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1. Introduction

The present thesis aims at a textual analysis of two plays by two contemporary Northern Irish women playwrights: Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone* and Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*. The examination is predominantly based on historical and ethnographic research with the major purpose to investigate the socio-historical and political background of women in Loyalist and Republican communities at the time of the Northern Ireland Conflict and to critically consider women's suppressed positions in society as well as within the Troubles as reflected in the plays.

On the whole, this study is divided into four major parts. The initial three sections constitute the theoretical framework: first a brief outline of the history of the Troubles is given, starting with an overview of its origins at the beginning of the 20th century, then outlining the conflict's progress and sectarian consequences and closing with a reference to the peace agreements in the 21st century. Subsequently, according to the relevance with regard to the two plays, the role of women in Northern Ireland and their status within the conflict is examined. This chapter is contentwise divided into a section about political and paramilitary involvement of Protestant, as well as Catholic women in Northern Ireland. Moreover, women's situation with regard to sexuality, domestic violence and feminism and their position in Northern Irish economy is summarized.

This is followed by a general account of female dramatists in the theatre world of 20th century Ireland and women's effort to persist in a male-dominated and male-focused Irish theatre. Particularly women's contribution in setting up an Irish national theatre in the South as well as in the North, with key figures such as renowned Lady Gregory, is highlighted. Besides, especially the 1980s are referred to as a significant period, during which a stronger female Northern Irish theatre began to develop. The purpose of the initial three sections of this thesis is to

provide an insight into the political and socio-historical context the two plays originate from and to stress that women playwrights, such as Devlin and Reid, were by no means the norm in 20th century Northern Irish drama. These chapters constitute the foundation of the last section, where it is focussed on investigating the primary texts by means of a contextualized reading. Like a number of women dramatists Christina Reid and Anne Devlin emerged as successful writers in the 1980s, a time when the Northern Irish conflict was still a central problem and only initial attempts were made towards an agreement. With their plays these authors gave the women of that violent and politically tumultuous period a voice.

In both works the hardship of women's lives in working-class Belfast and the role of women in the patriarchal society of Northern Ireland shaped by the political dispute of the time are central themes. The two plays differ insofar as in *Ourselves Alone* politics and paramilitary involvement are foregrounded themes, whereas *Tea in a China Cup* centres on the domestic sphere. The former is concerned with the lives of three women captured in a world of Irish Republicanism and controlled by paternal hegemony. Set in the aftermath of the IRA hunger strikes in the early 1980s it addresses women's exposure to male-dominated control, which appears to be accompanied by male-dominated Irish nationalism. Under this domination women's active political and paramilitary involvement is a particularly significant aspect addressed in *Ourselves Alone*. By contrast, the latter is less politically orientated and refers to the lives of three generations of working-class Protestant women in the time span from 1939 to 1972. Reid's work focuses on traditional Protestant values and loyalty to the British Empire. This unquestioned political loyalty is to a certain extent transferred to women's loyalty to their men, who are depicted as stereotypical Irish husbands, being drunkards and compulsive gamblers, but also 'brave soldiers fighting for King and Crown'. What both plays have in common is the representation of strong patriarchal structures in the given societies, from which women consciously or unconsciously try to detach themselves.

Close examination of the two plays enables to highlight several characteristics that are evident in both works. Based on these characteristics, the textual analysis focuses on seven themes in order to compare women's difficulties in the context of troubled Northern Ireland.

2. The Conflict in Northern Ireland – From its Origins until Recent Peace Agreements

*Ulster will fight - Ulster will be right?*¹

The Northern Ireland Conflict is a political dispute between Unionists or Loyalists, a majority of two thirds of the population of Ulster who are in favour of a union with Great Britain, and Nationalists or Republicans, a minority in Ulster who support a united Ireland. Unionists in general belong to the Protestant community, whereas Nationalists have a Catholic background. Yet the conflict is not essentially a religious one, although religion has always played a significant role in Northern Ireland and shaped national and political identity of the two communities (Alison 57). The conflict in the last third of the 20th century has its origins in the mass protests of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement in the 1960s protesting against the deliberate exclusion of Catholics from political and economic power in Northern Ireland (Sales 2). These tensions by the end of the 1960s led to the development of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland and increasing IRA violence in the following decades. Arbitrary internment of so called “suspected terrorists” without trials was the consequence and increasingly fuelled Catholic resentment throughout the subsequent years (Alison 69).

As the main focus of the present thesis is the question of the role of women in Northern Ireland, particularly the depiction of women in Northern Irish theatre in the late 20th century, it is reasonable to provide a short overview of the conflict starting merely in 1969. Nevertheless, origins dating back to the partition of Ireland by the beginning of the 20th century and the development until the initiation of the

¹ Popular slogan of Ulster Unionism, qtd. in: Hadden, Peter. *Beyond the Troubles? Northern Ireland's Past and Future: A Socialist Analysis*. Belfast: Herald Books, 1994, 13.

still prevailing peace process shall be part of this historical account of the civil conflict, which has been euphemistically named 'The Troubles' (Frank 7). Furthermore, the starting sectarian division in Ulster society and intentional discrimination of members of the Catholic community providing the 'breeding ground' for the eventual release of the Troubles will be examined. This will be followed by a brief account of the progress of the conflict accompanied by several attempts to initiate an efficient peace process which would still not be fully accomplished until the early 21st century. Finally the last subchapter will trace the impact of religion and education on Northern Ireland's divided society and its consequent prejudices prevailing in the respective religious group.

2. 1. Historical Roots of the Conflict

Ireland as a place of conflict and riots dates back centuries. Since England's first attempts to establish her power in Ireland in the 12th century the green island had always been shaped by rebellion against Britain and confessional disagreements. Gradual indicators for a development towards dividing the country and leaving the six counties of Ulster under British rule had become apparent in the 19th century. With the introduction of the first Home Rule bill in 1886 to launch self-administration for Ireland by the liberal British Prime Minister William Gladstone the foundation of a potential partition of Ireland was laid (Bew 235). The discussion about Home Rule was a controversial one from its very beginning as the British landlord class feared the loss of Irish tenants' rents, which consequently would lead to their downfall. This fear urged the Conservatives to collaborate more closely with the Ulster Unionists in order to encourage their readiness to fight against Home Rule (Frank 49, Hadden 13). According to Hadden, who contemplates the origins of the Troubles from a socialist angle, it was the British who adopted a tactic of "divide and rule, to stir up opposition in Ireland" (13). Rather than a Nationalist threat they feared a rise of the Irish working class movement which could overthrow capitalism. Therefore, it was Britain's main aim

to cooperate with the Ulster Unionists and to widely meet their interests (Hadden 14-15).

The introduction of the first Home Rule bill in 1886 was followed by brutal turmoils in Belfast marking the start of enduring controversy between Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists. After two bills had failed to be accepted by the British parliament the third one was probated by the House of Commons in 1913 and was enacted as a law the following year. Meanwhile the Ulster Unionists had appealed to the population to sign against Home Rule stating that an Irish autonomous administration would be a substantial threat for the unity of the British Empire. It would endanger the material welfare of Ulster and Ireland in general and infringe religious and civil freedom as well as their rights as British citizens (Frank 154, 54-55). Bew points out Ulster's economical motives for the eagerness to remain part of Great Britain. He argues that the success of Unionism

as a truly broad mass movement lay in its ability to articulate the uneven development of Irish capitalism in a particular way. The hegemony of Unionist ideology lay in the contrast it was able to make between Ulster's expansionary regional capitalism and Southern underdevelopment" (Bew 239).

This political mobilisation in Ulster was followed by the foundation of the paramilitary organisation Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), almost simultaneously with the acceptance of the Home Rule bill in the House of Commons on 16 January 1913. Its Catholic-Nationalist counterpart was the foundation of the Irish Volunteers from which the Irish Republican Army (IRA) would arise later. Both organisations developed to abundantly equipped civil war armies supplied with weapons from German production. The subsequent years were marked by constant riots in Northern Ireland and therefore discussions between the British government and Nationalist and Unionist politicians about the exclusion of Ulster to form an autonomous administration arouse. On Easter Monday in 1916 resentment against British hegemony also escalated in the south of Ireland during the so called Easter Rising. Numerous combatants of the radical Irish Republican

Brotherhood occupied the main post office and other public buildings in Dublin under the leadership of the Irish Republican freedom fighter Patrick Pearse. He announced a proclamation of the Irish Republic and called for an Irish uprising which only five days later was clearly defeated by British troops. However, discontent continued to prevail in Ireland (Frank 55-60).

After the 1918 elections into the House of Commons the Nationalist party Sinn Féin, founded in 1905, significantly gained mandates. In order to demonstrate their absolute will of establishing an independent Republic of Ireland, in January 1919 the Sinn Féin MPs refused to take their seats in Westminster, founded a separate Irish parliament, the first Dáil Eireann, and voted for a provisional government under president Eamon de Valera. By launching the paramilitary unit IRA under Michael Collins the Dáil showed its willingness to even use force against the British administration in Ireland. What followed was a strenuous guerrilla war that urged the British government to settle Irish sovereignty, which would also include a potential partition of the nation. By 1920 the war between the IRA and Great Britain had also reached Ulster leading to the most brutal confessional conflict of all the previous riots in Ireland. Within those riots the Government of Ireland Act was eventually arranged in 1920 and Northern Ireland's constitution was defined. Thus, Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom, however with its individual parliament, executive and jurisdiction. On 22 June 1921 King George V. proclaimed the Unionist dominated Stormont parliament in Belfast, which would exist until 1972. The British Prime Minister Lloyd George now pressured the delegation in the south of Ireland to sign the contract that determines Ireland's agreement to its partition. This contract deeply divided the Nationalists in the south as it did not feature the required entire independence of the British Empire. As a consequence, in 1922 a fierce civil war broke out between opponents and proponents of the contract which should last more than a year (Frank 60-70). Hadden adopts a rather radical standpoint with regard to the roots of the Troubles ascribing the responsibility exclusively to Great Britain which acted in its own capitalist interest:

The British capitalists had solved their immediate problem, but at the cost of creating a potentially much greater problem which capitalism would never be able to solve. [...] So, despite the hand wringing and moralising of its present day representatives, it was the British ruling class who prepared the ingredients for the violence of the last quarter century. They created a problem which on a capitalist basis, quite simply has no solution (16).

2. 2. Pre-Troubles Era

Northern Ireland's history since 1920 appears to be a compact version of Ireland's situation in the 18th and 19th centuries. At that time the Anglican upper class had been privileged by the prevailing government, which was reflected in the Protestant parliament ostensibly established for Protestant needs only in 1921. Moreover, the Catholic mobilization of 1968 reminded of the Irish Rebellion in 1798 which proved that the partition of Ireland had by no means solved Ireland's fundamental problem with British hegemony (Jackson 335). The new state of Northern Ireland was confronted with the problem of a divided society from the day of its foundation onwards and discrimination against the Catholic minority occurred instantly. Any symbols signifying the Nationalist community, such as the presentation of the Irish tricolour, the Irish national flag or commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising were broadly suppressed. According to Tonge, "the creation of Northern Ireland was the least worst option in terms of reflecting this loyalty [to the British state], [however] Nationalists saw themselves as trapped in an illegitimate, British-held part of an Irish state temporarily partitioned" (19). Catholics merely had the status of acquiesced foreigners and their institutionalized discrimination was the main element in securing the Northern Irish state.

Thus, Catholics were to some extent banned from positions in the public sector, a policy that persisted until the 1960s. In 1969 319 Protestants and only 23 Catholics were in a higher administrative position (Frank 71-72). Unionist-controlled local councils also frequently rejected Catholics employees, which resulted in a minimal percentage of Catholics in the political sector. Catholics had to face discrimination not only in terms of public labour, but also with regard to

general employment policy. In the Protestant dominated east most of Northern Ireland's industries were located, whereas in the more rural west Catholics could hardly profit from that. Reversely, Catholic employers also avoided hiring Protestant employees, however overall, the majority of employers in Northern Ireland were Protestant. Also the numbers of unemployed and unskilled citizens differed considerably among Catholics and Protestants. Until 1972, Catholic males had become twice as likely to be unskilled than Protestant males and rates of unemployment were significantly higher among Catholics.

Furthermore, many Catholics were discouraged by Unionist dominated security services due to its sectarian practices and were therefore remarkably underrepresented in the Northern Irish police and security forces. The first two years after the partition entailed over 400 people killed and 2,000 injured. Consequently, the Special Powers Act was introduced to re-establish peace and order. It was meant to be in force for only one year, whereas eventually turned out to last until 1972. Its main operators, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC or B-Specials), were armed and created mistrust and resentment among Catholics, as its members were predominately Protestant. Only few Catholics recruited voluntarily to the police force in Northern Ireland, as it was not regarded as neutral and seemingly only established to reduce the political threat of Nationalists. Particularly in the early years after partition a greater part of police operation was against the Catholic population, although disturbance was mainly caused by Loyalists attacking Catholics who consequently were forced to leave their homes (Tonge 19-20).

One of the most obvious forms of discrimination became apparent with regard to electoral manipulation in order to guarantee a Protestant Unionist majority. Qualification to vote for local councils was dependent on property, which was the reason why only home owning ratepayers had a right to vote. Hence, as fewer Catholics were among homeowners, the generally better-off Protestant community clearly profited from this system (Tonge 21-22). With the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 an election system using proportional franchise to provide

representation for the Catholic Nationalist minority was established. However, this system was abolished by the Unionist government which introduced a majority representation. Through gerrymandering Unionists decided exclusively and to their own favour on electoral boundaries, which is why they also gained the majority in predominantly Catholic areas (Tonge 21, Frank 72). A noteworthy example is Derry, a town with a considerable percentage of Catholic population, where the council should have been dominated by a Nationalist majority, whereas gerrymandering deliberately contrived Unionist control. Also in towns, such as Dungannon and Omagh, Unionists pushed Nationalist majorities on the representational margin. Tonge points out that “overall, Unionists controlled 85 per cent of councils, even though they amounted to only 66 per cent of the population” (Tonge 21-22).

Along with electoral unfairness, discrimination in housing was one of the main issues why the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was founded in the late 1960s. Both Catholics and Protestants were affected by poor housing conditions along with a significant decrease in house building between World War I and World War II. In the post-war period competition for new quality housing arose where Catholics tended to be affected adversely. Many Catholics who lived in slum-like conditions were less likely to receive new housing than Protestants and individual councils appeared to arbitrarily allocate houses determined by subjective decision making. The councils’ main aim was often to preserve a majority of Unionists and seemingly deliberately denied new housing for Nationalists in predominantly Unionist areas (Tonge 23). Whether discrimination deliberately occurred in Northern Ireland remains an issue of disagreement as there is a lack of official assessment. Nevertheless, as a survey of 1968 shows, a considerable majority of the population perceived the treatment of Catholics in Northern Ireland as unfair. Yet, as a logical consequence, Unionists denied the discrimination of Catholics as “Protestant superiority was seen as the natural order, justified by the need for eternal vigilance against suspect Catholics” (Tonge 24). Unionist supremacy seemed to be inviolable until the 1960s and from the outside the old order remained stable. Nonetheless, a weakening economy and

internal differences among “modernisers and fundamentalists” (Tonge 34) gradually appeared. Above all, Nationalists started to refuse to accept their disadvantaged condition and began to protest against social injustices.

2. 3. From ‘Moderate Modernisation’ to Triggering the Troubles

With Prime Minister Terence O’Neill’s assumption of office in 1963 a more moderate policy was introduced in Northern Ireland. O’Neill sought to stabilize Northern Ireland’s weak economy and to modernize the province’s political system (Frank 84). In doing so he aimed at an improved dialogue with the Ulster Nationalists but did not intend to share the power with them. His strategy was merely to implement a more tolerant regime in which the relations to the Catholic minority ought to be stabilized by granting them an increased say and a normalisation of the relationship to the Republic of Ireland ought to be ensured (Tonge 35, Frank 85). The Prime Minister’s advance to the Nationalists caused provocation among Loyalist fundamentalists, such as the Presbyterian priest Ian Paisley who perceived O’Neill’s ‘approaching policy’ as treason and threat for Unionist Protestantism. In order to defend the old, conservative order Paisley founded the Ulster Constitution Defence Committee with its paramilitary sub-organisation Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV). Simultaneously another armed rebellious group that named themselves after the traditional Ulster Volunteer Force started to officially attack the IRA.

O’Neill’s ‘policy of détente’ and his effort to improve the Catholic situation were not particularly fruitful. Also the new British Labour government under Harold Wilson only used the proclamation of measures against Catholic discrimination for election campaign purposes in 1964 and overall ignored the issue within its subsequent term in office. At that time a growing Catholic middle class developed a new political awareness and did not want to passively accept discrimination any longer. The fact that the aforementioned forms of discrimination remained, led to the formation of the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association in 1967 (Frank 85-87).

Inspired by the American Civil Rights Movement the organisation was joined by “nationalists, liberal unionists, trade-union activists and other sympathetic parties [...] to press for reform of Northern Ireland’s political system” (Arthur and Jeffery 5). Their claims included the reduction of privileging ratepayers and wealthier Protestants in terms of franchise, abolition of gerrymandering and the termination of discriminatory allocation of public housing. These demands were uttered via peacefully held civil rights marches in various areas of the province; the first one on 24 August in 1968 in Dungannon (Arthur and Jeffery 5).

After this peaceful and undisturbed protest the second major demonstration took place in Derry on 5 October the same year accompanied by a large contingent of the RUC. The protest turned into violent riots particularly within the Catholic Bogside area and would develop into a fierce battle between the police and youths from the Bogside. As Bew and Gillespie summarize, “two days of rioting in Derry end with the police using armoured cars, high-pressure water hoses and baton charges in an attempt to restore order. Around 100 demonstrators and several RUC officers are injured” (4). It was the first violent conflict between Nationalists and the Northern Irish police forces and an initial prognostic symptom for further riots during the subsequent months until they would finally escalate at the same scene. On 12 August 1969 a parade by the Unionist Orange Apprentice Boys passing by the Bogside in Derry turned into brutal unrest when young Catholic rioters behind barricades attacked the armed police with stones and petrol bombs. RUC and B-Specials tried to contain the situation with 1000 armed men using tear gas. The “Battle of the Bogside”, as it became known, is often referred to as the key event of the beginning of the violent sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland.

