the women of *Cumann na mBan* who fought alongside the IRA in the early twentieth century. Their

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[236] Corrigan, *Out of Order*, 23.

[237] Ibid., 25.

[238] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence,* 11.

struggle was equally connected to the history of the republican struggle against British colonialism, and for many of them, their gender did not drastically change their participation.

Women organized themselves within the prison in the same way that the men did, under a paramilitary-style hierarchy. Women also participated in the same three dominant tactics of collective resistance: blanket protests, hunger strikes, and dirty protests. Eileen Hickey was elected first OC of the republican prisoners of Armagh in 1973; she was succeeded by Mairéad Farrell in 1976.[239] Farrell was the first person to follow Ciaran Nugent and go on the blanket in protest of the designation of paramilitary prisoners as criminals. She was also instrumental in the hunger strikes organized at Armagh, and especially in the 1980 dirty protest.[240] In addition to using the same structural hierarchy as male prisoners, republican women also envisioned themselves as belonging to a distinct community. Like the men, they resisted the isolation and individualization of the prison system and acted as a collective group. While the women lived their daily lives as prisoners in relatively the same way that men did, they were treated differently by the prison administration because of their gender.

The prison uniform was the most obvious sign of the criminalization of political violence within Long Kesh Prison and resistance to wearing that uniform was central

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[239] Evelyn Brady, et al., *In the Footsteps of Anne: Stories of Republican Women Ex-Prisoners* (Belfast: Shanway Press, 2011), 69.

[240] Although seldom discussed, three women in Armagh joined the 1980 hunger strike organized by the republican prisoners at Long Kesh.

to all of the collective action taken between 1976 and 1981. However, women

imprisoned in Armagh, whether granted SCS or not, were not required to wear prison

uniforms. The prison administration introduced this rule in 1972, and reasoned "that it

was much more likely to have a positive effect on the rehabilitation of female

offenders."[241] The reasoning behind that decision was connected to the idea that

women posed less of a security threat than men did. This view ultimately reflected the

socially accepted position that men were political actors and women were not.

Perceived as a lesser threat, physical punishments for women were less severe than

those for men. The only exception to that treatment was strip searches, which were

used far more frequently and strategically against women than they were against men.

The prison system was a part of both a colonial and patriarchal power

structure. While the British administration had dominance over its republican

prisoners, the male-dominated prison system also exploited gender norms to

particularly target, humiliate, and silence female prisoners. Most of the republican

women prisoners came from Catholic communities where they were raised with values

that stressed the importance of modesty, particularly for women. In many Irish

Catholic families, even married people did not undress in front of each other. For

some Catholics, "clothes [were] almost a part of the person's body. To invade this is a

violation. It's a violent act, and…in this sense, rapacious."[242] The prison

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[241] Northern Ireland Office, *Regimes in Northern Ireland Prisons: Prisoners' Day to Day Life with Special Emphasis on Maze and Armagh* (1980), Para. 46. Shelfmark P2862, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library.

[242] Sinn Féin POW Department, *Stop Strip Searching in Armagh Jail* (1984), 21. Shelfmark P1728, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library.

administration exploited these norms and targeted the women by exposing their bodies through strip searches.

These searches were a tool used to humiliate both male and female prisoners. However, searches induced a greater degree of humiliation, degradation, and fear in female prisoners than they did in male prisoners. Searches of female prisoners were almost always carried out by male prison guards. The use of male guards was deliberate, and it was intended to further humiliate the women. Strip searches of female prisoners by male guards carried with them the threat or use of sexual humiliation, harassment, and assault that the searches of male prisoners by male guards normally did not.[243] Mary McArdle, who was imprisoned in the 1980s, recalled one particularly traumatic experience with strip searching:

> That day started as a pretty normal day. It was 2nd March and we endured ten hours of physical, sexual, and mental torture. It turned into a nightmare of a day. It started with eight or ten screws going into a cell, and what they did was they actually attacked people. They pulled them onto the floor, stripped them, humiliated them and degraded them, one by one. You could hear your friends, people who were your comrades, being attacked. You had all this range of experiences. It was very frightening and made you feel very angry.[244]

McArdle's memory of strip searches demonstrates how the prison administration exploited gender norms to target female prisoners. Her experience also shows that even though prison conditions were relatively the same for men as they were for men, prisoners' experiences were shaped by their gender.

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[243] There were cases of strip searches in Long Kesh where men experienced sexual harassment, humiliation, or assault. While those cases were far fewer than similar cases in Armagh Gaol, men were even more reluctant to discuss their experiences because of the way that their experience was gendered.

[244] Brady, et al., *In the Footsteps,* 245.

Gender shaped both prisoners' experiences with prison conditions and their experiences with resistance. For the Armagh women, the most significant form of collective resistance was a dirty protest. In early 1980, the Armagh women had been operating under a work stoppage for over two years with little effect on the prison system. On February 7, 1980, extra prison guards were sent into Armagh's B wing while the thirty-two republican prisoners were waiting to have dinner. They were surrounded by prison guards, including over thirty male guards, allegedly brought in from Long Kesh. In the words of Mairéad Farrell, "The male officers never gave us a chance. They immediately jumped us and starting beating all around them."[245] The women were beaten and confined in two large cells while prison officers searched their cells for articles of paramilitary-style clothing. The women were individually returned to their cells, many of them beaten and strip searched during the process.[246] They were locked in their cells for five days, without access to toilets or washing facilities. After the five days of initial confinement, the women refused to use the toilets or washing facilities and refused to wash their sheets or clothes, and the dirty protest in Armagh Gaol officially began.

