

The Repression of Communities: Visual Representations of Northern Ireland during the Thatcher Years

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I remember once, in the early days of the troubles, the local RUC received a call one wintry night from a Protestant farmer reporting intruders on his property. As the patrol car turned into his drive, they saw a colour television plonked smack in the middle of the road. One constable got out to remove it-and was blown to kingdom-come. In Ulster, the medium really is the message.

--John Naughton

John Naughton's striking anecdote above inspired me to explore the ways in which film directors and screenwriters approached the subject of Northern Ireland's violence during the years 1979-90. The Thatcher years produced many works that still require contextualization. "The troubles" in Northern Ireland (which "started" in 1968-69) have certain inbuilt impediments as a film topic, primarily the sheer complexity of Ireland's history with, and governance by, Great Britain. Margaret Thatcher came to power with mainstream opinions on Northern Ireland's position in the United Kingdom; as long as the majority of the population of the northern six counties wished to stay under British rule, she would defend that desire. In effect, this policy (which the Labour party also endorsed) put the British government and the Irish Republican Army (IRA), who sought to reunite the country against the wishes of the majority Protestant population of Northern Ireland, on a collision course throughout the 1980s. Thousands have suffered injury and death from this guerrilla war.

The claims for separation from the United Kingdom were helped by the rampant constitutional anomalies. For example, in Northern Ireland, unlike England, Scotland, and Wales, the major political parties--Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats--never were allowed or encouraged to form local branches. Instead, political parties in Northern Ireland reflect specifically the Irish-British dimension: the Ulster Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party, supported mainly by the Protestant population, argue for the continued connection to Great Britain; the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and Sinn Fein, supported mainly by the Catholic population, argue for a gradual move to a United Ireland. Sinn Fein is the political representative of the Provisional IRA.

In the midst of Thatcher's election campaign in 1979, her close friend and shadow secretary of state, Airey Neave, was murdered by the Irish National Liberation Army, a more left-leaning organization than the Provisional IRA. Thatcher, in her early period of office, instructed her ministers to seek a peaceful internal arrangement within Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, she inherited from the Labour government a slew of problems concerning special category status for terrorist prisoners. This special status officially ended in April 1980, and was quickly followed by the "blanket" protest (in which prisoners refused to wear prison clothing), which turned into a series of hunger strikes. The most famous hunger striker, Bobby Sands, was elected a Westminster M.P. in a by-election, while he was starving himself to death.

Thatcher refused to grant special status to terrorist prisoners, and after ten men died, the IRA leaders called the strike off.¹ Though this emotional battle was a propaganda victory for the IRA, it also showed the resolve of Thatcher, a woman not afraid of confrontation, as she proved again

during the British miners' strike and the Falklands/Malvinas crisis. On the political front, plans for "rolling devolution" for Northern Ireland never garnered much interest, but in 1982 a local assembly convened after province-wide elections. The Nationalist parties declined, however, to take their seats, leaving the Unionists to talk to themselves.

Instead of attending the assembly, the constitutional nationalists (led by John Hume of the SDLP) discussed matters with elected representatives from the south of Ireland. These talks resulted in the New Ireland Forum Report released in 1984, which called for three main options to be considered by the British and Irish governments. Thatcher's negative response, later coined the "Out, Out, Out" speech, was characteristically to the point: "I have made it quite clear--and so did Mr. Prior when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland--that a unified Ireland was one solution that is out. A second solution was confederation of two states. That is out. A third solution was joint authority. That is out. That is a derogation from sovereignty. We made that quite clear when the Report was published" (Kenny, 82) .