After that incident permanent barricades were erected in Catholic working class areas of Derry and Belfast and so called “no-go areas” for government security forces, such as the ‘Free Derry’ area in the Bogside, were set up (Bew and Gillespie 17). When the police forces were not capable of the situation anymore, a situation regarded as victory by Republicans, the British government started to react: on 14 August troops of the British army were deployed in Derry in order to

substitute the RUC and to restore law and order. British soldiers were meant to be unbiased and to stay only until normality would have been achieved (Frank 93-94). However, this fatal decision would mark Northern Ireland's everyday life for the subsequent 38 years during which British troops coined the street scene of Northern Ireland (BBC News 31 July 2007). Meanwhile sectarian violence had also reached the streets of Belfast particularly inflamed by initial news about killed civilians (Frank 94). Moreover, although initially welcomed by both Catholics and Protestants, it turned out that the troops were acting in British interest only, as Hadden puts it:

The army were not sent for humanitarian reasons but because of fear of what a civil war might mean for British capitalism. Civil war on its doorstep would destabilise Britain, probably spreading to the huge Irish communities in its cities. Britain would be blamed internationally. British property would be destroyed or seized in Ireland and there would be campaigns to boycott British goods in the United States and other countries with Irish communities (33).

The IRA failed to defend the Catholic areas of Belfast and Derry during this conflict in August 1969, an aspect that contributed substantially to the internal crisis that the movement already had to face and eventually led to its split. By the end of 1969 the IRA divided itself into two wings, the Official IRA (OIRA or "Officials"), who supported the existing leadership and civil rights and the Provisional IRA (PIRA or "Provisionals"), who adopted a more radical and Nationalist position. In 1970 first severe fighting between Catholics and the British Army occurred followed by a first IRA campaign of bombing and attacks on soldiers in 1971. It was still terrorism on a small scale compared to what was to follow, yet enough to provoke the Protestant Unionists leading to the government's decision about internment without trial (Hadden 35-36). According to Hadden, "on 9 august 1971 342 people were dragged from their homes and interned. Hundreds more were to join them in the bloody weeks to follow" (36). The internment policy triggered widespread rioting, strikes and the highest rate of emigration since World War II.

A stricter sectarian society was suddenly created when formerly mixed areas became either mainly Protestant or mainly Catholic. Half a year later an attack on anti-internment marchers in Derry's Bogside would have fatal consequences. On Sunday 30 January 1972 British paratroopers arbitrarily opened fire on the peaceful and unarmed marchers. Fourteen of them were killed in the assault and many others were injured, which is why this disastrous day entered history as "The Bloody Sunday". The tragedy led to numerous mass protests and strikes in Ireland's North and South and above all, the IRA consequently had a significant revival: numerous Catholic youths were motivated to fight back poverty, discrimination and military repression encountered by their community and recruited as volunteers mainly in the strictly conservative and violent PIRA (Hadden 36-37, Frank 97). They tried to achieve their main aim, namely British withdrawal, by means of cruel terrorist attacks not only within Northern Ireland, but also in Britain. Malachy, the main characters' father in *Ourselves Alone*, is a leader of the Provisionals, which ought to reveal his radical Nationalist attitude.

According to Hadden, Britain ironically would have been eager to withdraw, however IRA terrorism reinforced Protestant opposition to a united Ireland even more and the fear of civil war especially hindered a withdrawal of British troops (38). Thus, the Protestant community prepared for a severe backlash. Already existing paramilitary movements, such as the UVF, increasingly recruited and a new group, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), was formed and recruited thousands of members. Hence, Loyalist paramilitaries equally applied bomb attacks to take revenge in Catholics areas and also the Unionist government demanded a more severe offensive against the IRA. However, since Bloody Sunday the British government had become cautious about repressive measures against Catholics and did not want to leave the sole scope for action to the Unionists. Therefore, the government in London dissolved the Stormont parliament in 1972 and introduced direct rule from Westminster, which ultimately led to enforced terrorism by the UDA and UVF against the Catholic community (Hadden 38-39). Nevertheless, after the government's unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with the IRA and a brief ceasefire, there was seemingly only one solution in terms

of British policy namely the reinforcement of repression: "House searches, beatings, arbitrary arrests, plus the more lethal methods of undercover troops were the order of the day" (Hadden 39). *Ourselves Alone* addresses this subject with unjustified raids that are occasionally also on the agenda in Donna's house. In December 1973 first attempts to end the conflict by restoring an independent Northern Irish administration, however with an equal distribution of power among Unionists and Nationalists, took place with the announcement of the so called Sunningdale Agreement. However, the convention failed due to substantial refusal on the Unionist side (Frank 107-108).

By 1974 daily sectarian riots, strikes and demonstrations had reached its peak; from then the number of public mass protests declined. The Troubles shifted to a form of "an extended secret war fought out by the various paramilitaries or the state forces. The mass of the people were kept in the dark, their main role, apart from looking on, was to add to the ever increasing toll of innocent victims" (Hadden 43). Loyalist as well as Republican paramilitaries started to have internal crisis: feuds between UDA and UVF as well as between the Provisional and the Official IRA started to develop. Furthermore, the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) with its paramilitary wing Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) separated from the Officials. This constant disagreement within the IRA is mirrored by the character of Liam in *Ourselves Alone* who 'participated' in any IRA split that occurred between 1969 and the early 1980s. Loyalist and Republican killings continued, though with less victims towards the end of the 1970s (Hadden 42-45). This apparent relaxation was only temporary, as with the abolition of the political status of Republican prisoners new sectarian disagreements arose. It also triggered momentous protests within the prisons: after having refused to wear prison uniforms Republican prisoners had to endure in the cells naked and only with a blanket. Additionally, prison authorities deliberately humiliated the internees, which escalated when prisoners started the so called no wash protest: prisoners lived naked in the most inhuman conditions with their own excreta smeared onto the walls.

The prison protests reached its climax when in 1980 seven prisoners in Maze Prison, also referred to as 'Long Kesh' or 'H Blocks', decided to go on hunger strike which was called off again when the British government seemed to give way. Nevertheless, Margaret Thatcher remained persistent, which triggered the second, more fatal fast within Maze prison. On 1 March 1981, Bobby Sands, a Provisional IRA commanding officer, initiated another hunger strike which ended with his death in May (Hadden 49-50). In the course of the strike Sinn Féin managed to nominate 27-year old Bobby Sands as candidate for a seat in the House of Commons which he eventually won, just like two other hunger strikers did. After Sands' death nine other prisoners died due to the hunger strike which was eventually called off. The government's obstinacy and their refusal to indulge thus alienated the Ulster Catholics even more and led to a significant political rise of Sinn Féin (Hadden 50) and a new wave of recruits to the IRA in the 1980s (Alison 69). Moreover, Bobby Sands became a Republican key figure and martyr of the Troubles; his veneration is also an issue in the Nationalist community in *Ourselves Alone*.

2. 4. Towards Enduring Peace

In order to avoid Sinn Féin as the Catholics' strongest representation, the British government now tried to approach the more moderately nationalist Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), which however appeared to be inefficient. In 1983 the new Irish Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald aimed at a closer cooperation between the North and South with regard to the Northern Irish question, a goal that the SDLP had always aimed at. This so called New Ireland Forum demanded a single unified Irish state according to mutual agreement in the North and South, a federal structure of the state and a solution both governments in London and Dublin are responsible for. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher initially rejected the three suggestions, but approved of a closer collaboration between the Republic and Britain, which led to the signing of the Anglo-Irish-Agreement on 15 November 1985. The agreement was again a step towards Northern Irish self-administration,

though for the first time the British government also granted the Republic of Ireland a say. In addition, the British government aimed at handing over responsibility for Northern Irish security policy to the Republic. Nevertheless, the Republic's longing for a united Ireland had to be backed by the majority of the Northern Irish citizens, which would not be reached until the present day. (Frank 118-120).

According to Hadden, the Agreement was a failure, but "[...] at that time it was hailed as an historic breakthrough by the entire political establishment [...]; Militant was the only voice raised which explained that it would solve nothing but would make things worse [...]" (52). Hence, the IRA ruthlessly continued the armed conflict within the following years, though gradually enhanced discussions about a potential peace process were initiated. The political leadership of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain as well as the United States contributed to planning a peaceful conflict resolution. As a result, both Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries declared ceasefire in 1994. Nevertheless, the IRA did not announce permanent armistice, neither did they entirely lay down the weapons. Only two years later they ended the ceasefire again and IRA terrorist attacks continued to be a daily threat in Britain and Northern Ireland. Eventually the new British Prime Minister Tony Blair was able to free Northern Ireland's policy from this 'dead end situation' and initiated new, more efficient peace discussions in 1997. His aim was to include all affected parties, particularly Sinn Féin and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), into the negotiations (Frank 126-132).

By the beginning of 1998 the negotiators set the central and definite goal to achieve a permanent agreement about the future of a peaceful Northern Ireland, which differed from previous agreements. Moreover, external pressure increased substantially: by the Northern Irish population who was tired of the 'war', by the American President who was particularly eager to act as a mediator and by a considerable international media attention. After intense negotiations the Belfast Agreement, also known as Good Friday Agreement, was signed on Good Friday, 10 April 1998. The Agreement enacted collaboration of Irish and Northern Irish administrations whereby the Republic of Ireland would have to relinquish its

territorial claim to Northern Ireland. Furthermore, a council containing of representatives from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would have to be established in order to discuss mutual issues. An equality commission would have to regulate fair and peaceful cooperation between Catholics and Protestants.

Above all, the disarmament of paramilitary organisations, as well as an early release of paramilitary prisoners would need to be ensured. Finally the British Army ought to gradually withdraw its troops and measures by the Northern Irish security forces, particularly the RUC, ought to be restructured and prepared for peaceful operations (Neumann 199-204). The foundations for a future peace process were laid but its realization turned out to be considerably more difficult. One of the most complex issues was the disarmament and non-compliance of ceasefire by Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries. Splinter groups of both movements continued to commit terrorist attacks into the 21st century (Frank 146). Two vital steps were taken towards an end of the conflict when in 2005 the IRA officially declared the end of its armed campaign and decommissioned its weapons. Furthermore, a devolved government in Northern Ireland was restored in 2007 (Melaugh)² and for the first time the heads of the leading parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin, agreed on cooperation.

2. 5. A Place Torn Apart

Between 1969 and 2005 the Northern Ireland Conflict required more than 3600 fatalities, of which a significant amount were civilians (McKeown).³ Despite recent peace agreements the conflict left behind its traumatic traces and a persisting gap between the two religious communities. What remains is a deeply divided society that is still confronted with sectarian violence and antagonism on a daily basis (Frank 141), meanwhile possibly in a more subtle way.

² <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/faq/faq2.htm>> 03 December 2009.

³ <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/mckeown/index.html>> 08 December 2009.

2. 5. 1. The Role of Religion

The role of the Catholic Church with regard to the politics of the Republican movement is ambiguous, as on the one hand it is a source of identity and Catholic schools and church events provide a means for keeping the community together. On the other hand, the Catholic Church opposes violence, which contradicts with the Republican objectives (Alison 69). The Christian commandment to love one's neighbor is obviously not accomplished by the IRA, which is why Central and South American revolutionary "liberation theology" is rather preferred within the movement (Shannon, "Catholic Women" 242). Consequently being part of a religious community is also less central for the characters in *Ourselves Alone* than for those in *Tea in a China Cup* where the domestic life in the Protestant community is taken as a theme, rather than active participation in paramilitary Unionist movements. What is interesting, also in regard to *Tea in a China Cup*, is the fact that Unionism is more shaped by the church than Irish Nationalism.

In contrast to Unionists, Nationalists share aspects such as the Gaelic language through which they can identify themselves. Unionists rather define themselves through a shared religious group and through monotheistic thinking, binary oppositions are more easily created, such as "good vs. evil", "godly vs. ungodly" and so forth. For instance, to Protestants Catholics are the "Other", the impoverished and inferior (Sales 64), which is a central aspect in *Tea in a China Cup* where the reader is confronted with prejudices and discriminations among both communities. Mitchell claims that religion in Northern Ireland has contributed in separating binaries and stressing differences and "played a vital ideological and institutional role in structures of dominance, dependence and inequality, more often reinforcing than restraining tendencies towards communal division" (16). The author further argues that even though the Northern Ireland Conflict "is not a religious one, religion cannot be omitted from analyses of social relationships" (15), a statement that is applicable to the subsequent analysis of Reid's play.

2. 5. 2. Contradictory Identities and Education

Prejudices within Northern Irish society, as apparent in *Tea in a China Cup*, have been investigated by O'Donnell who asked individual Northern Irish citizens to characterize their own identity compared to that of the 'Other' by means of choosing given adjectives:

Protestants described themselves [...] as British, loyalist, ordinary, determined, decent people, industrious, conservative and power-holders. Conversely, Catholics described Protestants as power-holders, bigoted, loyalist, Orangemen, British, bitter, ordinary people, brainwashed, determined and murderers. [...] Catholics identified themselves as Irish, long-suffering, ordinary, insecure, decent, deprived, unfortunate, fine people, nationalistic and reasonable. Protestants identified Catholics as ordinary people, Irish, priest-ridden, 'breed like rabbits', republican, bitter, superstitious, brainwashed, nationalistic [...] (qtd. in Douglas 156).

Interestingly, characteristics, such as 'decent' or 'ordinary', were attributed to both communities, an issue that is to some extent also revealed in *Tea in a China Cup*. Reid approaches this issue by portraying two different religious communities that are equally 'ordinary' and 'deprived' and who are holding identical, outdated sectarian prejudices against each other. In this respect Ruane and Todd provide approaches in order to interpret the Northern Ireland Conflict, whereof one is "the cultural approach" (27). According to this approach, the Northern Ireland Conflict is said to be based on "problematic values, beliefs and attitudes" such as:

an obsession with the past conceived in mythical terms, extreme nationalism, religious intolerance, an unwillingness to compromise and a willingness to use or condone political violence. Each side is said to be in a time warp, out of touch with present-day reality, entrapped in a mythical view of the past which leads to endless repetition of old tribal conflicts [...] Each of [Northern Ireland's] religious communities has counterparts elsewhere which share its basic beliefs and many of its prejudices (Ruane and Todd 29, 31).

Nevertheless, as Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean argue, Loyalists appear to fuel stronger hatred against Republicans than reversely (287).

Particularly whenever the economic situation aggravated, Protestants maintained their British identity and stress their 'right' to suppress Catholics in terms of wealth, property and employment (Fairweather et. al. 287). The issue of poverty and unfairly distributed wealth among the two communities is to a certain extent also subject of *Tea in a China Cup*.

This "culture war", as Longley terms it (16), where diversity has become the central problem, has been emphasised by the Northern Irish segregated education system. Separation at primary and secondary level in Northern Ireland has contributed to shape Catholic and Protestant identity and sectarian loyalties at an early stage and fuelled antagonism which provided a basis for the conflict. The Unionist Stormont government declared the state primary education system generally as a Protestant one. Also when in 1947 the government introduced free secondary education, applying the British Butler Education Act of 1944, Catholic schools were still excluded from those benefits (Arthur and Jeffery 25). Financial shortage in terms of funding children's secondary education and a resulting jealousy of the Catholic neighbour by the early 1950s is also a problem addressed in *Tea in a China Cup*. Only by the late 1960s the O'Neill government increased subsidies also for schools in the Catholic sector. What impact the Troubles and sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland particularly have had on women, as well as the space and roles they have occupied within the conflict, will be subject of the subsequent chapter.

3. Proper Housewives vs. Paramilitary Terrorists - Women in Northern Ireland

*I think women should have more say
in the running of the country because its men ruined it.
(Elisabeth, welfare worker at the UDA)⁴*

In order to fully comprehend and successfully analyse the depiction and role of the female characters in the selected plays, an account of the position of women in Northern Irish society is indispensable. The following chapters briefly consider women's political, social and economic position throughout the time of the Northern Irish conflict. The distinction of women between the private and the public sphere will be taken into account while particular emphasis will be laid on the impact of the Troubles on women's lives from a Catholic, as well as from a Protestant angle.

It was not until the 1970s and early 1980s that scholarly research gradually drew the attention to women's status and role in Northern Irish society and politics, which is ascribed to Ulster's highly conservative churches and schools, as well as exceedingly disadvantageous conditions for women in the labour market. The utterly conservative views of both Catholic and Protestant churches shaped women's position in Northern Ireland substantially and appears to be the only common ground in this sectarian society. Furthermore, this delay of research also roots in the fact that there seemed to be a greater necessity to thematise Northern Ireland's problematic and discriminating situation in terms of religious segregation and its troubled political state of affairs (C. Shannon, "Women in Northern Ireland" 238). Particularly large working-class areas, such as Belfast and Londonderry, are marked by patriarchal structures restricting a woman's role in Northern Irish

⁴ Qtd. in: Fairweather, Eileen, McDonough, Roisin and McFadyean, Melanie. *Only Rivers Run Free. Northern Ireland: The Women's War*. London: Pluto, 1984, 286.

society to that of a “sacrificing mother, obedient wife and servicer of male needs” (C. Shannon, “Catholic Women” 235).

Edgerton remarks that women, who married and started families relatively young, were restricted in their strong family units (61). Examining their domestic role, as well as their suppressed relationships to their husbands and families critically is not necessarily supported in Northern Ireland; at least it was not until the end of the 20th century. It is rather the maternal role in order to keep the family unit together that is ascribed to women (Edgerton 61). As a consequence, women have always been relatively invisible on Northern Ireland’s political scene and in paramilitary organizations, particularly on the Unionist part (R. Ward, *Women, Unionism* 113). Northern Ireland’s sectarian society with its political and social life based on community loyalties shaped women’s subordination significantly. Since the late 1960s substantial economic and social changes have taken place in Northern Ireland whereby women have been more and more involved in the public sphere (Sales 4). Nonetheless, they predominantly remained excluded from party politics and it was only in 2001 that the first female Northern Irish MPs were voted into the House of Commons since the late 1960s (BBC News 2001). However, some women have always been actively involved in Northern Ireland’s politics and the Troubles, an issue that is also referred to in Devlin’s *Ourselves Alone*.