The collective action of the women dirty protesters transgressed their traditional gender roles while simultaneously revealing their womanhood. Portrayals of the dirty protests were also always gendered, often by including descriptions of menstrual blood smeared on the walls of the women's cells. These descriptions

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[245] Women Against Imperialism, *Women Protest for Political Status in Armagh Gaol*, 23.

[246] Coogan, *On the Blanket*, 116.

explicitly gendered the women's actions by "objectif[ying] a [sexual] difference that women had carefully obliterated in other dimensions of their political life."[247] Again, the body was at the center of prison resistance, but in this case that body was explicitly gendered. Sexual difference was not meant to be a part of the dirty protest, but it became a part of the political discourse surrounding the prison protests in 1980 and 1981. The next chapter will examine in detail the ways in which the Armagh dirty protest entered the political discourse on the prison struggle and highlighted the complicated relationship between the women's movement and the republican movement.

Conclusion

In whatever form, resistance among republican prisoners in Long Kesh and Armagh formed collective identity among the republican community and reclaimed space within the prisons. This chapter has outlined three major collective acts of resistance: blanket protests, dirty protests, and hunger strikes, and demonstrated how the physical body was implicated in each of these tactics. Beyond these three tactics, prisoners created a network of shared communication that transcended the physical isolation of the prison system and solidified a sense of community among republicans in the prison. The way in which that community envisioned its collective identity was both connected to the historical struggle of Irish republicanism against British colonialism and unique to the context of the prison system during the Troubles.

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[247] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 138-139.

After the introduction of criminalization policies in 1976, prisons became the single most important site within the republican struggle, and the identity of the prisoners heavily influenced the identity of the republican community as a whole. While the experiences of prisoners was predominantly shaped by the physical and institutional structure of the prison system, social and cultural norms also affected their experiences, particularly when those norms concerned gender. This chapter discusses the ways in which the 1980 women's dirty protest at Armagh Gaol was both the same as and distinct from men's resistance, focusing on the ways in which the body was gendered by the prison regime and the community outside of the prisons. The next chapter will turn to the relationships between the prison struggle and the community at large, specifically focusing on the effects of that dirty protest on the prison struggle, the women's movement, and the republican movement.

Chapter 4: Republican and Feminist Reactions to the Armagh Dirty Protest

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the ways in which male and female republican prisoners organized various forms of collective resistance within Long Kesh and Armagh Gaol prisons. Both men and women republican prisoners fundamentally organized their resistance around the issue of political status. The various models of prison administration both shaped and were shaped by the various resistance tactics. Collective resistance among republican prisoners coalesced around the three tactics of blanket protests, hunger strikes, and dirty protests. Throughout, the body was a primary site of resistance. Yet the particular ways in which the body was implicated in this resistance was gendered, based on the different treatment of male and female prisoners as well as the gender norms within the broader republican community. This chapter focuses on the 1980 dirty protest at Armagh Gaol and the ways in which the protest was perceived by various interest groups beyond the prison walls. The chapter demonstrates how women were able to collaborate with and gain recognition from key political actors. This collaboration was crucial to the success of their protest. Reactions to this protest demonstrated the overlapping yet sometimes divergent goals of each of the republican and women's movements during the Troubles.

The Republican Women's Movement in Northern Ireland

Historians of various regions have demonstrated how the relationship between anti-colonial struggles and women's movements is complex and contradictory.[248] In many cases, dominant gender norms are suspended in times of anti-colonial mobilizations and women take on traditionally male roles in the struggle for national liberation. In the context of Irish republicanism, politics was considered a traditionally male sphere. The same was true for militancy. Although women participated in both politics and militant organization, their primary role was still meant to be within the home or in a supportive capacity to men.[249] However, after independence in many cases women were often denied the full political, social, and economic equality they were promised in exchange for their support or believe they would receive upon independence. This was the pattern in Ireland in the early-twentieth century. Women fought alongside men

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[248] The complex and contradictory relationship between anti-colonial movements and women's movements has been studied by historians in a wide variety of geographic and political contexts. Louise Ryan writes about this relationship within the context of the women's movement and Irish republicanism in the early twentieth century. She argues that nationalist (Irish republican) rhetoric defines womanhood in ways that limit the choices available to women as active agents in the nationalist or anti-colonial movements, but women's actual participation in that struggle contradicts and transgresses those definitions. However, even if women are allowed or encouraged to engaged in "unwomanly behavior," as was the case for militant republican women in early-twentieth century Ireland, their behavior is only exceptional during the exceptional circumstances of the national struggle. Generally, these changes do not survive once the new nation-state is established, as exemplified in Article 41 of the Constitution of the Irish Free State (see chapter one of this study for more information). Louise Ryan, "'Furies' and 'Die-hards:' Women and Irish Republicanism in the Early Twentieth Century," *Gender & History* 11, no. 2 (1999): 256-275. This relationship has also been observed by Beth Baron in her study of the feminist movement in twentieth-century Egypt. Baron examines the relationship between women as symbols of a feminized nation and women as actors in the nationalist movement in post-World War I Egypt. She focuses on familial imagery and rhetoric that constructed women as "Mothers of Egypt," arguing that symbolic representations of women as symbols of the nation emphasized women's domestic roles and excluded most women from formal politic processes. Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

[249] Ryan, "'Furies' and 'Die-hards:'," 256-257.

in the War for Independence (1919-21) in organizations like *Cumann na mBan.* While

membership in *Cumann na mBan* was largely restricted to middle and upper-class

women, the women were included as equal to the male Irish Volunteers in the

organizing and execution of key militant actions like the 1916 Easter Rising. Men and

women took classes together on subjects like first aid and the history of Irish

nationalism. They also drilled together, and they were held to the same physical

standards. Some women actively took up arms during the Easter Rising, the War for

Independence, and the Civil War, while others served as medics and in other

capacities.[250] Yet after the formation of the Irish Free State (1922), women were

denied key political, social, and economic rights.