Her strong criticism came only a month after an IRA bomb attempt on her life at the Conservative Party Conference (October 1984) killed five people, so Thatcher was in no mood for fudging the issues. Nevertheless, a great deal of hard bargaining behind the scenes over the next year led to an ingeniously worded (it avoided defining the present status of Northern Ireland) Anglo-Irish Agreement, one signed in November 1985. This agreement gave a formal voice, for the first time since the formation of the Northern Ireland state in 1921, to Southern Irish elected representatives in the running of the province. Although restricted to matters of security and the treatment of the Catholic nationalist community, it offended the Unionist parties

who refused to recognize the legitimacy of the agreement and began to encourage acts of civil disobedience. The accord represented an attempt to isolate the IRA and its violence. For the remainder of her term, Thatcher's ministers sought to strengthen the accord in spite of Protestant resistance. This policy included banning all terrorist spokespeople from appearing directly on television.² Through all these complex political negotiations, "the troubles" ebbed and flowed. In retrospect, from the vantage point of 2004, Thatcher's legacy is a mixed one, for her confrontational style clearly worsened the situation, yet her willingness to sign the Anglo-Irish Agreement provided a base for the later, and more comprehensive, Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

As befitting the confrontation of the period, it is unsurprising that most films made between 1979 and 1990 dealing with Northern Ireland invariably grapple with IRA violence, as well as the violence that happens in response. They usually fall within the thriller genre, since it contains all the ingredients necessary for conspiracy, intrigue, murder, and star-crossed lovers. Belfast's rugged streets move characters from innocence to experience. In many ways, this tendency to use generic conventions and formulas betrays a conservative choice: it emphasizes the universal quality of a film's narrative and, in so doing, avoids a concerted attempt to demythologize the Northern Ireland "problem." But given cinema as a powerful cultural force in society, it remains important, first, to point out how films underwhelm or repress history and politics; second, to understand how they also undermine specific communities. So the haphazard group of films dealing with Northern Ireland follows a fatalistic aesthetic, much in the same way as Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) convinces us that societal corruption so pervades our world that it swallows up the individual seeking to do good.

The history of films dealing with Ireland as a whole has been well charted in a series of books published since the late 1980s (Barton, Curran, McIlroy, McLoone, Pettitt, Rockett, Slide). We see from these works that Ireland's struggle with England for independence has attracted many filmmakers: from Brian Desmond Hurst's *Ourselves Alone* (1936) through Michael Anderson's *Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959) to David Lean's *Ryan's Daughter* (1970). These films look at violence within Ireland, among Irish people, and conclude that compromise is possible for those who are not fanatics. Of the three directors above, only Hurst was an Irishman. English and American filmmakers tend to bring Ireland to the Irish. Like many other small countries sharing a common language with a larger country, Ireland's national images have been foisted upon it by outsiders. John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952), for instance, remains a favorite among Irish viewers of all ages: it presents a flattering, romanticized version of the country, an escapist revision of reality through rose-technicolor spectacles.

The film that influenced many screenwriters and directors considering Northern Ireland as a subject is Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* (1947). The pursuit of an IRA gunman through the streets of Belfast provided Reed with a convenient metaphor to explore the metaphysical themes of the outsider and of salvation. Reed's combining of the thriller genre with film noir allows him to suggest the universal aspect of the gunman's actions, and some viewers (Hill, 1987; McLoone, 2000) have been disappointed at the apparent lack of a political statement from the film. This unwillingness to be historically or locally precise springs, they argue, not only from a fear of being accused of partisanship but also from a fear of confusing the non-Irish audience, those not expected to understand the byways of Irish politics as containing vital information for narrative

resolution. Yet, a close reading of the film and of certain scenes in particular actually argues the reverse, that Reed is much more detail oriented than he is given credit for, and his clear preference is for constitutional nationalism (McIlroy 2001).

Although one can say very little about the Northern Ireland situation without someone attacking the critic as misguided and/or prejudiced, it seems important to take a stand on delineating the problems of representation. The easiest and most conventional method of approaching the conflict opens filmmakers and critics to charges of sectarianism because it too neatly divides the warring groups into three camps: (1) the Catholic community and its paramilitary offshoots (particularly the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army); (2) the “security forces” (the British Army; the locally recruited Ulster Defence Regiment [now disbanded]; the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) [now renamed the Police Service of Northern Ireland]; and (3) the Protestant community and its paramilitary offshoots (particularly the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force). Such a framework allows a filmmaker, particularly in the field of documentary, to give the impression that the security forces either keep the warring factions apart or, indeed, the reverse, keep them fighting and thereby prevent a solution. Immediately, readers may object to the use of the words “Catholic” and “Protestant,” preferring the less religious terms “Nationalist” and “Unionist.” But it remains a fact that Catholics populate the vast majority of Nationalist organizations, and Protestants the Unionist groups. Most filmic representations accept this generalization of Northern Ireland’s simmering political scene. To term someone a Protestant or a Catholic in this context conjures up a whole history of social, economic, and political attitudes not confined to religious affiliation.