3. 1. Gender Relations and Ideological Concepts of Catholic and Irish Republican Womanhood

With regard to gender and women in the Republican movement it is noteworthy that its nationalist ideology is gendered on its own. Ireland has always been referred to as ‘Mother Ireland’ where women are supposed to stay at home taking care of sons and husbands who fight for freedom of the nation. According to McWilliams, this imagery has particularly been shaped by the Catholic Church whose schools provided education to children, who in addition were shaped by their pious parents (“Women in Northern Ireland” 85). Virgin Mary as a role model

contributed significantly to shaping Catholic women's identity of remaining chaste and pure and "adopt the mother's passive, unquestioning role" (85) as well as staying at her place which is "apart from the convent [sic] the home preferably rearing sons for Ireland" (Holland qtd. in McWilliams 85). Mary's image was also popular in representing the concept of Irish Republicanism particularly around the time of the Hunger Strike in the late seventies and early eighties. Wall murals in nationalist parts of Belfast depicted an agonized Virgin Mary as a symbol of Mother Ireland standing by her martyred son who is tortured by the crucifiers, the British imperialists. The son, a fallen IRA soldier draped with the Irish tricolour, is held by his mother just like Mary is holding Jesus Christ after crucifixion (McWilliams, "Women in Northern Ireland" 86).

Shannon claims that the cult of Mary in the Irish manifestation often also highlights a positive, more active role in order to secure salvation ("Women in Northern Ireland" 245). This was the inspiration for many Irish mothers to engage in active participation in the conflict, such as protesting against the withdrawal of political status during the time of internment, activities which they had previously considered not being capable of. Thus, Republican leaders effectively used such murals as a means of encouraging female activism (C. Shannon, "Women in Northern Ireland" 245-46). However, McWilliams argues that the initial identification with the mainly passive role of Virgin Mary has begun to be disapproved by groups of Northern Irish feminists who claim that different mythological images of the "Great Mothers" ("Women in Northern Ireland" 86) of Ireland ought to be considered as "images of mothers as warriors, clever, imaginative, strong, cunning, wise and compassionate" (86). These pictures would have to be "trampled down by the imposition of a narrow, patriarchal colonial culture" (McWilliams, "Women in Northern Ireland" 86). This is also confirmed by Shannon who states that throughout the 1980s female role models, such as goddesses from pre-Christian Gaelic mythology that represent independence, power and authority became increasingly appreciated ("Women in Northern Ireland" 246).

3. 1. 1. Republican Women – “The Backbone of Civil Resistance”⁵

Catholic women have always been more visible and involved in Republican politics and paramilitary activity than Protestant women in their political communities (Sales 70). This is also reflected in the difference between the two plays as in *Ourselves Alone* one of the main female characters is involved in the IRA, whereas in *Tea in a China Cup* the protagonist is more tied to the domestic sphere. As Shannon puts it, since the foundation of Northern Ireland in 1921 Catholics have been confronted with unemployment, appalling housing conditions and extreme poverty, which consequently was not accepted without objection by Catholic women. In contrast to Protestant women, they often had to provide the sole family income and therefore became politically more aware (C. Shannon, “Catholic Women” 236) In fact, the very first protests by the end of the 1950s against the discriminating housing policy by the Unionist dominated government were initiated by women. Shannon states an example of some young Catholic women in Dungannon who had to care for their families in over-crowded, expensive and often unhygienic houses; circumstances that were similar to thousands of working-class Catholic women throughout Northern Ireland (“Women in Northern Ireland” 238-39). Dungannon was particularly severely affected by those conditions and the inequitable allocation of houses, which is why women organised a protest in summer 1963 that was a crucial part of the events that eventually led to the founding of the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (C. Shannon “Women in Northern Ireland” 238-39).

Inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States the leaders Angela McCrystal and Patricia McCluskey formed the Homeless Citizens League, as well as the Campaign of Social Justice and organized various demonstrations in which women protested against discrimination of Catholics in housing and public

⁵ Ward, Margaret and McGivern, Marie-Thérèse. “Images of Women in Northern Ireland”. *The Crane Bag*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1980), 71.

employment. The women of the above mentioned organisations played a vital role in transferring local protests of northern Catholics to a greater struggle for civil rights with a broader political ideology. As Shannon argues about actively involved women: “[...] The founding of the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association is as much the result of their groundwork as of the various trade union, republican and civil liberties groups that joined in establishing the organisation in April 1967” (“Women in Northern Ireland” 241). Yet, the optimistic civil rights marches from 1968 to 1969 turned into sectarian rioting, brutal intervention by the police and upcoming Loyalist and Republican paramilitary terrorism as well as repression by the government. Catholic women reacted in their own inventive way to this violence when the British army executed the first armed raids in the Catholic lower Falls Road area of Belfast in July 1970. During a curfew of two and a half days people could not leave their homes and were in desperate need of basic food, which encouraged women to ignore the soldiers and step beyond the barricades to distribute goods for their families and friends and marching around while singing civil rights songs (C. Shannon, “Women in Northern Ireland” 242-43). Those searches and riots triggered an increasing number of recruits to the IRA since 1969 and ultimately led to the implementation of internment without trial in August 1971 by the Stormont government. Over the next few years Catholic areas were marked by house searches in which women intervened by banging dustbin lids or blowing whistles in order to warn as soon as they noticed armed soldiers or the police approaching Catholic domains (C. Shannon, “Women in Northern Ireland” 242-43).

Women organized strikes and boycotts and participated in weekly marches often protesting on behalf of their interned fathers, husbands and brothers who had reached a number of 3000 by 1978. Particularly the abolition of political status for paramilitary prisoners in 1976 encouraged even more Catholic women to political activism (C. Shannon, “Women in Northern Ireland” 244-45). This coincides with Ward and McGivern’s account, who state that “it is noteworthy that throughout the history of Irish Republicanism women have always been the most visible presence at demonstrations and rallies” (Ward and McGivern 71). However, the most

prominent roles in the Civil Rights Association were still male and only a few, such as Bernadette Devlin, a well-known civil rights activist and one of the few female members of the British parliament in 1969, managed to be among the public female figures in the movement (Edgerton 62 and C. Shannon, "Women in Northern Ireland" 247).

3. 1. 2. Women Fighting in Republican Paramilitaries

Female combatants have only been allowed to join the IRA since the beginning of the Troubles. Before, women were able to join a women's organisation called Cumann na mBan, which was established in 1913 as an auxiliary for the Irish Volunteers. Women's roles in Cumann na mBan had not changed since its foundation until the beginning of the Troubles. The organisation was established to support the IRA and to fundraise for the movement, as well as to provide first aid and store weapons. It pursued a somewhat misogynistic attitude, as for instance women who were divorced, lived in relationships without wedlock or had illegitimate children were rejected in the first place or members with such an 'inappropriate' life style were excluded (Alison 143, Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean 240). This verifies what Buckley and Lonergan's determine as the origin of women's presence in the Troubles: "Female participation in struggle for freedom can begin in support of activities defined by males" (75). By the end of the 1960s young members of Cumann na mBan increasingly began to express discontent with their subordinate role and plead in favour of integration into the IRA itself. After the IRA's split in 1970 the PIRA supported Cumann na mBan, but also opened access for women into their male dominated movement, however initially without the full status of military members. After subsequent restructuring of the movement, women became equally accepted (Alison 143). Cumann na mBan seemed to fully represent Catholic women's fate in a country that struggled for liberation, namely that they had to fight for both, their own rights, as well as for their social community's rights. This is expressed in a statement by an initial

member of the Cumann na mBan and later IRA volunteer in an interview led by Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean:

It's sad to think of a revolutionary organization, comprised solely of women, which could be so uniquely placed in giving the lead to the fight for women's liberation and not doing that [...] And that's not to say that women shouldn't fight to liberate this country from the stranglehold that the Brits have on it. But we should be fighting for our own rights as well, because if we don't no one else will do it for us (240-241).

By the mid 1970s Cumann na mBan was dissolved, which led to the fact that women joined the IRA directly (Talbot 138). Particularly women whose family background was shaped by the old IRA became directly involved in Republican paramilitaries. This female support was welcomed and encouraged in the movement as "Republican women have provided an almost inexhaustible reservoir of womanpower and so the tradition continues" (Ward and McGivern, 71). After the internment policy had been introduced in 1971, women of Catholic working-class areas in Derry and West Belfast were most likely to support Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA. In this "prison culture", as Shannon puts it ("Catholic women" 238), a strong sense of solidarity arose among women who were waiting for their interned men or who had to bear brutal house searches by the security forces. During such raids homes were partly completely demolished and men were brutally attacked in front of their wives and children. Many of those women participated in IRA terrorist activity by storing guns and ammunition, keeping safe houses or operating as lookouts and couriers between prisoners and their leaders (C. Shannon, "Women in Northern Ireland" 244-46).

Fairweather, McDounough and McFadyean give a vivid account on women's hardships in Northern Ireland in both Protestant and Catholic communities. In order to illustrate the motives for joining the IRA, the authors interviewed various female members of the movement. Cathleen, a young woman from the Belfast Falls Road area, had experienced harassment by Loyalists from her early childhood onwards until her family saw themselves forced to move to a Catholic

area where they were not humiliated by the British army which mainly operated in Protestant areas. After a brutal raid at her aunt's house, where her uncle got arrested, Cathleen gradually realized that for her, in order to fight against discrimination of Catholics, there was no other way than participating in the IRA:

I used to go down and help my aunt after that. A few months later, when I was giving her a hand to lay some lino, the Brits arrived to do another raid. They deliberately wrecked her new lino – danced all over it and laughed as they were doing it. I thought it was terrible and said, 'Don't do that, please don't do that. She hasn't got much money and she's been saving for it.' But it didn't make any difference to them. Things like that maybe seem small to others who don't have to go through it [...] Then internment was brought in. I felt I'd no other option but to join after that. That's when it became crystal clear to me that the Brits were here to suppress the Catholic minority, and for no other reason (qtd. in Fairweather, McDounough and McFadyean, *Only Rivers Run Free* 236).

Women volunteers in the IRA constantly struggled for equal treatment in this male dominated movement and always had to prove themselves to prevent from prejudices that women were less competent. Nevertheless, there were women who were capable of doing any task in the IRA:

[...] We have women who work in *all* spheres – the carrying of weapons, planting bombs, making them, setting up operations, carrying out the jobs, bringing the weapons and getting them away after the job [...] Sometimes women train male volunteers [...] I think it is true to say, however, that a woman has to be better than a man initially to prove herself. After that, though, there's no obstacles. Whoever most skilled is in charge, be it a woman or a man (female IRA volunteer qtd. in Fairweather, McDounough and McFadyean 241-242).

In the early years of women participating as volunteers IRA actions mainly consisted of men firing the guns and women carrying them. A fairly practical reason for using women as gun-carriers and storers, such as aunt Cora in *Ourselves Alone* is referred to, is that soldiers were less likely to suspect young women in the street of being an active volunteer. Women seemed to be less dangerous and as searching women's bodies, even after it became known that

there were female volunteers, carried the risk of negative reputation, they became safe assistants within the IRA (Alison 190).

3. 1. 3. Republican Women Imprisoned

As a result of paramilitary activities many women were sentenced to jail. The equivalent to the IRA men's Maze Prison or Long Kesh was Armagh Prison where most of the female political prisoners were incarcerated. Since throughout the 1970s women's involvement as IRA combatants increased, also the number of interned women rose continually. Until 1976 more than one hundred women were imprisoned because of paramilitary activity. These female volunteers did not contribute as couriers or intelligence gatherers, but were involved in actual armed contests against the British soldiers, such as for instance planting bombs (Talbot 136). Like male inmates, detained women also protested by means of hunger strikes and the so called 'no wash' or 'dirty protest' in order to regain political status as prisoners. The latter consisted of refusing prison clothing, wearing blankets and covering the walls with urine, faeces and in women's case with menstrual blood. Approximately 400 male and 30 female prisoners took part in those protests (Buckley and Lonergan 84).

In 1982 the policy of strip-searching was introduced in prisons, which was a particularly discriminating method against women. It incorporated the removal of all clothes, as well as a visual search of genitalia, even during pregnancy, breast feeding or menstruating (Talbot 141). Consequently women prisoners were discriminated for two reasons, namely for their political beliefs, as well as their sex. Alison reports about a former female Republican prisoner who was victim of hundreds of strip-searchers in only one year: "There is no way this could have possibly been justified on security grounds; it was a deliberate and gendered tactic of intimidation and was experienced, as an ex-prisoner has stated elsewhere, as 'psychological rape'" (196). Talbot introduces an interesting issue wondering whether women's participation in prison protests and the harassment they

encountered boosted awareness concerning their gender and the women's movement or whether this was just another commitment to male dominated Republicanism (140). She argues that gradually "Republican women had gained the right to equal participation within the ranks of combatants and that feminist issues were of growing interest" to female prisoners (140). As a consequence "women's experience of the conflict was also being discussed in feminist terms in the wider Republican press" (143).

Dowler gives a striking account on how some women perceive and express their resentment about their 'invisibility' in Irish storytelling and resistance songs, which is directly referred to in the opening scene of *Ourselves Alone*. Two of the women interviewed, some former members of the IRA having served prison sentences, articulate what Frieda is experiencing in the play when she has to perform the Republican song 'The Men Behind the Wire'. They are expressing their resentment about a line in a song about "the bold Fenian Men" (170):

Maureen: These songs are shite nonsense. Men write them and men sing them. They could care less what the women have done. There are a couple of songs about women but most of them are about the men. It is absolutely desperate it is, the bold Fenian Men. What of the bold Fenian *Women*?

Peggy [interjects]: Ach, this isn't even the worse one. What of the 'Men in the IRA', they love to sing that one around here. I was in the IRA but that song is not written about me. I also hate the song 'The Men Behind the Wire'. I was in prison for 4 years, there were women behind that wire too! (qtd. in: Dowler 170).

3. 1. 4. Republican Women in Party Politics

Before the 1970s women were barely represented in nationalist party politics. Also until the mid-seventies there was only scattered female involvement in ideologically divided Irish nationalism, either by joining the moderate Social Democratic and Labour Party or the more revolutionary Sinn Féin which was applying force. Similar to the motives of joining the IRA, female Sinn Féin activists

have been encouraged through witnessing their male relatives' or friends' internment in the early 1970s or intimidation and discrimination of fellow Catholics (C. Shannon, "Women in Northern Ireland" 247). Republican organisations have remained male dominated and only few women managed the step into the leadership. Those women were confronted with cruel discriminations, as the example of Máire Drumm, Vice-President of Sinn Féin, who was assassinated in 1976 for her militant speeches, shows (Ward and McGivern 69). By the early 1980s the younger generation of Sinn Féin women started to adopt a position in the movement's leadership pleading in favour of women's issues dealt with beside the constitutional issues in the party programme. Eight out of thirty-two seats on the Sinn Féin national executive were guaranteed to women when in 1983 a separate Women's Department was founded. Yet, in reality there has always remained a large gap between what is stated in the party policy and women's reality in terms of equality (C. Shannon, "Women in Northern Ireland" 247). A survey by Ward shows that by the beginning of the new millennium Northern Irish women's underrepresentation in the UK's political institutions still has not improved significantly. In 2001 only 17% were female representatives in the British House of Commons and 19% were female representatives in the Northern Ireland Councils, whereby female Loyalist politicians are included. In 2003 17% of the representatives were female in the Northern Ireland Assembly (R. Ward "It's not just" 495).

It is noteworthy that not all Catholic women necessarily support the ideology of Sinn Féin Republicanism. Shannon claims that election results of 1986 and 1987 show that Catholic women mainly support the less radical nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party ("Catholic Women" 245). Frieda in *Ourselves Alone* is temporarily involved in the SDLP, though more against her will than fully loyally. A number of Catholic women have avoided party politics by engaging in community centres in order to work with children and youths to protect them against harassment and potential paramilitary recruitments or to participate in reconciliation work for ex-prisoners. Nevertheless, there is a large part of women who live in a nationalist environment and simply have no time and energy for

political activity as they have been burdened by family duties and responsibilities in their households (245). This characteristic can possibly be attributed to non-political Donna in *Ourselves Alone* who is physically as well as emotionally exhausted and has a fairly passive attitude towards political or paramilitary activism. Yet, Sales argues that “the years of conflict have [...] opened up new opportunities for women to develop their own activities and agendas, which have begun to challenge the traditional values of the two communities” (73).⁶

3. 2. Ideological Concepts of Protestant Womanhood and Patriarchal Ulster Loyalism

Protestantism is particularly characterized by deep-rooted patriarchy determining women’s subordinated role in the home fulfilling the duty as the house keeper and following the vocation of wife- and motherhood (Moore 13). As mentioned in chapter 3.1 religious imagery, such as the Virgin Mary, plays a vital role in determining the representation of Catholic women in Republican society, a tendency that is opposed in Evangelistic Protestantism. Moore argues that “[...] in doing so [Protestantism] also drops the image of woman as significant and important” (13). McWilliams reasons similarly when she states that “the veneration of Mary as a mother figure is anathema to the teachings of Free Presbyterianism. The patriarchal nature of Protestantism leaves out the imagery of women and in turn women become invisible” (“Women in Northern Ireland” 86). Unionism appears to have no heroines or a ‘female nation’ such as ‘Mother Ireland’, as it is more related to imagery of masculine conquests and triumphant settlement. There is only some exceptional female appearance on Loyalist imagery, however always conveying messages of loyalty to England and reflecting the profoundly patriarchal values of Unionism (Moore 13). Ward points out a rare case when the female is symbolic for Ulster in a verse of a Unionist poem:

⁶ For more on women in Northern Irish Politics cf. Galligan, Yvonne . *The Politics of Women’s Representation in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland*.