The relationship between the republican anti-colonial struggle and the

women's movement in Ireland was further complicated by the prominence of Catholic

values among the republican community and the new government formed in the Irish

Free State. While women in the Irish Free State were granted the right to vote in 1922,

a right often denied to women in newly independent states, the constitution enshrined

many Catholic ideals that kept women bound to gender norms that limited their

influence and freedoms in society.[251] A lack of separation between the Catholic

Church hierarchy and government leaders during the formative years of the Irish Free

State contributed to the passage of legislation that defined women's roles as domestic.

The Civil Service Regulation Bill, passed in 1925, restricted the rights of women to sit

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[250] Margaret Ward, ed. *In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism* (Cork: Attic Press, 1995), 73-76.
[251] Christina Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy: Campaigns around Republican Women Prisoners in Armagh Jail," *Feminist Review* 23 (Summer 1986): 62.

for competitive examinations in civil service careers. In 1932, a marriage bar required

women teachers to retire upon marriage. This bar was eventually extended to include

women in all sectors of civil service.[252] The devaluing of women's paid employment

outside the home was just one example of restrictions of women's rights in the Irish

Free state because of the pervasiveness of Catholic social teaching.[253] These types of

Catholic values were shared by the majority of republicans in Northern Ireland, who

were still engaged in an anti-colonial struggle after partition. The Catholic Church had

a prominent institutional role in both local and national politics in the Irish Free State,

but the Church's influence was limited to republican communities in Northern Ireland.

Catholic values, however pervasive, were not the sole determinant of republican

women's status in Northern Irish society. Women's status was also influenced by

economic and political factors, as well as their relationship to the republican

movement and the women's movement.

The development of a women's movement in Northern Ireland came largely in

the late-twentieth century, after the outbreak of the Troubles. Following partition, the

political force of the Irish women's movement in the Irish Free State went through a

period of decline, chiefly due to the conservative climate of the new independent

state.[254] The women's movement in Northern Ireland went through a similar decline

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[252] Caitriona Beaumont, "Women, Citizenship, and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922-1948," *Women's History Review* 6, no.4 (1997): 568.

[253] Ibid., 565

[254] Mary E. Daly, "'Oh, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, Your Way's a Thorny Way!' The Conditions of Women in Twentieth-Century Ireland," in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland,* eds. Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 108.

following partition. Across Ireland, the women's movement was fractured along lines of class and political affiliation prior to partition, and partition further entrenched political differences. After partition, women were divided along political lines both with respect to their personal politics (i.e. republican or loyalist) and with respect to national politics (divided between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland). Broadly speaking, two distinct women's movements that are relevant to this analysis manifested.

The first movement consisted of mainly educated, middle-class women who were concerned with women's issues as they affected women of all ethnicities and across national boundaries. This women's movement was similar to the contemporary movement in Great Britain, and most individuals and organizations within this movement identified strongly with feminist politics of the late twentieth century. Women who were parts of this movement were concerned with issues such as domestic violence and sexual assault. Cathy Harkins was involved in this section of the Northern Irish women's movement. Harkins was a republican activist who was heavily involved in the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) in the late 1960s. In the mid-1970s, she began working with an organization called Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, which aims provide all Northern Irish women (as well as men and children) who are victims of domestic abuse with refuge accommodations and emergency assistance.[255] Harkins wrote to *Spare Rib,* a second-wave feminist

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[255] Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, "About Women's Aid," accessed April 15, 2016, http://www.womensaidni.org/about-us/womens-aid/.

magazine in the United Kingdom, and said: "The struggle for women's liberation will at times entail confrontation with the British Army and state institutions…but it will also involve challenging the attitudes of Church, political and paramilitary groups."[256] As evidenced by this statement, this section of the Northern Irish women's movement believed that patriarchal power structures were embedded in both British colonialism and any potential forms of Irish home rule. For these women, like Harkins, feminist issues needed to become a part of the overall policy of any of the concurrent political movement.

The second movement consisted mainly of working-class Irish Catholic republican women, primarily committed to liberation from British colonialism.[257] These women were concerned with issues such as domestic violence and sexual assault, like the women in the first movement. However, they approached these issues primarily as republican issues. Women Against Imperialism (WAI) was a women's organization formed in 1978. In an article in *Spare Rib*, WAI released a statement confirming the organization's wholehearted support for "sexual equality, gay liberation, state nurseries, an end to physical violence against women, and a women's right to control her own body."[258] However, these women also asserted that "abstract feminist demands" could not be imposed upon women who suffered daily at the hands of British troops, from "British deformed 'justice' in the North and British economic

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[256] Cathy Harkins, *Spare Rib* (November 1980), quoted in McCafferty, *The Armagh Women*, 88.

[257] Cockburn, *The Space Between Us*, 61.

[258] Women Against Imperialism, *Spare Rib* (November 1980), quoted in McCafferty, *The Armagh Women*, 89.

interests in the South."[259] This chapter is concerned with the second movement, which was the women's movement most closely associated with the republican movement and with Catholic values.

Some scholars have argued that the women's movement in Northern Ireland, particularly the republican women's movement, was almost or completely inseparable from the broader campaigns for social justice and independence represented by the Catholic civil rights movement or the republican movement.[260] It is true that many of the women who formed the key organizations within the republican women's movement were active in groups such as the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) and DHAC.[261] Women also formed organizations that related specifically to their experiences as republican women. Two of the key organizations that formed this movement were the Relative's Action Committee (RAC, founded in 1976) and WAI. These organizations were both begun by and primarily consisted of women, but their differing goals reflected some of the divisions within the republican women's movement and how the movement as a whole developed.