Grave misconceptions and misunderstandings between the two communities in Northern Ireland have spread to the film representations of the people in Ulster, and to that extent, film and TV drama production has often added to the mystification. By dividing my subsequent discussion into the three sections mentioned above, I will take the sectarian positions “by the throat,” as it were. The first, and most “appealing” to filmmakers, is the depiction of the Catholic community and the paramilitary organizations emanating from it.

The Catholic Community and the IRA

The majority of film and television productions dealing with the province focus on the minority population of Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland, a subject area prone to censorship. A TV drama reviewer in 1982 commented that “in television alone, upwards of 40 programmes have been suppressed in part or in whole during the past decade” (Poole, 33). One of the most famous cases of censorship was the BBC film *Real Lives* (1985), which profiled two Irish extremists, one Protestant and one Catholic. The furor over the initially banned film resulted from Martin McGuinness’s (of Provisional Sinn Fein) voiced opinions in favor of an organization (the IRA) that in 1984 almost murdered the prime minister and most of her cabinet colleagues. A letter from the home secretary sent to the BBC Board of Governors indicated his concern over the film’s possible transmission. The board voted against the screening. In reaction, journalists led a one-day strike at the BBC, protesting the blatant intervention of the Thatcher government. Matters worsened when Thatcher appeared on a news program and thanked the board for their “judicious” decision not to screen the documentary. On the surface, it appeared that the Board of

Governors had bowed to government pressure, and the IRA received yet another propaganda victory. In the heat of the moment, commentators overlooked that until the last few years of Thatcher's term, the British government had allowed the reporting of Sinn Fein. By contrast, the Irish Republic banned Provisional Sinn Fein access to broadcasting in 1975 because of its unequivocal support of the "armed struggle."

Most films blindly accept the assumption that the Catholic community is an oppressed minority. Since the IRA casts itself as the protector of this beleaguered community, filmmakers deal with the IRA. At the start of Margaret Thatcher's term of office, three films with references to the IRA caused considerable comment. Two of these, with American directors but diverse financial backing, were the most direct and explicit. Arthur MacCaig's *The Patriot Game- A Decade Long Battle for the North of Ireland* (1979) utilized television footage from a number of international TV stations to build its visual argument that the British troops present in Northern Ireland continue to play the role of imperial oppressors. The film vehemently supports the IRA armed struggle, ostensibly showing how history makes it inevitable. According to the *Variety* review in 1980, the Irish Northern Aid Committee, subsequently investigated by the American authorities over allegations that it transferred money directly to the IRA, used the film as a fundraiser. So controversial was the film that two special screenings were held in the Royal Court Theatre in London in June 1979, since most British distributors declined to handle the picture.

Dealing with the IRA also functions as the main subject of the two other films released in 1979: John Mackenzie's *The Long Good Friday* and Tony Luraschi's *The Outsider*. In a sense, they

reveal the “tentativeness” of a British production versus the “boldness” of a foreign-financed production, a general thesis advanced by John Hill (Rockett).

John Mackenzie’s film looks primarily at gangsterism in 1970s London. Bob Hoskins plays working-class mobster Harold Shand, who makes good by sheer graft and appropriate violence, a precursor to Spica in Greenaway’s *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (1989). Shand, the nouveau riche, eventually runs into an older, more efficient “family,” that of the IRA. As the screenwriter conceived it, “The hero would be a Thatcher man gone mad--the ultimate self-made capitalist and utterly patriotic” (Keefe, vi). The problem with the film from an Irish nationalist perspective is that IRA violence simply functions as a form of gangsterism (which to many British governments it has always been characterized). In this way, the film reflects an English realpolitik. The history of the film’s postproduction reveals that financial backers were uneasy with the depiction of the IRA as this unstoppable, incorruptible force. Mackenzie never helps the audience move beyond gangsterism because he never investigates the IRA. It is, in effect, the evil deus ex machina. What is fascinating is that the IRA infiltrates the underworld in Britain and is treated as an inexplicable, though amazingly efficient, force. This attitude of respect tinged with repulsion remains the essential British view today.