The sword half drawn on her own behalf
 In Ulster's Red Right Hand
 Will leap from the scabbard and flash like fire
 For the common Motherland (qtd. in R. Ward, *Women, Unionism* 42)

Referring to Ulster as female and fighting for England is quite remarkable, as active fighting was carried out exclusively by men (R. Ward, *Women, Unionism* 43). What seems to be more common in symbolizing a nation is the occasional reference to 'protecting the motherland', such as England, or 'mother Ireland' which has to be fought for by its men, rather than the image of a female Ulster fighting for the nation. Women's representation in important symbolic Protestant traditions, such as the annual Orange Parade on the twelfth of July⁷, is equally spare as they "are more likely to be found in the back room making what seems to be endless tea and sandwiches for their men folk, as is expected" (Moore 14). Hence, there appears to be a strict separation between male and female spheres in the ideologies of Protestantism (Sales 65), a tendency that is especially evident in Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*.

Any position of power in Unionist Northern Ireland is almost entirely monopolized by a male clergy and even the domestic sphere is dominated by male authority (Sales 65). This is confirmed by the utterance of conservative Ian Paisley, former leader of the DUP and previous first minister of Northern Ireland: "I believe that the husband is the head of the wife and the home. I believe that the father should be prophet, priest and king in his home. As king he should exercise rulership. As prophet he should exercise rulership" (qtd. in Fairweather, McDonough and

⁷ Annually on 12 July members of the Orange Institution participate all over Northern Ireland in so called Orange Parades in order to celebrate the victory of the Battle of the Boyne with the Protestant population. In this battle the Protestant King William III., the Dutch Prince of Orange, defeated the English Catholic King James II. in July 1690 at the river Boyne which is situated close to today's Northern Irish border. Northern Irish Protestants regard the historical event as the foundation of civil rights and religious liberty for Protestants in mainly Catholic Ireland. The parades, attended by Orangemen dressed in special uniforms wearing Orange ribbons and medals, are led by officials, who carry flags, and accompanied by the march music of Orange bands. During the years of the Troubles, Orange Parades were repeatedly the source of riots and provocation, particularly when held throughout Catholic-dominated areas of Northern Ireland. Thus, Orange parades are political rituals that, apart from commemoration, also express loyalty to the British state (Bryan 3). The significance of parading on 12 July is above all addressed in *Tea in a China Cup*.

McFadyean 266). His wife Eileen Paisley echoes her husband one-to-one: “Well, I’m just a minister’s wife. I have my husband and his work... I think the husband is head of the home certainly... [...] marriage is a partnership with the man at the head” (Fairweather et. al. 274). This view of Protestant womanhood by Northern Ireland’s political forefront originating from the early 1980s was starkly rooted in Evangelical Christianity and is still prevailing in the present. Women are meant to hold moral authority and power, however with regard to the domestic scene and achieved by self-sacrifice (Sales 65).

3. 2. 1. Protestant Women’s Paramilitary Involvement

Documentary sources suggest that there is little known about Protestant women in paramilitaries as they have not been particularly prominent in Loyalist movements. Alison argues that Loyalist women are less likely to admit having been involved in paramilitary than Republican women, mainly because of a more negative attitude towards such participation (152-153). There is the commonly held view among the Protestant community that women should not be involved in any kind of violence whatsoever. This is why active Loyalist women are mostly seen as only being in relationships with their Loyalist men and not in active paramilitary resistance (Alison 152-153). One of Alison’s interviewees, a Loyalist ex-prisoner, claims that one reason for women’s underrepresentation in Loyalist paramilitary movements is the different goals both parties were fighting for. According to him, the Republican’s war of resistance against the state required more participants and therefore, also provided a role for women. In contrast, Loyalist paramilitaries’ aim was to fight a “counter-terrorist war against Republicans” and not “buildin’ a revolutionary movement” (qtd. in Alison 154). Republican movements, according to the interviewee, linked revolutionary motives, such as human rights issues, with gender issues, whereby there was no need for doing so for Loyalists. Hence no real responsibility was established for Protestant women as there was no ideological or strategic need for women such as in Republican movements (qtd. in Alison 154).

Loyalist women's activities mainly involved welfare work, support for male prisoners, first aid or moving guns rather than actually planting bombs (Sales 69, Alison 157). The fact that the women's branch of the UDA had been abolished in 1974 because of its responsibility for the cruel murder of Ann Ogilby for having delivered parcels to an unmarried prisoner, is yet another reason why women had less opportunity for recognized paramilitary activism (Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean 283). Nevertheless, there were some active Loyalist women who were politically motivated and above all inspired by the brutal violence of the PIRA. Communal violence in the 1970s, where Protestants had to leave their homes, some of them being burnt out, was particularly fuelling bitterness among Protestants and encouraging women to become combatants (Alison 157-159). This attitude is reflected in a statement by one of Alison's interviewees, a former participant in the UDA: "I wasn't born to hate, I was taught to hate. And I was taught by the best because Sinn Féin/IRA taught me" (qtd. in Alison 159). Another respondent claimed that one main motive for Protestant women to join a paramilitary activity was defending their families and homes while their male companions were defending their country (qtd. in Alison 160). Many women also joined the movement simply because of their social background and to continue the 'family tradition' (R. Ward "It's not just" 498). The number of imprisoned Loyalist women was naturally considerably lower than that of interned Republican women. Like female Republican prisoners they also had to face gender specific humiliation, though they were never strip-searched. Some Loyalist women, as Alison's interviewee points out, were confronted with discrimination by Republican women in prison or with loneliness in isolation, as due to their greater number, Republican prisoners could at least stay in their own community (qtd. in Alison 209).

Leaders of Protestant communities are predominantly male of whom many are strongly anti-feminist. A Loyalist community worker interviewed by Alison stated that on the whole "unionism is 'more honest' about its chauvinism towards women than republicanism is" (qtd. in Alison 213). The latter presents its women as being "at the forefront" while they are in fact repressed similarly (Alison 213). Another

reason why Republican women are more visible in the movements is because feminism and active fighting for women's own interests are more associated with Republicanism (Sales 5). Also Ward and McGivern argue that any radical protest has always been ascribed to Republicanism and would be treated with suspicion if carried out by Protestant women (71). They would find it problematic to confront themselves with their own oppression as women. In contrast, for Catholic women struggling for independence has always been a defining part of the community they belong to. Thus, struggling for their own rights is not as alien to them as it might be to Protestant women (Ward and McGivern 71). Moreover, Loyalism is defined by opposition of any move by the enemy, which is stressed by an interviewee of Alison: "So if Republicans are embracing women's rights, then again... [Loyalists would] move against that" (qtd. in Alison 154).

3. 2. 2. Women in Unionist Politics

According to Sales, women have always played an important supportive role in Unionist politics, such as the participation in the Ulster Women's Unionist Council, founded in 1911 (66). However, their activities were rather limited and access was only reserved for upper and middle-class women. Apart from that, neither women's suffrage nor their nominations for election were discussed at that time. The Westminster Parliament did not have elected Unionist women included until the Stormont period when four women were elected (Sales 66). Shannon strikingly points out that there are more Protestant than Catholic women who in fact want to show support for a political party, even though there is this contradictory evidence of the lack of Protestant women's actual political participation ("Women in Northern Ireland" 249). Nevertheless, she claims that by the beginning of the 1990s political consciousness among Protestant working-class women began to rise, quoting a Protestant woman in 1991:

"The Protestant community wasn't aware of the discrimination, but they are now. We were told we were God's own people. Stormont would look after us and all the rest of it. We don't believe that any longer. We haven't

believed that for thirty years and we are fighting back” (qtd. in C. Shannon, “Women in Northern Ireland” 249).

A female member of the UDA interviewed by Fairweather et. al. also realized the need for an increasing political participation by women. She made a bitter remark about women’s liberation: “There’s no women’s lib amongst Protestants, but if women had more power the world wouldn’t be in half such a mess” (qtd. in Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean 286). In a more recent account by Ward the stereotypical image of Protestant women of being merely the ‘tea makers’ is challenged. Her findings simply sum up what has always been the case until the present when she argues that Unionist women are politically active in many different ways but in less powerful roles than men. These women are motivated by a certain national consciousness, in a nationalism that lacks of active female symbols “combined with a cultural conservatism that acts to reinforce traditional gender roles, constrains and militates against women taking on prominent political responsibilities” (R. Ward “It’s not just” 504).

3. 3. Public vs. Domestic Violence – ‘Troubled Women’ in Northern Ireland

Although there has been less female paramilitary involvement, the violence of the Troubles has clearly not spared women. 247 women of all age were killed by bomb explosions or gun attacks throughout the Northern Irish conflict between 1969 and 1994 (RUC Statistics Unit qtd. in McWilliams, “Struggling” 16). Such deaths led to a debate about the morality of killing women and the awareness that this level of violence had become in fact intolerable within the Northern Irish conflict (McWilliams, “Struggling” 16). On the whole, fewer women than men have died due to the violence of the conflict. Nevertheless, women have not suffered less from the impact of it, if only in a different way, for instance through the loss of friends and relatives particularly that of their husbands and children’s fathers. As a consequence, numerous women were faced with the strain of holding the family together and providing solely the entire family income. The Troubles have also left

marks in women's psychological state of health, such as nervous disorder. Until the middle of the 1990s approximately 35 million tranquillisers were prescribed every year of which two thirds were taken by women (Coulter 134).

What has been neglected in public discourse is the fact that the violence of the Troubles has in many cases been transformed to the home particularly against women who broke rules and norms. Consequently men's paramilitary activity and their power gained outside the home has often led to an increased control of women in the home (Evason, *Hidden Violence* 73) and is particularly evident in men's treatment of their women in *Ourselves Alone*. In her study about domestic violence in Northern Ireland Evason states the assumption that "the power gained outside the home may be deployed within it, adding an extra dimension to all the means which men normally have for oppressing women and engendering fear" (*Hidden Violence* 73). Evason stresses that she does not condemn any membership of a paramilitary organisation, neither does she want to claim that those organisations support violence against women. More importantly, what the author intends to underline is that during the Troubles women lived in armed patriarchy (*Hidden Violence* 73). This is stated in almost any account of the issue, namely that domestic violence in Northern Ireland has occurred in a rather distinctive socio-political context. Numerous men, who have been members of paramilitary organizations, have had immediate access to weapons which have frequently been used against their own wives (Moore 15, Scanlan 83). Those memberships might have often protected men from being persecuted for domestic crimes.

Edgerton makes a bitter statement about the public awareness about domestic violence: "If women as mothers have received little sympathy, then women as wives have received even less" (78). Families are principally often associated with comfort and love, however contemplating those in Northern Ireland from a feminist perspective they can also be regarded as patriarchal institutions where male power is used for the oppression of women (Coulter 106). Coulter argues that until recently "violence behind closed doors" was mainly overlooked and "the

construction of the home as sanctum prevented an understanding that the practice of domestic violence was in fact widespread” and often regarded as “private affair of others” (106). This ignorance anchored in Northern Ireland is quite context specific insofar, as over the past decades policy makers and academics have been occupied with the public violence of the Troubles rather than paying attention to more private forms of it. Even women themselves considered actions against public violence as more central than actions against its domestic equivalent (Coulter 107).

As already stated, Northern Irish women have always been central in protests against injustices throughout the Troubles. Regarding violence women protested vehemently against the aggression of the British Army throughout the 1970s. Especially at the time of internment women rather protested against the unjustified imprisonment of men than against the violence of their own male partners in the homes (McWilliams, “Women in Northern Ireland” 84). This existing ignorance of the problem is confirmed by Edgerton who points out that until the foundation of the Northern Ireland Women’s Aid Federation in the mid 1970s and the Rape Crisis Association in 1981 women, who underwent domestic or sexual violence, were basically invisible and widely ignored. Women’s Aid is providing help to refugees from domestic violence from both religious communities (Edgerton 78-79). According to McWilliams, during the Troubles it got into conflict with the Church, as well as the Republican movement. The former did not approve of family splits whereas the latter opposed that the women’s organization refused to distinguish between political punishments, such as the tarring and feathering of convicted women⁸ and the violence inflicted by state forces or husbands (McWilliams, “Women in Northern Ireland” 84). Acting in opposition against domestic violence was “a fundamental challenge of the traditional role of women” (85) that particularly opposed the beliefs of the Churches.

⁸ ‘Taring and feathering’ was a practice for public humiliation of women who dated British soldiers by tying the women to a lamppost with their heads shaved and covered in tar and feathers. It was a punishment carried out on nationalist women within their own community (Coulter 135).

Especially the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland often condemns divorce as a means of ending women's hardship regardless of how violent those partnerships were and worship the inviolability of marriage (Mcintyre 59). Seeking clerical support affected women are even encouraged by the Catholic Church to go back to their violent partners as divorce is considered as a 'shame'. The state has often been equally little helpful, as there are various reported cases that, when contacted, the RUC occasionally refused to respond to abused women's appeal for help or to intervene (Coulter 110). This is an issue which is also referred to in McWilliams and McKiernan's study which an affected woman in Northern Ireland was interviewed for: "they are not there to help. In this area police are not people that you normally go to. I mean, to walk out and stop them on the street they would laugh at you – I mean they don't have any contact with this community whatsoever" (qtd. in McWilliams and McKiernan 55-56). Although there are signs that it is not accepted any more as it used to be the problem of domestic violence has continued to persist in Northern Ireland (Coulter 106-107). After the ceasefires and the Good Friday Agreement in the late 1990s it seemed as if violence had not gone, but in fact "just moved indoors to the private domain of living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms" (Foley 82).⁹

3. 4. Sexuality and Northern Irish Women

Both Catholic and Protestant churches have utterly conservative views about divorce, abortion, homosexuality and women's sexuality in general. Catholicism, as noted in chapter 3. 1, uses the imagery of the Virgin Mary in order to establish women's passive, obedient and maternal role in society. By implementing this image as a role model for Catholic women, the Catholic Church has quite consciously separated sex from motherhood. Many young Catholic women are familiar with this image and establishing it in the Catholic education system has

⁹ For more on domestic violence in Northern Ireland cf. McWilliams, Monica and McKiernan, Joan. *Bringing it Out in the Open: Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland: A Study Commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland)*. Belfast: HMSO, 1993.

convinced women to actually hate their bodies (Ward and McGivern 68, McWilliams, "Women in Northern Ireland" 86). This is also reflected in a scene in *Tea in a China Cup* when Catholic Teresa is talking to her Protestant friend Beth about the first menstruation: "My mummy calls it the curse" (*Tea*, 30). Protestantism does not worship a pure and chaste 'role model' such as Virgin Mary, which does not mean however, that Protestant women are not faced with similar restrictions in terms of sexuality and birth control (Ward and McGivern 68). Like Catholicism, the Protestant religion regards heterosexuality combined with marriage as sacred and god-given whereas illegitimacy and homosexuality is considered as being shameful. Thus, in both communities women's upbringing has always been affected by a strong religious ideology leaving young girls often in complete ignorance about sexuality. While Catholicism uses the image of the Virgin Mother as a role model for chastity, repressive Calvinist ideas convey an equal idea about sex as a sinful action in Protestantism (McDonough 184). This is the main reason why girls are taught that sex is only reserved for marriage; something "women just have to put up with" (Reid qtd. in E. Shannon 214) and Christina Reid particularly addresses in *Tea in a China Cup*.

Protestantism, similar to Catholicism, opposes divorce, abortion and principally also contraception. Concerning the latter, the Protestant community points out though that it does not support the Catholic Church's opinion about the 'problem' of contraception (Moore 14). It is even an issue that evokes strong sectarian feelings, possibly more enhanced during the time of the Troubles rather than within today's peace process. Ward and McGivern point out that "the more ultra-Protestant advocacy of contraception is not posed in terms of women's emancipation but rather stems from a fear of being outbred by feckless Catholics" (68). Ten years after Great Britain Northern Ireland legalized divorce in 1978 (Moore 14). However, the 1967 Abortion Act implemented in Great Britain has still not been extended to Northern Ireland which is the only part of Britain where abortion remains illegal, an issue where both Sinn Féin and Democratic Unionist Party agree on (Prince and Beckford 1). Edgerton reveals that in both communities adequate forms of sex education in schools has actively been refused (62), a fact

that is particularly evident in the portrait of the two teenage girls in *Tea in a China Cup*. This in combination with the 'shame' of being a single mother urges about two thousand women per year to travel to the United Kingdom in order to receive abortions (Edgerton 62).

We would not speak of Northern Ireland if this controversial issue was not related to the Troubles either. In their article published by the end of 2008 Prince and Beckford state that Northern Ireland's politicians do not want to jeopardize the achievements having been made in the peace process by "forcing the amendment through" (2) as the political situation in Northern Ireland has currently deteriorated again. Ten years earlier this was already feared by Coulter in his chapter about fertility regulation in Northern Ireland:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is rather unlikely to persist with a policy such as the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act, which is deemed to be of essentially secondary importance and which may inflame local political sensitivities in a manner which threatens yet further prospect of a durable settlement. The rights of women living in the province will in all probability be sacrificed in the pursuit of the presumed greater good of a resolution to the Northern Ireland problem (113).

3. 5. Feminist Awareness among Women in Northern Ireland

The Troubles enabled women to gain a public voice and to stand up against the aggression of the political conflict in Northern Ireland. Many women, who were wives of prisoners, had to cope with everyday life on their own and were exposed to a double burden when suddenly they became the 'head' of the family. In addition, these circumstances provided women with increased self-confidence and strength. Others, who lost their husbands, children or friends to the violence of the conflict, started to organize help centres offering support for women in need. One of the most famous organizations was "Women for Peace", what is today's "Peace People". This non-sectarian peace movement was founded in 1976 by a Catholic, Mairead Corrigan, and a Protestant, Betty Williams. Their commitment for

providing alternatives to the prevailing violence and organizing peace marches for participants of any confession brought them the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976 (Scanlan 83).