Monica McWilliams, a prominent politician and women's rights activist in Northern Ireland, has identified five stages of development within the Northern Ireland republican women's movement: 1) civil rights activism, 2) "accidental" activism, 3) "conflictual activism," 4) peace activism, and 5) feminist activism.[262] The

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[259] Ibid.

[260] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 158.

[261] Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 64. Hill, *Women in Ireland,* 161-162.

[262] McWilliams, "Struggling for Peace and Justice," 13-18.

first stage came with the developing civil rights movement and groups like NICRA

and DHAC in the 1960s. McWilliams refers to the second stage of women's activism

as "accidental activism," adopting Susan Hyatt's term to describe activism "born of

the immediate experience of social injustice, rather than as a consequence of a pre-

existing ideological belief."[263] The women who were a part of this stage were not

active in previous political organizations (like NICRA and DHAC). Their political

activism developed as a result of their participation in direct action that opposed the

increasing violent British occupation during the early 1970s. McWilliams argues that

the RAC was developed as a part of this stage of women's activism.

The RAC was founded in 1976, when a group of four women met in Derry to

discuss how to best support republican prisoners after Whitelaw abolished special

category status (SCS) for any prisoners sentenced after March 1, 1976. The primary

objective of the RAC was the restoration of SCS for republican prisoners. The

organization held the belief that "mass involvement on the streets linked to the success

of the armed struggle" would secure SCS for prisoners and eventually "drive the Brits

out of Ireland altogether."[264] Sections of the RAC developed in cities and towns across

Northern Ireland. The most active groups were the Derry RAC and the Belfast RAC

because they were located in the two largest urban centers in the country.[265] These

groups organized protests outside of the H-Blocks and Armagh Gaol, particularly

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[263] Ibid.," 21.

[264] Relatives Action Committee, "R.A.C. Special," (n.d., c. 1974), Periodicals, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[265] Relatives Action Committee, "Prison Struggle," (May 1980), Periodicals, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

between 1976 and 1981. In addition to organizing protests and demonstrations, the RAC collected donations on behalf of republican prisoners and their families and encouraged public support for prisoners through activities such as a student essay competition on the topic of "The Political Prisoner."[266] They wanted to demonstrate to both the prisoners and the prison administration that the republicans inside British prisons had the support of the community behind them and that the republican community would not tolerate British policies of criminalization.

The RAC included both male and female relatives of prisoners, but it was founded by and primarily organized by women. Many of the members perceived it as a group specifically for women. As Mary Nellis, whose son was imprisoned in the H-Blocks, recalled: "If you had a relative inside you were a mother of a 'terrorist.'...It was wonderful to meet together each week, and know that you were talking to a group of women who understood what you were going through."[267] This appeal to women's roles as wives and mothers demonstrated how women within this particular Northern Irish republican women's movement relied on dominant gender norms. This strategy was successful for the women because it grounded their political activism, which was generally considered a male role, in generally accepted roles for women.[268] The

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[266] Relatives Action Committee, "R.A.C. Special."

[267] McWilliams, "Struggling for Peace and Justice," 23.

[268] Members and supporters of the RAC advocated for specific forms of protest that relied on women's legitimacy as wives and mothers. One republican prisoner at Long Kesh, R.G. McAuley, wrote to the RAC and encouraged "blocking of main roads and junctions by women with prams, again a very effective means of protest which generally gets coverage in the media, especially where women accompanied by children make up the bulk of the protesters." R.G. McAuley to the Relatives' Action Group [Committee], November 22, 1976, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library.

women like Nellis who spoke out as mothers of prisoners used their position as the

moral guide for the family (and by extension the nation) to draw attention to the plight

of republican prisoners. However, this strategy did not advance women's status within

formal politics as a whole because women did not engage in political activism that

focused on their rights as women.

McWilliams calls this group a part of the "accidental" stage of the republican

women's movement partially because the women did not have a predetermined

feminist agenda and organized specifically in reaction to the abolition of SCS. Women

legitimated and justified their political role on the basis of their domestic role as wives

and mothers in order to step into the political realm during this stage of women's

activism. However, categorizing this stage of women's activism as "accidental" denies

the founders and members of the RAC political awareness or agency. The absence of

an overtly feminist agenda does not mean that the RAC lacked any political agenda.

The RAC was an overtly republican organization, stressing its support for Irish

prisoners in the H-Blocks, in Armagh, and in jails throughout Ireland and the United

Kingdom.[269] If organizing the RAC in opposition to the abolition of SCS was an

example of "accidental activism" than so too was Ciaran Nugent's decision to go on

the blanket protest. McWilliams categorization of this stage of women's activism as

"accidental" reinforces the idea that women do not belong in the public sphere as

political activists.[270]

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[269] Relatives Action Committee, "Prison Struggle."

[270] This rhetoric is similar to the dominant rhetoric about the protesting women on Armagh's dirty protest, a point which will be explored further later in this chapter.

The women of the Derry RAC were the first non-prisoners to organize a blanket protest in support of the men and women on the blanket. On December 15, 1976, Mary Nellis recalled how these women stood outside the house of a Catholic bishop wearing only blankets in an unusual and highly strategic form of protest: "Because of the strict moral code and influence of the church, this [protest] was a radical departure for women."[271] This form of protest transgressed the typical moral standards for women's behavior, which were grounded in Catholic values of modesty and chastity. By protesting in front of a Catholic bishop's house, the women directly confronted the source of those standards and asked for institutional support for their cause. These women were not challenging gender norms that dictated they should be moral and modest for the sake of redefining their role in society. That kind of political rhetoric would have privileged feminist issues over republican issues. However, they were clearly well aware of dominant gender norms and knew that subverting those norms would gain the attention of key institutional actors, specifically members of the Catholic Church.