Tony Luraschi’s *The Outsider* focuses on young Irish-American Michael (Craig Wasson), who, filled with songs and stories from his Irish-born grandfather, comes to Northern Ireland to join the IRA. Michael accompanies the IRA on special missions, including the murder of a magistrate. The naive American soon learns that the IRA and the British army stay caught in a struggle without regard for the kind of romanticized idealism Michael exhibits. Luraschi presents

the IRA as a duplicitous group of men who use the young man for their own purposes. Ironically, Michael's grandfather turns out to have been the sinner of all Irish sinners: an IRA informer. Brutal, violent, and direct, *The Outsider* nonetheless bravely questions the presence of the British army, the shadowy role of the Ulster Defence Regiment, the interrogation techniques of the RUC, as well as the kangaroo courts of the IRA. This film, too, ran into distribution problems because of its topicality, especially scenes where police torture a blind IRA sympathizer.

The first truly remarkable Irish-directed "Northern Ireland feature" was released in 1982. Neil Jordan's *Angel* has received a great deal of attention from commentators who validate its aesthetics by remarking that both sides in the Northern Ireland "troubles" are condemned. Danny (Stephen Rea), the sax player, becomes a gunman for reasons of revenge after a Protestant gang murders a deaf-mute he has befriended. Some critics argue that the specifics of religion/allegiance are unclear; but, a knowledgeable viewer knows that because the policeman is the ring leader of the gang, this is almost certainly a Protestant paramilitary group.

Interestingly, the clue of a clubfoot sets off Danny's search for revenge. A nonspecific Irish saying to determine religion is to ask whether someone kicks with the "other" or "left" foot. In this instance, the culprit kicks with a malformed foot! The film's underlying premise is that police corruption and murder (represented by the Protestant community) destroy Danny's humanity and lead him to violent acts. Danny is, then, the IRA, "the people" radicalized into action. Literally, he is a son without parents, one who finds his voice--first by sax playing and then by gunplay. He eliminates the "cancer" of Protestantism and contentedly leaves a Jewish head of police--significantly called Bloom (a cute Joycean echo)- to sort out the mess at the end.

Pat O'Connor's *Cal* (1984), taken from Bernard MacLaverty's novella of the same name, follows the literary source very closely and traces a young Catholic boy's story. He and his father are the only Catholics left on a Protestant street and suffer accordingly. The film also looks at how a young Catholic man becomes involved in the operations of the IRA. Not unlike many reluctant activists, Cal (John Lynch) is seduced into working for the IRA--half through threats and half through promises that if he complies with "small jobs" he will be left alone to live his own life later. The IRA leader, Skeffington (John Kavanagh), presents his involvement through his crippled father, a parallel to the crippled father of the murdered RUC man for whose death Cal is partly responsible; Skeffington's father once was heavily committed to the cause of national liberation. Through his choice of characterization and shooting style, O'Connor indicates how the IRA leaders see themselves as fighting some kind of holy war. Skeffington, for example, is strangely puritanical and disapproves of bad language. At one point, Cal meets the IRA leader in a pigeon--and bat--infested stone-wall enclosure and, because much of their discussion is shot from above at an angle, it implies that the world of the IRA is unnatural. The brutal representation of the gunman Crilly, who actually murders the RUC man while Cal assists, conveys the sense that the IRA leadership easily manipulates young and violent men who are little more than gangsters.

Both *Angel* and *Cal* were critical and commercial successes, but three films in the 1980s dealing with the Catholic community and the IRA particularly impress because they originate from Irish women: Pat(ricia) Murphy's *Maeve* (1981), Stuart Burge and Anne Devlin's *Naming the Names* (1986), and Anne Crilly's *Mother Ireland* (1988). These three films explore the role of (Catholic)

women in the Republican movement. Murphy's film charts the return of Maeve (Brid Brennan) from "open-minded" England to her Republican "ghetto," where she finds herself constantly warring with chauvinist ideas from within and without her specific environment. The male soldiers who taunt her on the streets display misogynist attitudes little different from the male Republican leaders and advocates in her own community. By deliberately eschewing a conventional narrative- one feels distanced from much of the supposed linear visual presentation by occasional direct address to the camera and a complicated mise-en-scène- Murphy calls into question the patriarchal structures that support the presence of the British army in Northern Ireland, as well as those that support the Republican movement in Catholic Nationalist areas.