Furthermore, the conflict's effect on women was important in terms of the creation of feminist awareness in Northern Ireland. When the women's movement started to earn its first success throughout English speaking countries also Northern Irish women began to profit from it. Nevertheless, in some working-class areas everyday life was dominated by sectarian conflicts. Feminism seemed to be distant and not tangible for many women, as society was confronted with more serious issues, such as the daily violent riots in the streets of Belfast and Londonderry often resulting in the death of fellow humans (Scanlan 82). This lack of feminist awareness and a vast underrepresentation of women in the political arena of Northern Ireland turned women into participating in a range of activism on a more informal basis (McWilliams, "Struggling" 30). A noteworthy watershed in this regard was the foundation of the Northern Ireland's Women's Rights Association in 1975 in order to bring together women from Protestant and Catholic areas that have common demands and also work in a non-sectarian way. The Women's Rights Movement was concerned with issues such as for instance inequality of pay, rights on divorce, abortion, sexual discrimination or the lack of nursery schools. Right after its establishment the movement introduced a charter for Northern Ireland with seven feminist demands:

- (1) Equal opportunities in education, training and work
- (2) Equal pay for work of equal value
- (3) Equality of legal and social rights
- (4) The right to maternity and child care facilities
- (5) Parity of rights for women in Northern Ireland with women in England
- (6) Improved family planning services
- (7) Recognition for non-working wives and mothers (Edgerton 76).

With its activity and research the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement contributed significantly in revealing feminist issues on a broader scale and highlighting also taboo topics, such as rape and abortion, led to numerous

campaigns and public discussions (Edgerton 76).¹⁰ According to Miller, the history of feminism in Northern Ireland has been shaped by the Troubles which have driven men apart and in a way have brought women together (244). Feminist activists have often refused to belong to a shared tradition or community, although such belonging has been so central within Northern Irish society. Feministically aware women from different religions share a common understanding of the discrimination, inequalities and needs confronting them, which is a remarkable aspect within Northern Ireland's sectarian society.

Unfortunately women-related issues are still repressed on Northern Ireland's political agenda due to a stronger involvement in the current peace process. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that "the opportunities created by the peace process have created other spaces in which women can articulate their needs and become fully-fledged participants in what may prove to be a period of transition in Northern Ireland" (Miller 245). Interestingly there is the tendency that the majority of women in Northern Ireland, who support feminist ideas and the work of the women's movement, somewhat reject to identify themselves as being feminists (Miller 221).¹¹ Christina Reid concurs with this development explicitly stating that she is generally sceptical of labels such as the term 'feminist'. As a result, depending on the main roles and focus in her plays, she has been accused either of being a feminist or of being a sexist (qtd. in Foley 61). Anne Devlin on the other hand, considers herself as being a feminist possibly due to her strongly political background (qtd. in Foley 74).¹²

¹⁰ For a more detailed account of various forms and stages of women's activism in Northern Ireland cf. McWilliams, Monica. "Struggling for Peace and Justice: Reflections on Women's Activism in Northern Ireland." *Irish Women's Voices Past and Present*. Ed. Joan Hoff and Moureen Coulter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 13-39.

¹¹ Miller gives a deeper insight in the support for the women's movement and feminism among Northern Irish women providing a range of useful statistics according to age, religion, location, political affiliation etc.

¹² For a more recent report on feminism in Northern Ireland and its role within the peace process cf. Ward, Margaret. "Times of transition: republican women, feminism and political representation." *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags*. Ed. Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004. 184-201.

3. 6. Women in the Northern Irish Economy

Segregation according to religion is also omnipresent among women in the Northern Irish labour market. Exclusion of Catholics from employment or securing leading positions for Protestants and separation in terms of housing are areas where sectarian division has always been obvious. Until World War II women were mainly present in Northern Ireland's linen industry which was however among the first to regress during the post-war period. The Stormont administration invested in male but not in female occupations and consequently women lost their jobs and their opportunity to combine work, marriage and motherhood, as for some professions marriage-bars and the closure of nurseries were introduced. Those marriage-bars were not abolished until the late 1960s, which explains why in 1971 only 29% of married women were employed (McWilliams "Women in Northern Ireland" 86-87). This development and the oil price shock in the early 1970s concurred with an increased need of public services. Women with higher education entered work as teachers, social workers, lecturers or community workers. Others found jobs in sectors such as gastronomy or cleaning. Thus, general female presence in the total employment increased steadily (Morrissey 104).

Based on the 1981 census, a study by the Fair Employment Agency proved an obvious underprivileged position of Catholics within the Northern Irish labour market (qtd. in Morrissey 105). Although meanwhile there has been overall improvement in this regard, the discrimination of Catholics in the working environment was a central part in the sectarian society at the time of the Northern Irish conflict. This is why sectarian practices, particularly in regard to education and employment, are ironized and most obvious in Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*. Protestant females slightly outnumber Catholic females in manual as well as non-manual occupations. 59% of Catholic females tend to rely on the public sector for employment compared to 49% of Protestants in this sector. Hence, Catholic women tend to be mainly represented in the service sector, as waitresses, cooks or cleaners, or in the health and education sectors, while Protestant women are

more likely to pursue a vocation in the financial sector working with banking, insurance and business services and also in the metal and vehicle industry. Moreover, Catholic women are less likely to be self-employed and represent a considerably lower proportion in management positions. Due to political reasons in Northern Ireland, there has been an increased need for employees in security and protective services, which especially Protestant females have profited from. Only every eighth female is Catholic in this professional sector (Morrissey 106-107).

These facts reveal that Catholic women's work is generally considered as less prestigious and more likely to be poorly paid compared to the work of women with a Protestant background. By 1990 60.9 % of Catholic women earned less than £ 100 per week in comparison to Protestant women with 53.4 % (Sales 152). According to Morrissey, class divisions among women have mostly widened during the time of the Troubles: "For some economic activity has entailed misery and exploitation, for others it has meant opportunity and affluence" (124). Particularly working-class women, the group referred to in both plays examined in this paper, have often had to accept low-paid jobs with only few legal rights (Morrissey 124). Overall, since the beginning of the 1970s the proportional rate of the differential between unemployed Catholics and unemployed Protestants has remained constant, having slightly declined for men and moderately risen for women until 1991 when women from nationalist backgrounds were almost twice as likely to be unemployed as women from unionist communities (Sales 139).

In an early account on the role of women in the Northern Ireland economy Trewsdale supports the claim that Catholic women have been in a disadvantageous position in the labour market only vaguely. He argues that differences in the employment of women in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s "can be attributed to the geographical distribution of the population and to social practice rather than directly to any form of religious discrimination" (101). Thus, he states that the sector in which women were working depended on the geographical location of the respective industry and Catholics, as well as Protestants rather stayed within their own areas. Trewsdale concludes that at the

time of his research the average working female in Northern Ireland was in a low-paid and relatively unskilled or semi-skilled profession, which applied to any women regardless of what religion they belong to (117). However, more recent studies, such as the elaborate work by Davies et. al., frequently stress that Catholic females are definitely confronted with stronger disadvantages than Protestant women, in terms of unemployment, as well as regarding the low status and payment of their work (46-47). Nevertheless, Catholic women are not exclusively at the bottom of the Northern Irish labour market, but have a “disproportionate share of the ‘best’ as well as the ‘worst’ of women’s jobs” (47).

The presence of war was not the only suffering endured by Northern Irish people: Poverty depicted a central problem for people of both religious communities in Northern Irish society (Ward and McGivern 67). According to a survey by Evason, 30.4 % of Northern Irish families in 1978 had to live below the poverty line (*Family Poverty* 9). By referring to a number of 80,000 Belfast “widows, divorcees, single parents and wives of prisoners”, who still had to face poverty in the early 1990s, Shannon points out that particularly women suffer from this kind of misery (“Women in Northern Ireland” 251). Life close to the poverty level is also an issue that is indicated in *Tea in a China Cup* where Beth’s mother cannot afford the life and education for her daughter she wished for. What becomes apparent in the play is that it is a prejudice that Protestants would live in a better economic situation than Catholics. On the contrary, people of both communities are affected and occasionally even support each other, as it is the case in *Tea in a China Cup*. This is also supported by Shannon who states that there is some tendency of women to work for common ground regardless of political differences and particularly when it comes to socio-political questions. “Neither of the two flags can you fry up in the pan for breakfast” (qtd. in Shannon, “Women in Northern Ireland” 251) is a slogan expressing women’s frustration about Northern Irish party politics. A Protestant interviewee of Fairweather et. al. expresses how the Troubles affected her in daily life; a view that numerous other women in Northern Ireland possibly have shared throughout the Troubles:

[...] I've spoke to Catholic women in the bus going to Long Kesh and I've said this many a time, we're all in the same boat and we're going to have to come together. But politics is just a lot of nonsense – I believe God knows what's best and God is the only one can finish the whole thing off" (qtd. in Fairweather, McDonough and McFadyean 329).

4. Contemporary Northern Irish Women Drama – Breaking the Theatre’s Glass Ceiling?

I remember being at a noisy party in Australia, and an acquaintance asking what I was working on. When I responded “Irish women’s writing,” he looked surprised and said, “I didn’t think they had any.” It turned out that, in the noise, he thought I had said “Irish women’s rights” but ultimately decided that the same answer applied in both cases.¹³

Ireland has a number of acknowledged, successful and well promoted male playwrights, a circumstance that is not that prominent in the female sphere of Irish theatre. Nevertheless, also women have shaped Ireland’s theatre scene by writing, performing and in several other ways (Trotter, “Translating Women” 164). With her above quoted ‘pun’ Rebecca Pelan, director of the Women’s Studies Centre at the National University of Ireland, might amuse, but also conveys to a certain extent a discomfoting truth. Women in Irish drama and in Irish writing in general, have always had to work in the shadow of more influential and publicly recognized male writers. However, what might not be apparent at first glance is the fact that women have been fundamental string pullers with regard to the development of Irish theatre both in the south and in the north of the island. Apart from an insight in parts of the Irish and Northern Irish general theatre landscape, this chapter aims at a brief outline of women’s involvement in the establishment of Irish theatre in the early 20th century. It will then have a particular focus on the 1980s when the Troubles in Northern Ireland were at its peak. By then female dramatists had started to portray women’s lives in the reality of political violence, paramilitary involvement and domestic duty until they have finally achieved the more prominent

¹³ Pelan, Rebecca. *Two Irelands: Literary Feminisms North and South*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005, xiii.

position women now occupy in the present Northern Irish theatre institutions, though still not as established as men's.

4. 1. Women Shaping the Foundation of an Irish National Theatre

Reflecting on the presence of women in contemporary Ulster theatre the development of the early Irish dramatic movement by the end of the 19th century, which was deliberately a political one, has to be considered. It consisted of artists and activists who aimed at using the stage for depicting Ireland independent from British hegemony. Common Irish stereotypes in theatres ought to be prevented by illustrating a positive image of Ireland and its people, history and cultural heritage by including Irish language and symbolism. However, the main aim of setting up an Irish theatre was to create it in Ireland by and for Irish people and to prove that Irish theatre culture was not dependent on British influence. By staging predominantly nationalist issues William Butler Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory and Edward Martyn, even though they did not belong to a particular nationalist group, founded the Irish Literary Theatre, forerunner of today's Abbey Theatre, in 1897 (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 13-17). According to Trotter, "the first years of the Irish Literary Theatre were not particularly revolutionary, but with it the interest in nationalist performance grew, calling specifically for Irish dramatists to write indigenous plays in the modernist vein" (19).

For the purpose of this paper it is worth noting that the foundation of Ireland's national theatre was considerably marked by the influence of women. Considering women's situation in Ireland at the turn of the 20th century and the restrictions that were to follow in De Valera's constitution in 1937 regarding divorce, contraception and women's status in general, women were strikingly important in early Irish theatre (Wilmer, 353). One of the most prominent female key figures in the history of Irish theatre was Lady Augusta Isabella Persse Gregory. For a Protestant Anglo-Irish it was rather unusual that she was intensely concerned with Irish culture and nationalism. As an active traveller throughout Europe she got to know

many modernist thinkers, was familiar with the Irish speaking areas of the country and, therefore, also fully capable of speaking Gaelic. Moreover, she was particularly interested in Irish folktales and stories which she translated for a broader readership (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 17). According to Wilmer, Lady Gregory was as significant in setting up the first Irish national theatre as William Butler Yeats:

She helped [...] coordinating its policy, directing numerous plays, writing many successful pieces, ghost-writing parts of Yeats's most popular plays [...], selecting plays, encouraging the talent of new writers, fighting for the right to stage controversial material, and overseeing the management of the company for thirty years (354).

By 1902 Yeats and Gregory had realized that an Irish national theatre could only progress with its own trained Irish actors, which is why they started to consult William Fay, a director, and his brother Frank Fay, a critic. In the same year William Fay organized the Irish National Dramatic Company which was the first to perform Yeats's famous play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* written in cooperation with Lady Gregory. *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is particularly significant regarding the depiction of Ireland as a female figure that has to be defended against British suppression. Rural Ireland with its particular devotion to the family life, folk culture and to the nation itself is foregrounded in the play. (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 21-22). With regard to female characters in Irish theatre Trotter critically remarks that

the nationalist dramatic tradition was founded on the premise that this tradition would seek to rid the theatre of the stage Irishman, but far less attention was paid to rewriting the long-suffering mother figure [such as in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*]. Irish female characters have embodied the nation, the land, the desired or responsibilities of male characters, but rarely have they been authentic, complex, autonomous women ("Translating Women" 164).

A striking aspect at that premiere in 1902 was the participation of actors with many renowned political activists among them. For those actors the task of acting became both political and artistic work (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 22-23). One

of them was another woman who contributed in the early development of Irish theatre: Maud Gonne, muse of William Butler Yeats and the first actress to perform *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. With her sublime performances and her commitment as a public activist for the nationalist issue of Ireland she went down in Irish theatre history and gained popularity among the Irish nationalist community. Particularly in an age when there was no considerable space for women in the public sphere, Maud Gonne's radical, public activism was remarkable (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 23).

Soon after initial successes the Irish dramatic movement's work developed from the creation of nationalist performances to the organization of an actual national theatre. Under the 'artistic leadership' of Yeats, Gregory and the dramatist J. M. Synge, a group of actors, writers and theatre supporters joined the Irish National Theatre Society (INTS). To finally open what is today's Abbey Theatre the INTS required financial support, which was provided by a further central female contributor in setting up the Irish national theatre. Annie Horniman, costume designer of Yeats's plays and heir to an influential British tea company, was not an enthusiastic supporter of Irish nationalism, yet helped to provide a suitable and permanent venue for the INTS players by covering the expenses for the subsequent years. With her financial means a building in central Dublin became finally accessible as the Abbey theatre, the National Theatre of Ireland (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 24-29).

Within the first twenty years of the Abbey's existence considerably more plays by women dramatists entered the stage than by the end of the 20th century. In 1907 almost two thirds of the new plays at the Abbey were written or co-written by female writers. Although it has to be acknowledged that all, except one play, were written by Lady Gregory and several other successful women dramatists had later disappeared from the scene. Until 1930 Lady Gregory's work at the Abbey had acted as an inspiration and encouragement for women to engage in writing drama and set an emancipated example for womankind in general at the turn of the 20th century (Wilmer 355-360).

4. 2. Women and the Theatre in the North

The political differences between Ireland's north and south were mirrored by the aims of early Northern Irish theatre. While the Abbey Theatre's goal was to set up a nationalist establishment counteracting the British image of stereotypical Irish people, the Ulster Literary Theatre, founded in 1902 in Belfast, was meant to establish "a Northern version of Yeats's Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin" (Murray 189). However, although it had much in common with the Abbey Theatre, it also aimed at displaying independence from it by importing many theatre productions from London. As Pilkington remarks:

[...] overall professional theatre in Northern Ireland maintained an unwritten policy of avoiding plays that dealt directly with nationalist and republican politics. If they existed, drama dealing with issues such as religious discrimination or sectarian violence was excluded in Northern Ireland (166).

Also in the North women contributed to the foundation of theatre, such as Mary O'Malley who, in collaboration with her husband, set up the Lyric Players Theatre in Belfast in 1951 producing poetic drama that was inspired by Yeats's spirit at the Abbey. It developed into a professional establishment in 1969 and was Northern Ireland's leading theatre during the 1970s. The Lyric was brought into being during the problematic period of the imminent 'pre-Troubles era' and despite increasing violence and a consequently decreasing audience, the theatre continued its production in Belfast; also due to governmental subventions (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 145). The Lyric Theatre is especially noteworthy for the current paper, as here Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* was first produced. With regard to the political issues in Northern Ireland the Lyric's main concern in the 1950s was to provide a cultural project for both Catholics and Protestants. On the one hand, it stressed the common Irish cultural heritage both communities share. On the other hand, it did not aim at giving the impression to be pro-nationalist, neither at creating antagonism against Protestants or the Northern Ireland state in general. Therefore, the Lyric attempted to avoid political plays by following a more poetic and aesthetic line. Nevertheless, this politically neutral course also functioned as a

strategy against Stormont's control and influence, which intensified Unionist suspicions about the Lyric being a potential "threat to Northern Ireland's cultural integrity" (Pilkington 186-188).

With the beginning of the Troubles however, drama dealing with sectarian violence, the political issues of the time and Irish identity increasingly entered not only the Lyric's stage, but also the Abbey Theatre in the Republic of Ireland. As Trotter comments: "From the mid 1970s, an explosion of new forms of staging and writing began to appear, many of which sought to re-evaluate the historical narratives that affirmed particular beliefs about Irish culture and identity" (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 148). In the early 1980s a dynamic, political theatre appeared in Ireland and with it also women dramatists and actors gained more space on the Irish theatre scene. In this regard, Northern Ireland appears to have provided greater opportunities for women, as during to the 1980s and up to the 1990s Irish theatre in the Republic had seemingly developed to a more conservative institution than at the beginning of the century. Wilmer points out that between 1984 and 1989 only one play written by a woman was staged on the Abbey's main stage whilst Dublin's Gate Theatre did not even produce a single play by a woman playwright (357). The fact that there are fewer female playwrights than male is still prevailing today and many Irish women dramatists are not supported sufficiently and in an equitable way. By contrast, Northern Irish female dramatists and feminist theatre groups have gained more subsidies and public awareness (Wilmer 357). Particularly throughout the 1980s, the period when Christina Reid's and Anne Devlin's writing careers flourished, increasingly progressive feminist politics influenced drama in Northern Ireland (Pelan 85).