Sections of the RAC also protested directly outside of prisons. On March 6, 1980, the RAC organized a picket outside of Armagh Gaol in support of the Armagh women's dirty protest.[272] The Belfast RAC also took their protest campaigns to London, drawing international media attention and directly confronting the British government for their inhumane treatment of republican prisoners.[273] The republican

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[271] McWilliams, "Struggling for Peace and Justice," 23.

[272] Relatives Action Committee, "Prison Struggle."

[273] McWilliams, "Struggling for Peace and Justice," 24.

prison struggle had gained international attention before (most notably immediately following the introduction of internment in 1971), but the RAC was the first Northern Irish organization to take their protests outside of Northern Ireland. Most importantly for the development of the republican women's movement, the women in all sections of the RAC gained experience in political activism that would later develop into what McWilliams calls "conflictual activism," the third stage of the women's movement.

McWilliams defines "conflictual activism" as "different kinds of conflict arising around issues with which women became involved [or]…the types of conflict which occurred *between* the groups as well as that which occurred *within* the women's groups."[274] This type of activism reflected the growing feminist conscious among all Northern Irish women that contributed to women's movements that were distinct from (or in opposition to) the strategies and priorities of the republican leadership. WAI was a key group that developed among republican women during this stage. A group of left-wing anti-imperialist women based in Belfast and Derry founded WAI in 1978. The organization stressed the importance of women's involvement in the anti-colonial struggle. WAI linked the oppression of the republican community by the British occupation to the oppression of republican women. They argued that women's liberation was only possible after national liberation and that the liberation of the nation was necessarily the first priority.[275] In the issues of *Saorbhean: Free Woman,*

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[274] Ibid.

[275] Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 65.

WAI's magazine, released between 1978 and 1981, WAI repeatedly articulated their

core mission. The statement was reprinted in every issue and reads:

> Irish women today are doubly oppressed. Both as members of a country
> suffering the burden of British domination and as women. Throughout
> Ireland's history women have played an important part in the fight against
> imperialism, for example Constance Markiewicz in the 1916 uprising and the
> women in the struggle today, but this has rarely included an understanding of,
> and a fight against the particular problems that women face in an imperialism
> dominated society.[276]

WAI argued that women's liberation was an integral part of national liberation, but

that women's demands for sexual equality, freedom from domestic violence, and

access to reproductive rights were all ignored because they were problems that

resulted from the British occupation.[277] WAI also linked women's oppression under

British colonialism to similar oppression under republicanism and Catholicism, two

ideologies that constituted the core of Irish identity in the North.[278] McWilliams

includes WAI in the "conflictual activism" stage of the women's movement because

their aims were often at odds with "the more directly feminist campaigns of other

women's groups."[279] Groups such as the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement

(NIWRM), formed by a group of women at Queen's University in 1975, aimed to

mobilize women on feminist issues unrelated to the civil rights struggle to which WAI

was so closely connected.[280] One of the goals of NIWRM was to serve as an umbrella

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[276] Women Against Imperialism, *Saorbhean: Free Woman*, no.1 (August-September 1978), 11. Periodicals. Northern Ireland Political Collection. Linen Hall Library.

[277] Weinstein, "The Significance of the Armagh Dirty Protest," 28.

[278] Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 65.

[279] McWilliams, "Struggling for Peace and Justice," 26-27.

[280] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 177.

organization for a wide range of organizations, both republican and unionist. NIWRM aimed to help women co-operate over common problems such as legal restrictions on abortion and responses to domestic violence.[281] WAI engaged with feminist issues as they related to the anti-colonial struggle. They argued that exclusively feminist issues such as those that NIWRM advocated for should be of secondary priority.

McWilliams identifies two final stages of women's activism in Northern Ireland: peace activism and feminist activism. While groups like the RAC and WAI generally supported the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the armed struggle, women who McWilliams identifies as peace activists were opposed to all armed activity, both republican and loyalist. Betty Williams and Mariéad Corrigan, both of whom were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their activism in 1977, played an important leadership role among such women.[282] Williams and Corrigan founded Peace People (formerly called Community for Peace People), which was one of the key organizations of this period of peace activism. The primary objective of Peace People is to "build [a] peaceful society in which the tragedies we have known are a bad memory and a continuing warning."[283] Williams and Corrigan founded Peace People during the era of criminalization (1976-81), but their form of activism was more characteristic of the period of managerialism (1981-2000). One of the primary

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[281] Valerie Morgan, "Peacemakers? Peacekeepers? – Women in Northern Ireland 1969-1995," Lecture, University of Ulster, Derry, Northern Ireland, October 25, 1995, accessed April 10, 2016, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/ women/paper3.htm.

[282] McWilliams, "Struggling for Peace and Justice," 28.

[283] "First Declaration of the Peace People," accessed April 10, 2016, http://www.peacepeople.com/?page_id=10.

objectives of managerialism was to de-escalate the violence of the conflict and work towards dispute resolution within formal political processes, rather than in prisons or on the streets of Northern Ireland. Peace People's activities are indicative of this new era in the British management of the conflict and of women's activism in Northern Ireland. Unlike the women of the RAC, who organized deliberately radical forms of protest, the Peace People primarily organize events that raise awareness about challenges to peace in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

Finally, McWilliams identifies a fifth stage of the women's movement, feminist activism. She argues that this stage primarily developed in the late-1980s and 1990s, but this was not the first period in which distinctly feminist groups formed. However, groups formed during this stage were distinct from earlier feminist groups (like WAI or NIWRM). These groups were distinct because they succeeded in shifting attention from the inequality produced by Northern Ireland's political conflict to the inequality produced by patriarchy as it manifested in Northern Ireland.[284] McWilliams argues that this shift did not occur until after 1985. However, the reactions to the 1980 Armagh dirty protest, by both women's groups and other political actors, demonstrates that this shift occurred immediately following the protest. While the women's movement was split over the issue of support for the Armagh women, there were key women like Nell McCafferty who immediately framed the dirty protest as a feminist issue. McCafferty wrote about the Armagh dirty protest in the *Irish Times* months after the protest began, saying the choice for feminists on the issue of the Armagh