In *Naming the Names* (a TV film for the BBC), a young Catholic woman, Finn (Sylvestra Le Touzel), is arrested for luring a Protestant judge's son to a park where the IRA apprehends and murders him. The critical event in Finn's life, the Protestant firebombing of her home in 1969, almost kills her guardian grandmother, while Finn is making love with an English journalist. When her grandmother does die a few years later, an orphaned Finn depends on her English boyfriend to keep her from the IRA, though he remains unaware of her predicament. Their breakup seals her fate with the IRA. Circumscribed by the streets of her West Belfast ghetto, Finn repeats only the names of these streets when quizzed by the police for her IRA contacts. The Catholic community, shown to be frightened and impotent in the 1969-70 period, becomes totally radicalized by the mid-1980s, as evidenced by the argument in Belfast City Library between Catholic Finn and Protestant Henry:

HENRY: Take Parnell, for example- Charles Stewart Parnell, a Protestant, a leader of the Home Rule, was destroyed by the Roman Catholic clergy over his divorce case.

FINN: He was destroyed by Gladstone, and the English nonconformists And when has any Protestant movement had a Catholic leader?

HENRY: Come on, they're not exactly queuing up at the door, are they?

FINN: How could they be? What of the wars of the constitution?

HENRY: That's not relevant.

FINN: A Protestant parliament for a Protestant people. And it's not relevant?! You think that's all right? It's economic, rational . . . ?

HENRY: You get angry very quickly. Who's done that to you, Finn? [She gets up and leaves]

They both run out into the street and face the large sign on the City Hall: "Belfast Says No," a reference to the Unionist resistance to the Anglo-Irish Agreement:

HENRY: Confirmed what they've [the Unionists] always believed. The British government are the real Republicans!

FINN: Welcome to Belfast.

The third film, *Mother Ireland*, a documentary video that features many Irish women's attitudes concerning their social and political position in Ireland, achieved a certain notoreity for its interview with Mairead Farrell, one of the three IRA suspects shot dead in Gibraltar by a British SAS unit. She complains that the Republican movement often fails to be fully aware of women's issues. To what extent audiences should feel pleased that Farrell can be just as involved in terrorist activities as any man remains problematic. Nonetheless, her direct engagement with social and political realities reflects the radicalization of many women in Northern Ireland.

Other Catholic women who dominate the video include Rita O'Hare of the magazine *Republican News*; journalist Nell McCafferty; filmmaker Pat Murphy; feminist Republican activist Bernadette Devlin; and women who supported the Nationalist movement during the War of Independence and the Civil War. Director Crilly forcefully brings out the discrepancy between the Mother Ireland image of compassion and suffering and the reality of modern Irish women who, at least in the Republican movement, demand and receive recognition that violence and feminism can (and do) go hand in hand.

The Security Forces

To put it mildly, the screen versions of the security forces in Northern Ireland have not been particularly sympathetic. Yet even here discrepancies exist. So, for example, one group, the Ulster Defence Regiment, has hardly been tackled at all, even though it carried out much of the

army-style operations--roadblocks, patrols, and the like--in Ulster. Like the RUC, this force is predominantly Protestant in makeup. Their colleagues in the RUC, however, have been more severely treated. For instance, in Ken Loach's *Hidden Agenda* (1990), the police callously murder Irish Catholic and American civilians, violently carry out house searches, and bitterly resent "foreign" interference. This fact is exemplified by the chief constable of the RUC in the film, Brodie (Jim Norton), who resists the investigation of Kerrigan (Brian Cox) and Ingrid (Frances McDormand). Loach offers no explanation as to why Brodie believes in his cause. Yet to understand the nuances of this particular situation, some background is necessary to discuss it further.