4. 2. 1. Gendered Troubles in Northern Ireland's Theatre

Although in the political discourse of Northern Ireland there has always been a greater difficulty to address women's lives, politics and their cultural contributions separately than in the Republic of Ireland, female playwrights received greater

attention in the North throughout the 1980s. In the Republic women were rather involved in the administrative areas of theatres (Pelan 52, 85). In 1980 one of Ireland's most prominent and successful theatre companies, the Field Day Theatre Company, was founded in Derry by playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea. They wanted to establish "a theatre experience for local Irish audiences, rather than a production in a major theatre space hoping to catch the eye of producers from London or New York" (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 159). Furthermore, the company aimed at developing alternative strategies in order to stage aspects of Irish identity and history in a comprehensible way (ibid. 165). Additionally to the annual production of a play the Field Day Theatre Company started to publish pamphlets on political and cultural subjects, such as the correlation of literature and colonialism with particular focus on Ireland's crucial relationship to England. One of its most renowned and influential works is *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* which is worth mentioning in the current paper as its inclusion of only a few women writers caused controversy among many critics (Murray 208). Therefore, an additional and remarkably elaborate volume about Irish women's writing was published in 1992 by which another crucial theatre company, having operated simultaneously to the Field Day, finally received broader appreciation: The Charabanc Theatre Company (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 164-165).

As the repression and marginalisation of women regarding occupational opportunities in society were also reflected in Northern Ireland's theatre industry, Northern Irish women increasingly tried to change the theatre world at that time (Maguire 102). Also McDonough argues that the position of women in the theatre and the fact that plays by and about women rarely find the way to the stage can be transformed to women's lives in society:

The theatre is a public realm where a people perform themselves to themselves, a part of cultural and national self-presentation; erasing the complexity of women's lives from this arena is, therefore tantamount to erasing them from public life. In fact, the theatre in many ways reflects how women's stories are often erased elsewhere in the public arena. (181)

The foundation of the Charabanc in 1983, Belfast's leading women's theatre group operating until 1995, introduced a new way of representing women's issues, such as motherhood, divorce, domestic violence and its position in the Northern Irish conflict on stage and provided a platform for creating drama by and for members of a community. In this case they particularly created theatre for and about working class women, similar to Reid's and Devlin's plays. This working class focus, according to Sullivan, can be ascribed to the fact that the Charabanc was founded out of economic disadvantage (139-142). It was set up by five 'desperate' actresses, Marie Jones, Eleanor Methven, Maureen McAuley, Carol Scanlan and Brenda Winter, who were in the need of employment opportunities and who refused to accept women's existing theatre roles as "wives, mothers or the background for some guy on stage" (qtd. in Foley 36). Funded by the Northern Irish Arts Council those women were able to use historical research and ethnography in order to depict and explore women's status and experiences in contemporary Northern Irish society. They wrote and performed plays about women in their local community and managed to not only present their work in local theatres, but also abroad (Trotter, "Translating Women" 164, Wilmer 358). Trotter stresses that those writers "adopted a feminist strategy by placing female characters and their stories in the subject position of the drama, reclaiming an aspect of the Irish experience - women's - which has been alternately idealized and ignored in the Irish mainstream tradition" ("Translating Women" 164). The Charabanc's work received international approval, though the majority of its plays have remained unpublished (Sullivan 138). In August 1995 the company was closed down, whereas its members have continued to participate in other feminist theatre projects.

According to Pelan, the Charabanc Theatre Company as well as Anne Devlin and Christina Reid's works have contributed most substantially to restructure Northern Irish women's drama by the end of the 20th century (86). They managed to confront the audience with a new subject, the 'real Irish women', and to make an attempt in breaking out of male-dominated practices in Irish theatre. Their clear aim was to critically question heterogeneous norms and traditions founded and

maintained in the Abbey Theatre by addressing women's reality and extending ways of performance by introducing alternative forms. Nevertheless, a crucial issue in the Irish theatre world is the fact that the average audience is used to being confronted with and to understanding male discourse rather than feminist forms of theatre. Drama by female playwrights including female characters might be adversely regarded as the theatrical version of 'chick flicks', films mainly produced for a female audience. Nonetheless, this can only be prevented by introducing a broader audience to a more women-centred, alternative drama; a risk that most theatres seem to be unwilling to take. Therefore, theatre by and for women remains at the margin, which is why some playwrights even avoid using the term "feminist" or "feminine" in descriptions of their work in order to prevent disapproval (Trotter, "Translating Women" 164-165). Pelan describes recent developments in Northern Irish women's drama as 'stagnation' in terms of progressive feminist theatre:

[...] with the demise of the Charabanc in 1995, and a shift of interest of the writers northern women's drama is no longer particularly evident and no longer visibly connected to anything resembling a feminist cultural practise – possibly again precisely as a direct result of its extraordinary localized culture (86).

Maguire argues that today admittedly some individual women achieved remarkable prominence in Northern Irish theatre, which is now a noteworthy accomplishment compared to the late 1990s (102). In other words, meanwhile women's drama might have become more popular. Nevertheless, it is still "ghettoized" and regarded as theatre exclusively designed for a female audience. Masculine hegemony in the Irish theatre landscape and its male dominated discourse is still not sufficiently challenged and critically scrutinized (Maguire 102). Being questioned by Enrica Cerquoni about women's presence and also underrepresentation in Irish theatre, Anne Devlin responds:

[...] I am thinking of Marie Jones and Christina Reid and myself and maybe I am completely deaf here, but I cannot hear who the other women dramatists are in the North for women in theatre: I mean the theatre has

not supported them. [...] One possible reason for me is that theatre critics are mostly men and so are the people running the theatres (qtd. in Cerquoni 120).¹⁴

4. 2. 2. Anne Devlin and Christina Reid - The Authors' Background

Like a number of women dramatists Christina Reid and Anne Devlin emerged as successful writers in the 1980s, a time when the Northern Irish conflict was still a central problem and only initial attempts were made towards an agreement. With their plays these authors gave Catholic as well as Protestant women of that violent and politically tumultuous period a voice. Prior to the analysis of the plays, the authors' biographies and careers ought to contribute to a better understanding of their work and their motives for writing.

Anne Devlin

Anne Devlin was born in 1951 in West Belfast and grew up in a Catholic family. Her father, the prominent Northern Irish socialist politician Paddy Devlin, very much influenced her intellectual way of thinking and attitude and raised her to a "working class socialist" (Devlin qtd. in Foley 72-72). By the age of twelve she moved with her family to Andersonstown, which is the setting in *Ourselves Alone* (Doyle 11). Paddy Devlin had a Nationalist background but soon rejected the violence of the Republican movement (BBC News 15 August 1999). Thus, he was the founder of the Social Democratic Labour Party. The politician supported his daughter's penchant for writing, whereas her mother wanted her to start a career as an actress: "When I do a reading or write for the theatre, I reconcile my parents' tug of war" (Devlin qtd. in Foley 72). Anne Devlin was involved in the Civil Rights Movement and their organized marches in the late 1960s (Doyle 11) and her

¹⁴ For a more detailed account of women in Irish theatre cf. Foley, Imelda. *The Girls in the Big Picture: Gender in Contemporary Ulster Theatre*. Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2002 and Shira, Melissa. *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

works may have certainly been influenced by her and her father's political background. However, she clearly points out that she is not writing history or her own biography. As MacGurk declares, Devlin does not want to make the public meaning of certain historical events her private meaning, but rather to integrate them into her private meaning (53). Devlin, graduate of English at the University of Colerine and mother of a son, had lived in England since 1984 and moved back to Belfast in 2007 (Doyle 11).¹⁵ Frieda's character in *Ourselves Alone* and her desire to 'escape' to England reveals to a certain extent Devlin's own emigration to England. On the whole, Devlin states that all three women in the play represent three paths at different stages in her own life (McGurk 58).

Her two most famous works are *Ourselves Alone*, which was also her stage debut in 1985, and her television script *Naming the Names*, first broadcasted on BBC television in 1987. In 1982 she started her writing career working on prose, television scripts and radio drama before devoting herself to the theatre. That year she won her first award, the Hennessy Literary Award, for her short story *Passages* which was soon after adapted for BBC-2 Television as *A Woman Calling*. Her Play *The Long March* was the first to deal with the Troubles in Northern Ireland. In 1984 she received the Samuel Beckett Award and for *Ourselves Alone* she was honoured by the Susan Blackburn Prize and the George Devine Award in 1985 (Anderson 93, Weekes 100-101). Interestingly in all her works she has focused on Northern Ireland apart from one script, the BBC version of D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (Anderson 94).

Christina Reid

Christina Reid was born in 1942 in Belfast into a Protestant working class family (Delgado vii). *Tea in a China Cup* has an autobiographical background, and thus reveals to a certain extent Reid's own family experiences in a country that was marked by the conflict between Protestants and Catholics. The setting of *Tea in a*

¹⁵ <http://www.bookrags.com/biography/anne-devlin-dlb/4.html> 10 January 2010

China Cup is the area around Belfast where also Reid grew up; a world in which women's lives are centred on their children and the home. In an interview Reid states that her own mother and grandmother were great, imaginative story tellers (qtd. in Foley 58), which might have been the inspiration for letting the main character Beth step out in front of the audience in order to act as a 'story teller'; as the narrator in the play. The family she grew into resembles the characters in *Tea in a China Cup* almost one-to-one: Reid's mother worked as a waitress to increase the family income while her father worked at the docks and was a gambler similar to Beth's father in *Tea in a China Cup*. Being a member of the Orange Order and constantly honouring the grandfather who 'bravely fought for Britain' in World War I has always been a central theme in her childhood and is also addressed in the play (Doyle 24).

Already at the age of nine Reid discovered her passion for writing through the imaginative stories she used to write in her diary (Doyle 24). In 1980, the time when she began her studies in English, Sociology and Russian Studies at Queen's University Belfast, she won The UTV Drama Award for her play *Did You Hear the One About the Irishman...?*. Three years later she also won the Thames Television Award for *Tea in a China Cup* and became a writer-in-residence at the Lyric Theatre, which is why she quit her studies in order to fully concentrate on writing for the theatre and also for radio and television. In addition, for *The Belle of the Belfast City*, first staged in 1989, she was awarded the George Devine Award (Delgado vii).¹⁶ In her works Reid, similar to Anne Devlin, raises issues of women's identity and self-definition and the constant tension among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (Delgado x). Significant in Reid's plays is the fact that her personal memories and family background have played a more important role in her writing than it might have in Devlin's works, which is why they tend to have a more autobiographical nature.

¹⁶ <<http://www.irishplayography.com/search/person.asp?PersonID=3174>> 10 January 2010

5. Literary Analysis

*A play is a slice of life put onstage with art*¹⁷

5. 1. Plot Summaries

5. 1. 1. Anne Devlin: *Ourselves Alone*

Ourselves Alone, a play in two acts, was first staged in 1985 at the Liverpool Playhouse Studio and in the Royal Court Theatre in London. The play is set in the aftermath of the early 1980s hunger strikes in Andersonstown, a suburb of Belfast. The main settings are Donna's house and the club where the Republican community regularly meets, but also Dublin and South Belfast.¹⁸

The title 'Ourselves Alone' has a political connotation since it refers to the translation of the Irish 'Sinn Féin', the Irish Nationalist Party connected to the IRA, which literally translated means 'we ourselves' (Cerquoni, "Women in Rooms" 164). In the play this title conveys an ambiguous meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the Nationalist family background. On the other hand, it addresses women's isolated position adopted in the play. What the female protagonists in *Ourselves Alone* have in common is that they are all 'left alone' by men. In the violent environment marked by the Troubles each of the three main female characters, Josie, Frieda and Donna, is in its own way 'doomed' to function in this highly political and patriarchal society. Although each of them has to face female suppression individually, eventually the three women are in the same boat. Among each other they function as a collective community, particularly when they are alone in the domestic surrounding of Donna's house. Thus, Devlin especially

¹⁷ Jean Jullien qtd. in Turney, Wayne S. "Notes on Naturalism in Theatre".
<<http://www.wayneturney.20m.com/naturalism.htm>> 04 March 2010.

¹⁸ Introductory information in *Ourselves Alone*, 11.

meets the title of her play by partly portraying the women in situations being 'alone' and entirely 'themselves' and where they can plunge into moments of light-heartedness.

Nevertheless, Josie, Frieda and Donna differ significantly in their attitude and values. Josie, "the serious voice", as Cerquoni defines her ("Women in Rooms" 164), is politically devoted and outwardly the strong and stable type among the women, whereas inwardly she is just as torn as Frieda and Donna. She is involved in the Republican movement acting as a courier and interrogator for the IRA and helping to secretly store weapons. In reality Josie is not convinced of the 'Irish Nationalist dream', the "thirty-two-county Workers Republic" (*Ourselves* 45). Yet she considers the attempt to achieve a united Ireland as her lifelong 'mission', otherwise she would find the Republican population's lives simply "meaningless" (*Ourselves* 46). Her long lasting and meanwhile unfulfilled affair with the married leader of the Provisional IRA, Cathal O'Donnell, contributes considerably to her deep loyalty to the Republican movement. This loyalty is also enhanced by her profound relationship to her father Malachy, who is the local commander of the Provisionals. In the first act of the play Malachy brings in Joe Conran, an Englishman who wants to become an IRA recruit, which, given his military background in the British Army, is considerably suspect. Josie has got the task to question him in order to find out whether he can be trusted and she decides that he is trustworthy.

Josie and Liam's sister Frieda, a hairdresser, has only one serious concern, namely to become a famous singer. Her dream is to set up a career independently from the movement's club. Thus, she rejects any political activity, constantly questions the situation critically and is therefore repudiated by her strict father. Frieda's reluctance towards the Republican's violence is mirrored in her relationship to the Protestant pacifist and member of the Worker's Party John McDermot, who is obviously not appreciated among the male members of Frieda's family. Frieda does not sincerely support the Republican movement's principles, yet struggles to free herself from its ideals. This insecurity becomes apparent in

Frieda's songs, which are about Republican volunteers and mourn the hunger striker Bobby Sands, whereas her real concern is writing her own songs and lyrics.

The third female protagonist in *Ourselves Alone* is Liam's common-law wife Donna, who is permanently situated in the domestic sphere representing the dutiful wife waiting for imprisoned Liam, while caring for their common two-year-old daughter. For him she gave up her first marriage and left behind her son hoping to find the true love in Liam. Donna provides her house as a safe place for fleeing IRA recruits or secret IRA meetings being constantly confronted with raids by the British Army. She successfully uses her position as the lonely mother at home for protection against troops. However, Donna is driven by her subconscious anxiety about Liam's aggression, which burdens her physically as well as mentally. She has to face health problems and above all suffers from nightmares and hallucinations, which seem to improve when Liam is imprisoned and not with her.

The interview with Conran becomes Josie's fate and she falls in love with him. When Josie gets pregnant Conran ruthlessly reveals that he has never wanted a child, but promises to stick to her. However, finally it turns out that, as a British secret agent, he betrayed an IRA arms shipment by warning the Irish security police. As a consequence, several members of the movement, including O'Donnell, are arrested. The reaction of Liam, who is also an active IRA member having been interned several times, is yet another proof of the patriarchal and highly politically affected structures in the family: he wants Josie to have an abortion or otherwise would use force on her. Although one might expect that nationalist Malachy would support Liam in this issue, he sticks with his daughter and wants her and the child to live with him. Eventually Josie is again bound to her father's authority and forced to live a life according to his political principles. Also Donna's relationship fails due to Liam's overwhelming jealousy and she starts a liaison with Danny, a more moderate member of the movement and seemingly more respectful than Liam. Nevertheless, Donna cannot free herself from her constricting past either and still bears hope that Liam would return. After her equally failed relationship to McDermot, Frieda finally realizes that she would

never be content with a life in Northern Ireland and decides to move to England hoping to find her fulfilment.

All three women are supposed to share their men's beliefs or are more or less forced to do so by intimidation and violence used against them. Yet, when they are alone and among each other the women become "surrogate revolutionaries" (Doyle 19). Then they dare to do what is inappropriate for women in their community, such as smoking and drinking, and relieve themselves from their real opinions and sorrows. Nevertheless, in the end it is solely Frieda who actually manages to break away from the misogynist environment that is restricting her in her development as an artist and in the search for the true love.

5. 1. 2. Christina Reid: *Tea in a China Cup*

Tea in a China Cup Reid, likewise a play in two acts, was first staged in 1983 at the Lyric Players Theatre in Belfast. The play portrays the experiences of three different generations of women in a Protestant working-class family in Belfast: Beth, her mother Sarah and her grandmother. The values and traditions upheld in this devoted Protestant family in various periods of time are perceived differently by these three generations and serve as the basis for Reid's play. The plot is set in a time span of over thirty years between 1939, at the beginning of World War II, and 1972, presumably only a few months after the Bloody Sunday in Derry. It consists of the stories of three generations of one family which are told by the narrator Beth in a series of flashbacks. Taking care of her mother, who is facing her death, leads Beth to talk about her own life and the environment that shaped her character. The particularity about these flashbacks is that the story told by the narrator is not entirely based on her own memories, but also on the stories told by her family members (Roche 230): "I couldn't possibly remember it, I was only an infant, but I've heard that story and all the other family stories so often that I can remember and see clearly things that happened even before I was born. . . ." (*Tea* 10).