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[284] McWilliams, "Struggling for Peace and Justice," 29.

women was clear. McCafferty argued that "the suffering of women anywhere…cannot be ignored by feminists…we have a responsibility to respond."[285] McCafferty's response demonstrates how feminists immediately reacted to the Armagh dirty protest. Some of those reactions, like those among WAI, focused on the Armagh women's struggle as a product of patriarchy as it manifested in Northern Ireland.[286] The remainder of this chapter explores how women's activism was closely connected to the prison struggle, and how the 1980 dirty protest fundamentally shifted the relationship between the women's movement and the republican movement.

The "Girls" of Armagh Gaol and the 1980 Dirty Protest

The catalyst for the Armagh dirty protest was a confrontation between prison guards and the thirty-two protesting prisoners held in Armagh's B wing that began on the afternoon of February 7, 1980. The republican women on this wing had been participating in a work stoppage since 1976 to protest the abolition of SCS. While the women were waiting for their dinner, they were surrounded by prison guards, including about thirty to forty male guards presumably brought in from Long Kesh. The guards told the women they were conducting a general search of their cells, which meant that the women would be confined into two large association rooms. Several women were severely beaten by the male guards, and they were held in the association rooms until the guards searched their cells. The women were searched, some violently,

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[285] Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 64.

[286] Ibid., 66.

and then they were allowed to return to their cells individually. They were locked in their cells for the next twenty-four hours, not permitted to use the toilets or washing facilities. The conditions on B wing remained relatively constant until February 13 when the guards informed the women that they were being moved to A wing. Immediately after they were moved, the dirty protest had begun. Like the men in the H-Blocks, the women emptied their chamber pots in their cells, smearing excrement on the walls of their cells.

Like the protesting men in the H-Blocks, the Armagh women organized their resistance around the issue of political status. The women's dirty protest occurred within the context of British policies of criminalization. It also occurred within the context of the republican movement, the women's movement, and the Catholic background of their community. As discussed in the previous chapter, the dirty protest explicitly displayed the femininity of the women, transgressed gender norms, and highlighted the gendered exploitation of women by the prison administration. All of these factors affected how gender impacted the success of the Armagh dirty protest.

Women prisoners did not view gender as significant to their situation. It was only among the community outside of the prison that the Armagh dirty protest took on a gendered meaning.[287] Begoña Aretxaga argues that this gendered perception of the protest developed, in part, because "women did not belong to prison in popular consciousness."[288] The career of a male IRA activist in the 1970s was certain to end in

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[287] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 138.

[288] Begoña Aretxaga, "Symbolic Overdetermination and Gender in Northern Ireland Ethnic Violence," *Ethos* 32, no. 2 (June 1995), 138.

either death or imprisonment, so the republican community accepted the centrality of

the prison struggle for men. If women were thought of as a part of the prison struggle,

they were only thought of as young, single women. Married women were expected to

abandon any political activities that involved a risk of imprisonment or death. In

contrast, young and old men, both single and married, continued to participate in

political behavior that risked either imprisonment or death. Within republican

communities, men were entitled to lifelong political careers, while women were

expected to abandon their politics in favor of their more important roles as wives and

mothers.

The limited inclusion of women in the perception of the prison struggle was

reflected in the rhetoric surrounding women republican prisoners. Female prisoners

were permanently thought of and referred to as girls by republican leadership.

"Neither men nor completely women," they were perceived at the general social level

as young, naïve, and gender neutral.[289] In a statement to the Secretary of State for

Northern Ireland, the family members of the women on the dirty protest wrote: "We

are concerned that the dignity, spiritual rights, and self-respect of the girls has been

violated to a serious degree in Armagh Prison."[290] The family members' use of the

term "girls" instead of "women" reflected how the republican community perceived

the Armagh women within the vision of the ideal Irish woman: innocent, pure, and

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[289] Aretxaga, "Symbolic Overdetermination,," 138.

[290] Letter from Armagh Families to Rt. Hon. Humphrey Atkins, May 28, 1980, Northern Ireland Office, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

lacking sexuality.[291] In this way, referring to the Armagh women as girls effectively erased their femininity.

The Armagh women also adopted this use of the term "girls." In a 1980 statement, Mairéad Farrell, OC of the protesting prisoners at Armagh, wrote: "Before the no-wash [protest], relationships between screws and girls was bearable….now there has been a major change."[292] The Armagh women did not refer to themselves as girls because they thought of themselves as naïve or lacking sexuality. The women perceived their resistance as the same as men's resistance. Like the women of the RAC, who exploited dominant gender norms to gain more attention for their blanket protest, the Armagh women made a strategic choice in embracing the term girls. They did not want to emphasize their experiences as women, so they used a term that diminished the prominence of their gender.

Despite the women's efforts to erase their gender identity, reactions to the Armagh dirty protest outside of the prison focused on the implications of gender within the protest. Feminists were divided on the issue of whether or not to support the women, but they could not ignore the graphic imagery of women confined to prison cells surrounded by excrement and menstrual blood. While some analyses of the Armagh dirty protest place too much emphasis on the issue of menstruation and the protest, menstrual blood on the walls of the women's cells explicitly displayed their

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[291] Weinstein, "The Armagh Dirty Protest," 21.