On December 12, 1982, an undercover unit of the Royal Ulster Constabulary murdered Seamus Grew and Roddy Carroll. Grew and Carroll were members of the Irish National Liberation Army, an extremist offshoot from the Official IRA. Both men were traveling home to Armagh City when a speeding car overtook them and forced them off the road. At close range, Grew and Carroll were shot to death, though neither man was armed nor wanted for any specific crime. Murders like these by the undercover RUC unit led to a police inquiry into what became known as the "shoot-to-kill" policy in Northern Ireland. Deputy Chief Constable John Stalker of the Greater Manchester constabulary headed an internal investigation authorized to present a report, one recommending what charges, if any, should be laid against police officers in Northern Ireland. Before Stalker could present his findings, he was "disgraced" back in Manchester by allegations that he kept company with criminals. Though proved false, these allegations removed Stalker from the Northern Ireland investigation.³

Commentators and authors put forth many theories to explain this bizarre twist of events, one of the most popular claiming that Stalker found connections between clandestine operations and their authorization from within the higher levels of the British government. Also in the conspiracy vein, it later emerged that the former Labour prime minister Harold Wilson had been the target of a CIA-inspired plan to discredit him. Hearing this, some quickly assumed that right-wing forces actively made conditions conducive for the rise of Margaret Thatcher and her conservative agenda. Loach attempts to combine these two theories in his film *Hidden Agenda*.

In the movie, an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer, Paul Sullivan (Brad Dourif), is killed while uncovering the story behind an ex-SAS soldier, Harris (Maurice Roeves), involved in a conspiracy against Wilson's Labour government in the 1970s. Loach ties the Conservative party supporters' shenanigans against the Labour party government of the 1970s (shades of the TV series "A Very British Coup") with the alleged "shoot-to kill" policy in Northern Ireland many years later. He fails, however, to make this connection stick. Two separate issues are (half) addressed here, one well (Conservative party conspiracy) and one confusingly (the British policy within Northern Ireland). The director stacks the decks from the very beginning. We see policemen make a house arrest, former detainees allege ill-treatment inside police stations, a police/SAS/MI6 unit kill Frank Malloy and the American lawyer with "efficiency," and British undercover agents kidnap (and kill off-screen) Harris on Dublin's streets- thereby suggesting that England continues to "invade" the Irish Republic.

Loach opens with two quotations: one from Margaret Thatcher states that Northern Ireland is as much part of the United Kingdom as her own constituency, and one from James Lalor, a

nineteenth-century Irish Republican, indicates the imperative of Irish independence. To imply that Thatcherism and Conservative party “dirty-tricks” supporters in the 1970s remain part and parcel of an alleged “shoot-to-kill” policy in Northern Ireland without investigating IRA violence and murder makes one question the ethics of Loach’s intertwining of fictional filmmaking and politics. His film seems more an exercise in political correctness, a response to recently published material (Doherty) than a true engagement with the real issues (many of which can be usefully scanned in Ryder). Loach’s negative depiction of the RUC stands with good filmic company. The corrupt police in *Angel* are involved in murder, and, in *Cal*, the police rather earnestly beat up the Catholic protagonist for his part in the murder of one of their own. The graphic murder of the RUC man in *Cal*, replayed often in flashback to underscore the protagonist’s guilt and desire for redemption, never contextualizes or explains the province’s problems.

In *Naming the Names*, a policeman interrogates Finn while others watch through closed-circuit-television surveillance, as a policewoman stands silently beside her and looks on disapprovingly. Policewomen are noticeably missing in most contemporary films dealing with the RUC. Perhaps filmmakers and writers feel their presence weakens the frame they hang around the picture of Northern Ireland: male. Protestant security forces exploiting and repressing female, Catholic civilians, including feminist Republican activists, as seen in such films as Murphy’s *Maeve* and *Anne Devlin* (1984), and Crilly’s *Mother Ireland*. To be sure, the presence or numbers of policewomen do nothing to subvert patriarchal structures, but they do complicate the rather simplistic accusations of misogyny at the root of Protestant policing. *Maeve*, through

its distancing devices, does point out that the Republican movement finds it extremely difficult to integrate women.