The play is set in a historical context, whereas Reid specialises on the political situation in Northern Ireland from a different perspective than Anne Devlin does (Grant qtd. in O'Dwyer 240). She focuses more on the domestic and social situation in a family at that time; on womanhood and the personalities within this troubled society. Reid herself states that she is not satisfied with depicting Ireland through its violence and internal problems while forgetting to regard the people themselves involved (qtd. in Roll-Hansen 389-390). Thus, in *Tea in a China Cup* the unpleasant reality of the Troubles seems to be suppressed by “the memory of the heroes in the First and Second World Wars and the celebration of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690” (Doyle 30). Beth’s grandfather, father, as well as her brother have served in wars and constantly memorizing and praising their bravery to have fought for ‘King and Country’ have always played an exceptionally central role in her family. The recurrent patriotic theme of the Orange Parade every year in July accompanies almost every scene in the play. For Beth’s ill mother Sarah, who has only a little time left in her life, listening to the Orange Band’s rehearsals and seeing the Orange Order’s parade is filling her with pride and, paradoxically, this seems to make her forget the realities of war (Doyle 31): the fact that her father was injured in World War I, that she lost her brother in World War II and that her son, currently based in Cyprus, is not necessarily in a safe position either.

Reid includes aspects of the Troubles by depicting its social impact rather than active political and paramilitary involvement. *Tea in a China Cup* conveys the difficulties this sectarian society is confronted with in everyday life, such as segregated graveyards, a divided education system, a difficult economic situation and resulting discrimination and prejudices among the two communities. Beth’s deep friendship to the same-aged Catholic Theresa and the fact that their families are equally confronted with economic problems are manifestations of this unjustified and arbitrary rivalry between Catholics and Protestants. Theresa’s superior education does not contribute to better professional perspectives than Beth’s, as sectarian discrimination limits employment opportunities for Catholics. We learn that due to this unpromising future, Theresa left Belfast at the age of

eighteen in order to live a more independent life in London. Beth and Theresa were raised in an equally conservative manner so that the peculiarities of growing-up remain a mystery for the two children. In order to contrast with the 'filthy Catholics', Beth was raised to be a faithful Protestant, constantly trying not to show weakness or poverty in public and, above all, owning a 'decent' china tea set, which seems to be the only luxury one can allow oneself. This and similar symbols and rituals have a crucial significance in loyal Protestant families and are particularly present in *Tea in a China Cup*, which is also revealed in the title of the play.

Moreover, the aspect of the isolated female community, where women stick together as a strong unit while waiting for their men, is also apparent in the play. Nevertheless, apart from addressing their heroic participation in wars, men are kept in the background. Yet, this does not imply that the women in *Tea in a China Cup* are depicted in a more emancipated position having more opportunities for self-realization in society. On the contrary, just like all the women in her family, Beth could never truly be herself. She has always been devoted either to her strictly Protestant family and the values her mother, grandmother and great aunt imposed on her or later to her professionally successful, but constantly occupied husband. By the time she is in her thirties Beth has realized her desire to escape from her current situation in order to, for once, 'be herself'. Her mother's death and her divorce go hand in hand by the end of the play and, as tragic as these incidents may seem, Beth is finally able to take a step towards her personal freedom and fulfilment.

5. 2. Northern Irish Women's Position within their Communities as Reflected in the Plays

The authors of *Ourselves Alone* and *Tea in a China Cup* use theatrical naturalism¹⁹ in order to realistically portray the roles allocated to Catholic and Protestant women within the home, but also in a public sphere that is marked by war and terrorism. In both plays women's desires and individual identities are undermined in a society based on a male-centred value system. Divided into various forms of female suppression evident in the plays, the following discussion aims at a critical analysis of this patriarchal society and the consequences it bears for the female protagonists. By means of the previously stated account of the Troubles' history and women's position in Northern Ireland, the extent to which both authors relied on realistic themes in their works shall become evident and contribute to a more comprehensive interpretation.

5. 2. 1. Male vs. Female Duties

In *Ourselves Alone* the boundaries between women's domestic and public duties coincide, as there is a manifold set of female characters: the loyal Republican Josie, who finally surrenders motherhood, the submissive housewife and mother Donna and the rebellious non-political Frieda. Josie's role as a participant in paramilitary activities is based on deep Republican loyalty in a world set up by male authority. While her position is unusually active for a woman in the IRA, other women have to carry out more subtle tasks, such as Donna, who offers her house for secret meetings or storing weapons. Another common contribution made by women referred to in both plays is banging the bin lids in the streets whenever

¹⁹ Naturalistic drama is theatre "which seeks to mirror life with the utmost fidelity. It became established and popular late in the 19th century stemming from the naturalism of Zola and his followers, and going beyond realism of Ibsen [...]. There was a sustained effort to reproduce everyday speech as exactly as possible, and more emphasis was placed on surface verisimilitude [...]" (Cuddon 175-176).

British soldiers are approaching. That female presence in the IRA is not necessarily the norm, is revealed by Frieda. She is sent home from the movement's club as "[she] was the only woman in the room" (*Ourselves* 18) where a meeting was about to start. Yet, Donna is surprised that Josie has not attended the meeting, although being deeply involved in the movement. However, the tasks Josie has been carrying out for years illustrate typical women's duties in the IRA and meanwhile she does not seem fully convinced anymore about her involvement:

JOSIE. [*to JOE*] I make messages between the commanders, move the stuff from one place to another, or people. I operate at nights mostly, which is why I was offering you my bed. I'm hardly ever in it.

[...]

JOE. You must be very brave.

JOSIE. I am not brave. I just began doing this before I had to think of the consequences. I think I'm more scared than I was ten years ago. But I'm getting better at smiling at soldiers. (*Ourselves* 30-31)

Josie's ambition for becoming an active IRA member was seemingly not established due to her personal aspiration for paramilitary terrorism, but rather as a result of her deep feelings for the married Cathal O'Donnell, an IRA leader (Foley 79). This becomes apparent when Donna realizes the enormous impact O'Donnell has had on Josie. She criticizes his radical political attitude that is now voiced by Josie and regrets that she got to know about their affair:

DONNA. [...] They told him when they blew up the police station near the cemetery that morning that some of our people might get hurt as well. And he asked – how many?

JOSIE. You don't know what you're talking about. Our force is defensive!

DONNA. I'm looking at you but it's him who's talking. I wish I didn't know any of this. I wish I hadn't walked into the room that night and seen you both. I wish you hadn't left the door open. (*Ourselves* 16)

Teaching Josie how to build barricades and planting bombs, O'Donnell became her political role model as well as her passionate lover, which makes her ideology appear as "a confusion of the sexual and political" (Foley 79). By describing her

intimate fantasies to Donna, Josie reveals her deep loyalty to O'Donnell and subconsciously admits that he strongly influenced her and also her political position. In her imagination sexual action seems to become the incarnation of fighting for a common goal with her as a "man" personifying the "warrior lover", an illustration similar to the real life in troubled Northern Ireland:

JOSIE. Sometimes when we make love I pretend I'm somebody else.

DONNA: Who?

JOSIE. Not someone I know. Someone I make up – from another country. Sometimes I'm not even a woman. Sometimes I'm a man – his warrior lover, fighting side by side to the death. (*Ourselves* 17)

Josie's talks to Conran turn out to become revelations of Josie's ambivalent motivation for participating in the movement. On the one hand, Josie acted as the courageous recruit trying to match men's abilities in the IRA when she unsuccessfully planted a bomb:

JOSIE. I was fed up being a courier. . . They used women as messengers then. I wanted to show them I could take the same risks as a man. So I planned it, stole the car, and left it outside the law courts. I'm glad it didn't go off. (*Ourselves* 63)

On the other hand, through her feeling of relief about the defective bomb Josie admits her fear of the consequences of such an attack. She states that she has "lost the killing instinct" and meanwhile even thinks that "the crushing of a foetus is a tragedy" (*Ourselves* 63). Thus, we learn that in fact Josie struggles to convey the image of the strong and reckless terrorist, which is affected by her longing for being an ordinary loving woman and mother. Particularly when she is pregnant with Conran's child, she refuses to carry out any more assignments ordered by the IRA stating that she does not want to lead her mother's life which was dominated by fundamental Republicanism (*Ourselves* 77). Moreover, earlier in her life Josie's Nationalist ideology was not entirely politically motivated either, but rather out of personal envy. Josie reveals to Conran that as a teenager she used to travel to the south of Ireland, not to visit the regions and its shops there, but to participate in the

annual Wolfe Tone Commemorations²⁰. She used to envy teenage friends who travelled to Dublin only for fancy shopping reasons, whereas she spent her time there without money and returning in a pig lorry. From then on her motivation for a united Ireland became anti-materialist or rather, as Joe claims, a result of materialist envy:

JOSIE. [...] All day the smell of pig feed stayed with me . . . From then on I stopped wanting only British withdrawal – to unite Ireland for the shoppers and the shopkeepers of Belfast and Dublin. I became a revolutionary. You see it wasn't the presence of the British that made me feel unclean that morning – it was the presence of money – Irish money as much as English money. (*Ourselves* 45)

As Foley remarks, “the credibility of her politics is interrogated by her willingness to accept the materials she envied as a teenager and which are now provided by Conran – perfume and weekends in Dublin” (80). Still earlier in her life, as an infant, her life was already dominated by powerful male authorities that paved her future ‘career’ as a terrorist (Greenhalgh 167). Josie melancholically would like to turn back the time, as she thinks even in her infancy some “dark figure”, a male force, already contributed to what she is today:

JOSIE. [...] I wish I could go back. Back then. . . somehow rid myself of that dark figure which hovered about the edge of my cot – priest or police I can't tell – but the light is so dim in my memory – most of the room is in shadow – and it gets dimmer all the time. [...] I'm trying to tell you why – about the first few moments when I took the wrong way. (*Ourselves* 78)

‘Invisible’ aunt Cora, Malachy's sister, is another embodiment of female Republican duty. She is used as a representative of Republican propaganda: an

²⁰ Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798), a lawyer and political theorist, was one of the first and most prominent members in the Society of United Irishmen, who had the opinion that Ireland should become an independent, non-sectarian republic. He contributed in radicalizing the movement by seeking help from France and was the main string puller of the Irish Rebellion against British hegemony in 1798. Having been condemned to death he committed suicide in prison in the same year. Annually in summer he is commemorated at his grave in Bodenstown, County Kildare, and honored as the founder of the Irish Republican Movement (Mac Annaidh 138-144, Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, <<http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/15188>> 25 February 2010)

'IRA heroine' who sadly also reveals the questionable side of womanhood in the Northern Irish Conflict. Frieda, who is looking after Cora now, precisely describes her aunt's fate:

FRIEDA. Cora is blind and deaf and dumb and she has no hands, and she's been like that since she was eighteen. And Bridget, the other one, is a maid because she stayed to look after Cora. And I'm still a maid because I'm looking after both of them.

JOE. What happened to her when she was eighteen?

FRIEDA. Oh the usual. She was storing ammunition for her wee brother Malachy – my father God love him – who was in the IRA even then. He asked her to move it. Unfortunately it was in poor condition, technically what you call weeping. So when she pulled up the floorboards in her bedroom – whoosh! It took the skin off her face. Her hair's never really grown properly since and look – no hands (*She demonstrates by pulling her fists up into her sleeves.*) (*Ourselves* 29)

Frieda grotesquely refers to her aunt's misery as "the usual", the apparently 'common destiny' faced by loyal Republican women. However, as the most critical among the three women in *Ourselves Alone*, she overtly condemns Cora's patriotic glorification:

FRIEDA. They stick her out at the front of the parades every so often to show the women of Ireland what their patriotic duty should be. But I'll tell you something – it won't be mine! (*Ourselves* 29)

In an interview Devlin criticizes this commitment forced upon women in an utterance that instantly reminds of Frieda's statement: "That's what this Nationalism, this violent, Republican Nationalism, that's what they want women to look like. Well, not me! That's what I'm saying, not us, no, not us" (qtd. in Doyle 71).

Via Cora's story Devlin depicts an image of feminine virtue within the Republican movement. Here women's loyalty to men's involvement is expressed in the silent fulfilment of their 'small' tasks, not questioning the consequences of those activities, even if they have to sacrifice their own physical and mental wellbeing.

Addressing Cora's destiny in the play is eventually a parody of the traditional depiction of a female representation of Ireland, such as 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan' or 'Mother Ireland', by deliberately deviating from the image of the ideal woman, the sacrificing but strong mother figure. As opposed to this, Cora's image is one manipulated by men revealing "the misogyny inherent in nationalist thinking and exaggerate[ing] the conventional ideal of Irish womanhood as passive" (Rea 212). Cora's non-mythological and vulnerable appearance differs significantly from Yeats's 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan' and clearly alludes to the nation's ruthless gender politics (Rea 213). The consequences of Cora's dutiful behaviour force her sister and her niece to look after her and thus be 'condemned' to spinsterhood, another form of 'patriotic duty' that is taken for granted by the male authority Malachy (Foley 78). MacGurk refers to Cora as a religious symbol, such the silently suffering and submissive Virgin Mary. This is confirmed by Fitzpatrick who argues that through Cora's figure women's duties in Irish Nationalism and Irish Catholicism are unified and compares Cora's exposition at nationalist parades to statues of the Virgin Mary heading Marian processions (324).

As a housewife and the only mother in the play, Donna conforms to the domestic order that is set by Republican society. Since Josie and Frieda have no mother, Donna, even though not much older than the two women, also functions as their mother-substitute constantly worrying about them and providing a home to rely on. Particularly reproduction and motherhood as women's main duties are challenged in *Ourselves Alone* when Josie reveals her pregnancy with Joe Conran's child. As it turns out that Conran is a British informant, Josie automatically becomes a 'danger' to the political cause challenging "Malachy's and Liam's authority to their nation" (Rea 214). "Joe's impregnation of Josie, as the men in the IRA see it, represents his penetration of the national territory and this sully[ing] of the nation's racial purity" (Rea 213). Josie plays no role in this issue; it is paternity that Liam and Malachy argue about; an argument in which Liam is regarding it as his duty to control this potential 'threat of the nation' that is embodied by the child, a hybrid of Irish and English nationality, and demands an abortion. For Devlin the aspect of motherhood became indispensable in the play after she had been confronted with

it throughout her own life. Just like it influenced Josie and changed her priorities in life, it also had an impact on Devlin's writing: "This fact of motherhood changed my whole life, I couldn't take it away; not even on paper. So no-one dies in this play. Mother, or the absence of her, became, in the face of violence, a major force for good" (Devlin qtd. in MacGurk 58).

Women's duties are entirely domestic in *Tea in a China Cup*, as unlike in Devlin's work, women are not politically involved in this play. Although men play a more subtle role in the play, their public role in society is portrayed as far more 'visible' than women's. In the family three generations of men have participated in wars, which is commemorated by the three framed pictures of soldiers constantly referred to throughout the play. We are first confronted with the scene of men going to war when Sarah's brother Samuel is leaving home in 1939 as a soldier and "one of the King's men" (*Tea* 11). Beth's grandfather, visibly proud of his eighteen-year-old son, has already fought in World War I and for him going to war is the epitome of manhood:

GRANDFATHER. It'll make a man of him. (*Tea* 11)

In *Tea in a China Cup* women's contribution to war, while men are fighting, is waiting for them to come home, providing a safe house, preparing sandwiches for them when they have to leave and visiting them in the military hospital. As Reid claims, women support war and men would not be able to persist in it without women's 'hidden' help (qtd. in Doyle 85). It seems as if men's loyalty to 'King and Crown' is mirrored in women's loyalty to their husbands, similar to Devlin's male characters, who fight for a united Ireland, whereas their women are rather banned to the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, the reader is also confronted with women's criticism of war and later on of the Troubles. In Beth's grandmother's opinion, what makes a real man is that he fulfils his true duty and stays at home with his wife and family. While men glorify war, women "stress the threat to life, the numbing

repetition of death. Their own cycles of reproduction are subsumed and made to serve the ends of history, rearing sons for the slaughter” (Roche 231-233).

GRANDMOTHER. He’s only eighteen. I want him to grow into a man here, in his own street with his own ones all around him, not in some stinkin’ hole in the ground in France among strangers.

GRANDFATHER. I was in the trenches in France when I was little more than a lad. It never did me no harm.

GRANDMOTHER. Oh aye, I suppose you were born with that bit of shrapnel in your leg.

GRANDFATHER. I’d do it again gladly, if they’d have me, for my King and Country.

GRANDMOTHER. But they won’t have you, will they, because your oul chest is still full of gas from the last great war. *She says the word ‘great’ with contempt. (Tea 11)*

The sarcasm in the grandmother’s words reveals to a certain extent the irony that is behind this male heroism and female ‘passiveness’. With the majority of men being out in the wars women are left behind and have to “adopt patriarchal values in ruling clan and home” (Foley 62). Those men, who have barely survived wars, like the grandfather in *Tea in a China Cup*, remain uninfluential figures in a female-dominated home playing a minor part in the play. Paradoxically, this women-dominated society is still based on a masculine value system (Foley 62). However, Reid stresses that for her, even though men are mostly in the background in her plays, they still have a role and an identity that is not only shaped by war (qtd. in Foley 60). She rather uses the ‘negligence’ of men’s roles in her plays as a means of foregrounding the female world in Northern Irish Loyalist society.

In this female world marriage, motherhood and the duties that are associated with it are most central in *Tea in a China Cup*. That rearing children is entirely a woman’s task is evident from childbirth onwards when we learn that Sarah’s husband has not been home for two days, which is why she does not have the means to pay a taxi to bring her to the hospital when she is in labour; not to mention the father’s absence at his child’s birth. Marriage is regarded as the

ultimate obligation for a woman in Northern Irish society; anything else is contemplated as 'unnatural' or immoral:

SARAH. Your time will come, Theresa, you wait and see. A good-lookin' girl like you won't stay single for long.

THERESA. I'm not sure I want to get married.

SARAH. 'Course you do! You wouldn't want to end up an owl maid, would you? It's not natural for a woman to stay single (*Tea* 52).