[292] Women Against Imperialism, "Women Protest for Political Status in Armagh Gaol," October 1980, 25.

womanhood and sexuality.[293] It was the most obvious physical indicator that the

women were different from the men, and it made it impossible for them to be

perceived solely as girls. A large sector of the republican community accepted the

need for men to go on dirty protest, but perceived it as a "step too far" for women,

because it made their sexuality visible and shattered the mold of the traditional

republican woman.[294] Republican media attempted to ignore the elements of the dirty

protest that conflicted with traditional perceptions of women, and instead focused on

the women as victims of the oppressive British prison system. The protesting male

prisoners in the H-Blocks were framed as brave and noble for asserting their right to

political status, while the protesting women were framed as victims of an unjust prison

regime.[295] This difference in discourse about the protests was present within the

prisoners' own perceptions of the protest. Bobby Sands described how he "felt proud

to be fighting for [the republican community]," while Mairéad Farrell described how

the women had been "forced into a position of a 'dirt strike.'"[296]

      In reality, there was a degree of coercion in all of the prison resistance in both

Armagh and Long Kesh; coercion was a part of the prison system as a whole. The

conditions of the prison had forced the women into a dirty protest during the first few

days of their protest. However, after the women were moved to A wing and the first

five days of the protest had passed, the women had the freedom to end the protest. The

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[293] Weinstein, "The Armagh Dirty Protest," 27.

[294] Ibid., 21.

[295] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 128.

[296] Sands, *Writings from Prison,* 31; McCafferty, *The Armagh Women*, 27.

narrative of external coercion by the prison administration in the case of the women's

protest reveals the anxiety about their behavior that was connected to their gender.

Since the protest transgressed dominant gender norms for women, the conditions of

the Armagh women produced social anxiety among some republicans.[297] The response

to that social anxiety was to frame the women within a patronizing rhetoric that

emphasized them as victims of the British colonial system. While the women tried to

frame themselves as equal to men in their struggle, they were also keenly aware of

how their position in society differed from that of men based on their gender. Because

their gender could not be erased from their experience, their struggle was first given

attention by the women's movement before it was included within the broader

republican movement.

The 1980 Dirty Protest, the Women's Movement, and the Republican Movement

The Armagh Dirty Protest raised issues in the specific relationship between women

and Irish republicanism and in the more general relationship between women and anti-

colonial struggle. The reactions to the protest among sections of the women's

movement and the republican movement fundamentally changed the relationship

between women and the broader republican struggle. The leadership of the IRA and

Sinn Féin did not initially support the Armagh women and did not want them to go on

a dirty protest because they feared it would take attention away from the protesting

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[297] Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*, 128.

men in the H-Blocks.[298] Once the dirty protest began, the republican movement

supported the women for the sake of demonstrating the strength and unity of the

movement. However, republican support for the women relied on the exploitation of

their gender. At the request of the leadership of the IRA and Sinn Féin, the Armagh

women ended their dirty protest at the end of February 1981. The day after the protest

ended, Bobby Sands led republican prisoners in the H-Blocks on a hunger strike. The

fact that the women's protest ended the day before this protest shows that, even though

the dirty protest elicited more attention for female prisoners than ever before, their

involvement in the prison struggle was still dependent on their gender. The hunger

strike was the highest form of sacrifice for republican prisoners, but women were not

called upon to make that sacrifice.

The women's movement split over the issue of the Armagh women. Some

feminists argued that the women were protesting for the same reasons as the men on

the H-Blocks, so their issue was primarily about the struggle for Irish independence

and their cause was a republican issue.[299] This interpretation of the women's protest

alienated unionist and loyalist feminist women, who did not want to support the

republican cause. However, other feminists argued that the Armagh protest was also

about protesting sexual assault and male domination within the prison, so Armagh was

a women's issue. In reality, the Armagh dirty protest was about both of these issues,

but the women's movement fragmented along political lines when it came to

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[298] Weinstein, "The Armagh Dirty Protest," 22.

[299] Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 70-75.

supporting the Armagh women.[300] The most influential support came from within the republican women's movement, specifically from WAI. That support bolstered national and international support for the women, which in turn helped them gain support from the republican movement.

On International Women's Day in 1979, WAI published the latest issue of their magazine *Saorbhean: Free Woman,* dedicated to the women of Armagh Gaol: "…By dedicating our commemoration of International Women's Day to our sisters fighting in Armagh Gaol and by highlighting the important role that women are playing in the fight for Irish freedom, we felt that we are continuing the militant tradition of international women's struggles."[301] That same day members of WAI protested outside Armagh Gaol and focused attention on the plight of women political prisoners for the first time.[302] Women participated in previous protests as Mary Nellis and the women of the RAC had; they spoke out against the injustice of the British prison system as the wives and mothers of prisoners, not as individuals who faced the threat of imprisonment themselves. WAI staged another protest outside of Armagh Gaol on International Women's Day in 1980, and at that protest, they were joined by over four hundred women from the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.[303] The national and international attention that the WAI gained for the Armagh women

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[300] Weinstein, "The Armagh Dirty Protest," 25.

[301] Women Against Imperialism, *SaorBhean: Free Woman*, no. 3 (n.d., c. March 8, 1979), 6. Periodicals, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library.

[302] McCafferty, *The Armagh Women*, 89.

[303] Ibid., 89.

helped ensure that they were included alongside the men of the H-Blocks when the

issue of prisons was raised by republican political actors.

The women in Armagh asserted that they were a part of the larger prison struggle

and that their protest was first and foremost an attempt to reclaim political status.