The British army in action appears as background “filler” in nearly every film dealing with Northern Ireland. Some television documentary programs isolate their experience, but only a few narrative fictional films have similar goals. Alan Clarke’s *Contact* (BBC Screen 2, 1985), based on his own recorded experiences in Belfast and South Armagh while he was in the British Parachute Regiment, captures precisely the tension and boredom of patrol and rest periods. The soldiers are young, violent, frightened, and curious all at the same time. One striking scene serves to sum up this weird atmosphere: after a comrade dies in action, the soldiers move toward the dead man, as if finding it psychically necessary to see the injuries inflicted. Every sound on patrol represents possible danger, and Clarke makes the audience feel almost continuously on edge.

Karl Francis’s *Boy Soldier* (1986), one of the less conventional male treatments of the British army, looks critically at the ridiculous go-between status of the army. Unique here is the Welsh emphasis. Without Channel Four, funding for this project would not have been secured, and it comes across as one of the more sophisticated treatments of the British army in recent years. Wil (Richard Lynch), a young Welsh soldier serving in Northern Ireland, sees his best friend killed on the streets. In a state of panic, he shoots a young man brandishing a knife. The public unrest at this “civilian murder” demands Wil’s sacrifice. Clinging to his principles of honesty, Wil refuses to lie for expediency and subsequently suffers maltreatment from his English army superiors who see little difference between the Irish and the Welsh. The process of brutalization, carefully

traced by Francis, suggests that ultimately the army is an inappropriately blunt instrument to use in the delicate Northern Ireland situation. But Francis also suggests that the real value the army offers for working-class British males resides in its sense of a close community.

The Protestant Community and Its Paramilitary Offshoots

One must look hard for a likeable or sympathetic Protestant character in films dealing with Northern Ireland; in fact, one rarely discovers a well-rounded protagonist or antagonist. Quite simply, filmmakers display little interest in developing approaches to the Protestant community, preferring to rely on comfortable stereotypes. For example, the Protestant voice is painfully missing in Loach's *Hidden Agenda*: the one million Protestants of the North of Ireland remain invisible in his constellation. Images of Protestantism are conveyed merely by a long shot from a high window during the 12th July celebrations (when the Protestants commemorate the victory over Catholic James II by Protestant William of Orange in 1690), and by the chief police officer Brodie who "resists" Kerrigan's investigation. What other Protestants we see are involved in violence or implied bigotry.

In O'Connor's *Cal*, the Protestant family members with whom the Catholic boy interacts are severe, distrusting, and terribly cozy with the trigger-happy security forces. Protestant youths assault Cal in another example of Protestant intimidation. In Peter Smith's and Alan Bleasdale's otherwise comic *No Surrender* (1985), a Protestant terrorist threatens a former comrade with exposure of his daughter's mixed marriage with a Catholic. Finally, we see the more "liberal" Protestant murder his more "extreme" former colleague, a hardly sympathetic portrayal despite

the screenwriter's intent to achieve it. Violence, and malicious violence at that, seems integral to most filmmakers' conceptions of the Protestant male community.

This contention opens up a new area: how have filmmakers considered Protestant women and violence? As Richard Kearney (1988) observes, Edward Bennett's *Ascendancy* (1981) and Kieran Hickey's *Attracta* (1983) show male violence paralyzing and repressing women to an extent that they assume mythic proportions- essentially the all-suffering Mother figure. Of course, given the blatant pro-Republican bias of Anne Crilly's *Mother Ireland*, Protestant women simply are excluded from the video documentary. But this view of Irish Protestant women fails to account for the violence that radicalized certain women to join the security forces.

Only *Naming the Names* offers an interesting portrayal of an Irish Protestant, even though reviewers misread the character as English (Pascal). Henry Kirk (Michael Maloney), the son of a local judge, is studying Irish history at Oxford. While at home, he travels to the Catholic Falls Road Bookshop to look at their Irish collection in search of materials for his Ph.D. thesis. The bookshop assistant, Finn, is steeped in Irish history but, given the de facto separate education systems in Northern Ireland for Catholics and Protestants, from a purely Republican perspective. Finn and Henry form a romantic attachment, both claiming that they have English partners. In this way, writer Anne Devlin emphasizes the love-hate relationship both Irish Catholics and Protestants have with the English mainland.