However, they were also aware of the gendered implications of their protest. In a letter

smuggled out of the prison, the women projected their dirty protest as a feminist issue:

> It is a feminist issue in so far as we are women, even though we are treated like criminals. It is a feminist issue when the network of this jail is completely geared to male domination. The governor, the assistant governor, and the doctor are all males. We are subject to physical and mental abuse from the male screws who patrol our wing daily, continually peeping into our cells. If this is not a feminist issue, then we feel that the word feminist needs to be redefined to suit these people who feel that "feminist" applies to a certain section of women rather than encompassing women everywhere, regardless of politically held views.[304]

This statement directly addressed feminist organizations that did not support the

Armagh women on the basis of political ideology. The fractured support from the

women's movement after the Armagh dirty protest demonstrated the complex

situation that faced Northern Irish feminists. It was almost impossible to unite a

singular women's movement in Northern Ireland that brought together women across

political, economic, or religious communities. It was also difficult for republicans to

balance the need to include women as equal parties in the struggle for national

liberation with the desire to keep women's issues secondary to the national struggle.

Journalist and feminist activist Nell McCafferty commented on this challenge facing

the women's movement in 1981: "It has so far proved easier to feminise Republicans,

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[304] Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 64.

who have much to gain from the inclusion of women in the struggle, than to Republicanise feminists, who have much to lose if women's interests are totally subordinated to a resolution of the war."[305] Nonetheless, the 1980 Armagh dirty protest and the support the Armagh women gained from the women's movement in Northern Ireland and abroad prompted major changes in the republican movement's approach to women.

It was shortly after the dirty protest that Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams acknowledged the importance of including women as full participants in the republican struggle and enacted actual policy changes to make that happen. In a 1983 statement to a political magazine, Adams stated, "To be frank, it is only in the last few years that we have begun to treat women's affairs in a political way…It [the department of women's affairs] would see its role as politicizing women republicans to fight for their rights as women and politicizing male republicans to support equality for women."[306] After 1980, men in the IRA and republican politics took notice of the participation of women in the continued struggle for independence. Sinn Féin began to form policies designed to include more women in governance, mandating that women make up one-quarter of the party's high council.[307] The struggle of the Armagh women was a key factor in initiating these political changes. It was a combination of the tactic of a dirty protest, which transgressed traditional gender norms, and the support of the republican women's movement, from groups like WAI, that made the

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[305] McCafferty, *The Armagh Women*, 90.

[306] Loughran, "Armagh and Feminist Strategy," 66.

[307] Weinstein, "The Armagh Dirty Protest," 24.

1980 Armagh dirty protest so effective in bringing women to the forefront of the

republican struggle.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which the 1980 Armagh dirty protest was

perceived by the republican movement and the women's movement in Northern

Ireland. While the republican response to the protest was supportive, much of the

rhetoric about the Armagh "girls" relied on the exploitation of their gender and their

position in society as women. The tactics of the dirty protest transgressed the typical

expectations for women in Northern Irish society and elicited some outrage among the

republican community, especially from the more conservative, Catholic factions of the

community. The women's movement was split over the issue of the Armagh women,

which reflected a deeper challenge for any Northern Irish women's movement to unite

women together beyond their political affiliations. Ultimately, the support from the

republican women's movement, most notably WAI, was successful in gaining national

and international attention and support for the Armagh women. This support combined

with the outrage from the republican community over the particular conditions of the

dirty protest, helped women gain a more prominent position in the republican

movement. It was after this protest that Sinn Féin developed an apparatus for

addressing women's affairs within the republican agenda.

Perhaps more important than the immediate fallout from the protest, the 1980

Armagh dirty protest raised larger questions for women's movements in the context of

anti-colonial struggles about the need to collaborate with broader social movements. The decision of WAI and the republican women's movement to privilege national liberation as a condition of women's liberation alienated factions of the women's movement who did not believe in the republican agenda. However, they were successful in convincing Sinn Féin, a party dominated by men, to include women in the party in a formal capacity and to include women's issues in its agenda. Despite this inclusion in the formal political process, the republican women's movement still faced difficulty discussing issues like domestic violence or reproductive rights within the still overwhelmingly Catholic, male-dominated republican establishment. Nonetheless, the discussion of women's issues and the prominence of women within the republican movement was fundamentally transformed by the 1980 Armagh dirty protest and paved the way for women to campaign for more rights and equality within the republican movement and began a new era in which women had more access to the formal political process than ever before.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the period of the Troubles primarily as an anti-colonial struggle, broadly focusing on the relationship between the Irish republican movement and the British government. Throughout that history, the prison system served as an important disciplinary institution for the maintenance of British colonial control in Northern Ireland. Between 1976 and 1981, prisons were the most significant site of Irish republican resistance to British colonialism. During this period, republican prisoners organized collective acts of resistance using three tactics: blanket protests, dirty protests, and hunger strikes. While the majority of these acts of resistance were organized among male prisoners in Long Kesh Prison, female prisoners at Armagh Gaol were also significant to the prison struggle. However, until the 1980 Armagh dirty protest, the women's resistance was largely ignored.

The Armagh dirty protest lasted for thirteen months. It concluded at the end of February 1981. On March 1, 1981, Bobby Sands led the republican prisoners at Long

Kesh Prison on a hunger strike that resulted in his death and the deaths of nine of his comrades. The Armagh women ended their protest so that all of the focus of the republican community could be on the hunger strike at Long Kesh. This relationship between the women's protest and the republican movement demonstrates how women's issues have been subjugated in favor of unity in nationalist, anti-colonial struggles. The 1980 Armagh dirty protest was not the first instance where Irish republican women's concerns were ignored in favor of the republican movement as a whole. Women have been active in the republican movement since its inception, particularly during the early twentieth century. However, the leadership of the republican movement has largely ignored women's involvement. Even though the Armagh dirty protest ended in service of the male prisoners' hunger strike, it was a significant turning point for women in the republican movement. After 1980, women were formally included in republican politics in a capacity that they never had been previously.

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