Finn delivers the two volumes of R. M. Sibbert's *Orangeism in Ireland and Throughout the Empire* (1914-15) to Henry, and this history of Orangeism written by an Orangeman sparks a

lively debate. In the midst of their discussion, Henry utters the Protestant position rarely articulated verbally or visually on television and film:

FINN: You think that's all not irrelevant now? Gladstone and Home Rule?

HENRY: No, no, Gladstone tended to dismiss the Protestants as a bigoted minority. Successive British governments are making the same mistake.

FINN: What is your thesis, briefly, in a line?

HENRY: The Protestant opposition to home rule was rational. Because at the time Ulster Protestant industries, linen, shipbuilding, were dependent on the British market. Home rule would have ruined Ulster financially.

FINN: But it wasn't just about money, was it?

HENRY: No, no. The Protestants were also worried about being discriminated against in a largely Catholic state.

FINN: They were worried?

HENRY: Yes, I think those fears were justified.⁴

The fact that I must quote a dialogue interchange to establish a Protestant Unionist ideological position is significant. No filmmaker in Britain and Ireland in this period thoroughly investigated a visual representation of the Protestant community, one that reaches beyond the easiest of stereotypes.⁵ If anything, filmmakers fetishize what they conceive as minority opinions. This reductiveness creates terribly unbalanced fictional renditions, despite the painstaking efforts of local television stations to provide fair treatment of each community in current affairs and news programs (Cathcart). Consequently, violence and the issues surrounding it in Northern Ireland received an extremely skewed representation between the years 1979 and 1990, a time during which a minority oppositional cinema has dominated our perceptions.

Over the Thatcher years, mainstream filmmakers became more assertive and aggressive in their representations of the Northern Ireland “problem.” Films and videos toward the end of Thatcher's “reign,” such as Ken Loach’s *Hidden Agenda* and Anne Crilly’s *Mother Ireland*, confidently and directly criticize the British government’s role in Northern Ireland. These films, in particular, struggle with a complicated politics; yet, they often fail to provide a stimulating visual treatment. At the other end of the spectrum, films concerned primarily with character continued to do well at the box office, including Neil Jordan’s *Angel* and Pat O’Connor’s *Cal*. These films repress history and politics for fear of distancing the non-Irish audience. In general, filmmakers and videographers have served well the ideological position of the Catholic nationalist community in Northern Ireland. The position of the security forces has been sketchily treated. The Protestant unionist community has largely been ignored. Although narrative films can arguably play a crucial role in the cultural reconciliation of Northern Ireland’s communities,

we find neither comfort nor proof in the productions made during the Thatcher years. We do, however, see bolder attempts than hitherto in articulating anti-British politics.

Notes

1. A useful blow-by-blow account of the hunger strikes may be found in Liam Clarke's *Broadening the Battlefield: The H-Blocks and the Rise of Sinn Fein* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987).
2. In the post-Thatcher era, "talks about talks" appeared to promise a new agreement involving all mainstream political parties, but in mid-1991 these meetings broke down, leaving Thatcher's legacy in place.
3. In addition to Doherty (1986), useful books on various aspects of the Stalker case include the following: Peter Taylor, *Stalker: The Search for Truth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987); The Committee on the Administration of Justice, *The Stalker Affair: More Questions Than Answers*, 2nd ed. (Belfast: CAJ, 1988); John Stalker, *Stalker* (London: Harrap, 1988); Kevin Taylor with Keith Mumby, *The Poisoned Tree* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1990); and David Murphy, *The Stalker Affair and the Press* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991).
4. Until the 1990s, The Republic of Ireland remained one of the most conservative countries in Europe. In 1983 and 1986, respectively, access to abortion and divorce were rejected in referendums. The latter issue, in particular, confirmed Protestant fears of a united Ireland.
5. The appearance in 1990 of Thaddeus O'Sullivan's *December Bride*, which focuses on the

rural Protestant community of the Strangford Lough area, is a remarkable exception. One might also make a reasonable case for the “Protestant sections” of Mike Leigh’s *Four Days in July* (1984).

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