This idealization of marriage is again ironically contrasted when Beth is seen waiting for her husband on the first evening of their honeymoon. This foreshadows initial problems in her marriage.²¹ Nevertheless, it seemingly also belongs to women's duties to ignore the dark sides of marriage and rather "keep the house clean and respectable" (*Tea* 25) and hold the family together. As O'Dwyer remarks, "the women of several generations sustain the families we see in this play, keeping the home-fires burning as the men engage in war, drinking and gambling. They accept this gender burden without question" (241). Only Beth gradually starts to realize that in her marriage she is about to follow in her mother's footsteps, which she frustratingly reveals to her best friend. Her major problem with this issue seems to be her inability to reveal this 'failure' to her mother, for whom this marriage was Beth's greatest achievement in life; also from a materialist point of view:

THERESA. Why are you angry with me?

BETH. I'm not angry with you . . . I'm just angry.

THERESA. Why?

BETH. Because it's all a lie . . . and I want to tell *her* about it . . . and I can't. My marriage has been the one big success of her life, and I can't spoil it for her, not now. I can't tell her away the velvet sofas and the china cabinets . . . there's nothing there . . . it's all a lie . . . (*Tea* 60)

²¹ The aspect of women being left behind by their men is a central issue in both plays and will be dealt with in greater detail in chapter 5. 2. 6.

5. 2. 2. Domestic vs. Political Symbolism and Traditions

Symbolism and established Protestant rituals and traditions are most central aspects in the “bygone culture” (Foley 62) portrayed in *Tea in a China Cup*. The reader is confronted with these aspects at the beginning of act one when Sarah, who is tied to the sickbed listening to an Orange band rehearsing for the annual parade on the twelfth of July. Sarah’s veneration of the Orange band and her profound longing for the twelfth illustrate her deep loyalty to the Protestant community:

BETH. You’ve exhausted yourself, your face is all flushed.

SARAH. It’s the sound of the flute bands. . . always gets the owl Protestant blood going. I tell you, a daily dose of the True Blue Defenders would do me more good than them hateful transfusions they give me up at the hospital. . . (*Tea* 8)

For Sarah attending the Orange parade is the ultimate duty to express Protestant pride and doing so annually represents her effort to maintain continuity. It is one of the conventions Beth has been brought up with since she was a child:

BETH. She carried me to the Field when I was four months old. She was sitting on the grass, her back to a hedge, giving me a bottle, when a gentleman in a clerical collar came up and patted us both on the head, ‘I’m proud of you, daughter’ he said to my mother, ‘coming all this way with a young baby. Women like you are the backbone of Ulster.’ (*Tea* 10)

As Fitzpatrick states, the recurring celebration of the twelfth of July in various periods in history, as well as the “reiterated tales of brothers and sons lost in the World Wars, further enhancing the sense of continuity, while articulating the cultural and historical forces shaping the contemporary characters” (329) prescribe the structure of the play. Keeping up the continuity of Ulster tradition is particularly achieved via story telling. Sarah, Beth’s grandmother and great aunt Maisie constantly reveal past family stories often eagerly amplifying them until the difference between fact and fiction is blurring. However, like so many other traditions and superficialities in Beth’s family, the story telling is in fact not about

passing on the plain truth, but rather about preserving Protestant values and keeping the community together (Foley 64). Nevertheless, it also carries the danger of the inability to move on in life, thus the women in Beth's family keep on being attached to the past. Even though Beth seems to be 'saturated' by those stories and expresses a lack of understanding for her relatives' outdated customs, she adopts their habits in many ways. Throughout the play, Beth in fact becomes a story teller herself, but to tell us the truth about herself and her family (Roll-Hansen 393).

The most significant recurrent motif throughout *Tea in a China Cup* however is obviously the china cup, which also constitutes the title of the play. For Protestant women possessing a 'good set of china' manifests the difference between being poor and being respectable (O'Dwyer 240):

GRANDMOTHER. No matter how poor we are, child, we work hard and keep ourselves and our homes clean and respectable, and we always have a bit of fine bone china and good table linen by us. (*Tea*, 25).

"Fine bone china and good table linen" are the domestic equivalents to public symbols such as the bands and banners at Orange parades or the heroic stories about the soldiers in the family and their corresponding framed photographs. What these symbols have in common is that they convey Ulster Loyalism, although gender-specifically interpreted. Reid clearly illustrates that men's Loyalism is public and politically motivated, whereas women's Loyalism is inspired by the home and family. Therefore, in *Tea in a China Cup* women's symbols expressing sense of community are chosen from the domestic world (Fitzpatrick 329-330). Particularly the china cup is clearly a feminine object different from military items that are meant to represent a nation's pride and values. It even has a manifold symbolic purpose as it "functions as a symbol of loyalist pride when present, and as an expression of despair and poverty when absent" (Fitzpatrick 330).

For the Protestant women in Reid's play 'keeping their homes clean and respectable' and owning a set of china is also a means of distinguishing themselves from apparently 'poor and filthy' Catholic women. We learn however, that this distinction becomes irrelevant under poverty that spares neither of the two communities in Northern Ireland (O'Dwyer 240). Husbands, such as Sarah's who spends his wages rather than providing it for his family, do not necessarily contribute positively to this crisis. It is therefore all the more humiliating for Sarah when her last resort to support her family is to sell her china to Theresa's mother, a Catholic. Like several other 'disrespectful' aspects, having to give away that 'pride of the home' is obviously concealed against the neighbours. Only a cup and a saucer are secretly kept by Sarah in order to symbolically preserve at least one last piece of respectability. Before Beth finally takes the crucial step to hand her house with all its belongings over to the auctioneer after Sarah's death, she also puts aside a cup and a saucer of her china. In doing so, Beth demonstrates that she admittedly keeps up the loyalty towards the women in her family and their little rituals, yet it is not a desperate act of holding on to 'dusty' values anymore. On the contrary, it seems as if Beth has never been that ready to move on. Referring to this tradition of passing on customs and values within the family in *Tea in a China Cup* Reid remarks:

It's about women generally, and how they uphold traditions and beliefs which are positively harmful and damaging to themselves, because they've had it instilled in them that it's safer to do this, that this is what women should do, and no matter how unhappy women's lives are, they tend to re-create the same thing for their daughters; they're not truthful to their daughters. (qtd. in Foley 65)

The lack of 'truthfulness' mentioned by Reid becomes apparent in the way the women preserve their unused china cups. It signifies, according to Foley, that tradition and superficiality play a more important role in order to cope with life than "encounters with truth" (64). Reid ironically expresses this through the girls' conversation:

BETH. My mammy loved it. She used to polish it every day.

THERESA. My daddy says it's daft having all those cups and saucers and things just for looking at.

BETH. That's what my daddy said too. (*Tea 26*)

That Beth finally breaks this tradition is revealed when she offers tea out of an unused Belleek tea set to her sick mother, who is more than excited about using the set on a conventional occasion:

BETH. I'm going to get one of those Belleek cups and saucers out of that cabinet in the dining-room and serve you tea in it.

SARAH. You can't do that.

BETH. I can if I want . . .

SARAH. I suppose you can, it belongs to you . . .

BETH. That's right . . . wouldn't you like to be the very first person to have actually had a drink out of that set?

SARAH. Don't tempt me. (*Tea 63*)

Sadly Sarah never got the chance to have her tea out of that set as she dies when Beth is about to serve it. Earlier in the play Sarah's request to Beth, who struggles to cope with her mother's approaching death, finally becomes even more ironic:

SARAH. Ach child, don't look away like that, you have to face death.

BETH. I can't . . .

SARAH. You must . . . you'll do things proper for me, won't you?

BETH. You know I will.

SARAH. Promise.

BETH. I promise.

SARAH. With a proper sit-down tea afterwards.

BETH. With a proper sit-down tea . . . afterwards. (*Tea 33*)

In an elaborate study Joanna Luft identifies Reid's application of the ritual of drinking tea in *Tea in a China Cup* as a political and a socio-critical statement, a so called Brechtian *gestus*. The latter refers to Brechtian dramaturgical style where the characters are shaped by a particular attitude, which helps to draw conclusions about their social circumstances (Brecht qtd. in Luft 215). Luft realizes that via portraying the women's gathering for a cup of tea their social relationships and values are revealed (214). Moreover, the purpose of tea is a relaxing and

comforting one, as in Beth's family its consummation often takes place after problematic discussions, such as in the scene where Sarah is confronted with the violence of the Troubles and is supposed to evacuate her house. Tea is also consumed after complex tasks, such as 'laying out the dead' as revealed in the quote above. Thus, in the play the significance of tea functions as a feminized activity, as well as a social and political construct, in contrast to masculinised activities, such as marching in Orange parades or going to war. Although the home is usually contemplated as domestic and private, social conventions determine it as the realm where women and girls have "to be good Protestant citizens, in this case, and good women" (Luft 215-216). Hence, the home and the *gestus* of drinking tea fulfil, socially conditioned, a public function.

A further scene in which the china set becomes the feminized equivalent to the masculinized activity of going to war is when Beth's brother Sammy is leaving for Germany as a British soldier; a scene almost identical with Samuel's departure in 1939. Finally the 'triangle' of framed portraits of the grandfather and 'the uniformed Samuels' representing the pride of meanwhile "Queen and Country" (*Tea* 43) on the wall is complete. The scene is directly followed by a discussion of the three women Sarah, grandmother and Maisie about Beth's relationship to Stephen and his aunt's impressive "real Belleek tea set" (*Tea* 47). Reid successfully contrasts Sammy's life characterized by guns and war tools with Beth's expected life to marry Stephen with his future inheritance consisting of "lovely old furniture and good ornaments" and a tea set "that was so fine, [...] Beth was afraid she'd take a bite out of it" (*Tea* 47). Once again the expectations of 'decent' Protestant men and women are clearly divided and accompanied by feminized and masculinised symbolism. Sarah proudly summarizes these binaries once more at her death bed:

SARAH. Beth, you have to admit I'm going out in quare style . . . velvet
sofas and fine bone china and the Orangemen paradin' past the window .
. . (*Tea* 62)

Her death, which she has been waiting for nearly as eagerly as for the parades on the festive day, occurs on the twelfth of July eventually completing her life as a proud Protestant. The final scene stresses the play's actual space again, namely the domestic sphere where "issues of class, gender, religion, and politics" are "at work" (Luft 217). After Sarah's death the three framed army photographs become worthless for the auctioneer, whereas Beth's tea set is highly valuable. As Luft remarks, "the value of the tea set in setting social and political boundaries is more significant than that of the military" (217). Sarah's death seems to relieve Beth from her lifelong loyalty to her family and also from her unhappy marriage to Stephen. Nevertheless, she keeps a cup and a saucer of her china, which indicates that her deep respect for her family and its tradition still exists. The reader is not only left behind with the image of a 'content Beth', but also with the image of a rather 'insecure Beth' who is about to start to define her own identity singing to herself a traditional folk song: "*On the hill there stands a lady, who she is I do not know...*" (Tea 65).

Tea in a China Cup abounds in the characters' superstitious viewpoints, which are even supported when a fortune teller foresees Samuel's death in the war and predicts that the child Sarah is carrying will be a girl. Besides, old myths about healing accompany the women's everyday life and are ridiculed by increasingly critical Beth:

BETH. A penny on the forehead for nosebleeds, docken leaves for nettle stings, a wedding ring to charm away warts . . .
 SARAH. Don't scoff at the old remedies. Without them you wouldn't have survived your first year. (*Tea 32*)

Here Sarah refers to the intense cough Beth had as an infant, which was healed after holding her over a waste gas outlet that forced her to "[cough] up all the infection" (*Tea 33*). Ever since, Beth sarcastically thanks the Belfast Corporation Gasworks for having saved her life. Another 'legend' about her survival as a weak infant was her, from a Protestant point of view, highly relevant birthday:

BETH. I wouldn't die as the eighth of March was the anniversary of the death of William, Prince of Orange, and this was a good omen. (*Tea 22*)

An additional symbol that stands for Protestant continuity and security in *Tea in a China Cup* is passing on women's wedding rings from generation to generation. We first encounter this custom when Samuel is leaving for France at the beginning of World War II and his mother puts her wedding ring on his finger. Her wise words "It'll guard you, bring you home safe" (*Tea 14*) declare that this ritual stands for safety and guidance; another mere superstition as Samuel will be killed in the war. Also Beth receives her grandmother's and mother's wedding ring shortly before Sarah passes away:

SARAH. They'll guard you after I'm gone. They'll keep you safe [...] I want you to wear them, for luck. (*Tea 62*)

This glorification of marriage by using the wedding ring as a 'magic tool' seems to imply a discrepancy, given the fact that married life is not portrayed in a particularly favourable light in *Tea in a China Cup*. Nonetheless, it is a tribute to the conventions of a 'proper Protestant woman'.

Moreover, a major task of the women in Beth's family is to prepare the decedents in the neighbourhood for their funeral, which is also characterized by traditional, superstitious rituals. One of them is to "always cover the mirrors when somebody dies, or their soul can be reflected away by evil spirits" (*Tea 34*). It is another ritual that Beth maintains after her mother's death; a further proof that outwardly Beth constantly attempts to preserve her mother's value system and the traditions that have been upheld in her family for generations. However, by doing so she simply aims at demonstrating respect for her dying mother, which also prevents her from revealing her problems with her husband Stephen who is only "for looking at, for . . . show, not everyday use" (*Tea 49*), just like the china set. Only when their lives are in danger at the climax of the Troubles, Beth dares to utter that Sarah's beloved items are "only . . . things . . . bits and pieces" (*Tea 57*) that can be

replaced (Roche 233). Eventually, despite their differing beliefs with regard to value systems, Sarah advises Beth to go her own way after her death:

SARAH. Grow up . . . change, the way everybody does when their mother dies . . . (*Tea* 9)

Tea in a China Cup refers to numerous traditional Protestant customs and personal domestic objects that aim at a symbolic representation, such as Protestant pride, whereas in *Ourselves Alone* symbolism is more political reflecting Republican attitude. One juxtaposition of female and male elements, similar to the comparison of domestic and public symbols in *Tea in a China Cup*, is evident in the first scene of act one. At the club Frieda innocently asks for sugar, an obviously frequent delivery to the club, along with cotton wool balls. For the Republican men these are essential components for planting explosives, whereas for the women sugar is a major ingredient for their home-made wine. Thus, also in *Ourselves Alone* everyday items have a “gendered relevance” (Foley 77) and with Frieda’s statement in the opening scene the reader is confronted with her scepticism and criticism from the play’s initial part onwards.

The adherence of Republican myth is signified through the portraits of the hunger strikers on the club’s walls which are repeatedly referred to throughout the play. As Foley argues, “the hunger-strikers, whose image adorn the walls of the club have replaced the icons of the 1970s, Pearse and Connolly, presenting a contemporary image of republican martyrdom and highlighting the seamless continuity of heroism from 1916 to 1981” (77). These “new Northern Republican heroes” function as a reminder that their predecessors only attempted to achieve a unified and fully independent Ireland (Rea 217). Hence, the new generation has to increase its commitment even more. The resulting generational conflict in the contemporary movement is therefore represented in *Ourselves Alone* by the father- son conflict (Rea 217) and the reference to a number of internal splits within the Republican movement. Frieda condemns this martyrdom when she

forcefully addresses her father who does not tolerate his daughter questioning the deeply rooted values and role models in the Republican struggle for freedom:

FRIEDA. [...] You know something, Father? You've been burying your friends since 'sixty-nine. But do you know something else, your friends have been burying you!

MALACHY. Never cross my door again!

FRIEDA. (*Desperation*) We are the dying. Why are we mourning them! (*She points at the portraits of the dead hunger strikers. She exits.*)
(*Ourselves* 39-40)

As a female equivalent to the hunger strikers aunt Cora represents a living image of dutiful Republican womanhood, which is proudly presented at Republican parades, as if she embodies just another item among flags, banners and hunger striker portraits. By contrast, symbolism that stands for the freedom and satisfaction the women in *Ourselves Alone* are actually longing for is evident in their memories of their youth at the sea. Cerquoni, who analyses the diversity of “rooms” in Devlin’s play, states that the sea “embodies for the three women a releasing space of physical and spiritual nakedness, which binds them together regardless of their disappointing experiences” (“Women in Rooms” 167). Frieda poetically summarizes this divine moment:

FRIEDA. And we sank down into the calm water and tried to catch the phosphorescence on the surface of the waves - it was the first time I'd ever seen it – and the moon was reflected on the sea that night. It was as though we swam in the night sky and cupped the stars between our cool fingers. (*Ourselves* 90)

This epiphany of apparently complete perfection and freedom is interrupted when Liam, John and Malachy realize that the women have been swimming in the sea naked. Male disruption of banal female activity is a recurrent theme throughout *Ourselves Alone*, for instance, whenever Malachy approaches the house and the women quickly hide traces of alcohol and cigarettes. A further occurrence of such an intrusion is when Frieda is ‘catching happiness’ in the form of catching autumn leaves which is another symbolic act of obtaining freedom and fulfilment. Also this

'heavenly' moment is interrupted by men, in this case a member of the police. As Cerquoni analyses, "this surreal atmosphere of intangibility, playfulness and emotional intensity, which the image of the falling leaves engenders, contrasts with the materiality and immanency of external interruptions (police)" ("Women in Rooms" 169). Although Frieda and McDermot initially perform this game together, McDermot denies his serious participation:

MCDERMOT. [...] She was a bit depressed, so we thought we'd come out and catch a few leaves to cheer her up! (*Ourselves* 67)

In the end it is Frieda who is solely accused by the police of "causing an obstruction" (*Ourselves* 67). It is yet another scene where Devlin portrays the "innocence of any free female activity obstructed and pronounced aberrant, whether it be hair dyeing, catching falling leaves, drinking wine or nude bathing. A male conspiracy of police, army and republicans rules every waking and abstract moment" (Foley 89).

5. 2. 3. Sectarianism - Terrorism within the Public Sphere

'Up come the man with the shovel in his hand, and he says boys go no farther, for we'll get a great big rope and we'll hang the bloody Pope, on the twelfth of July in the morning.' (*Tea* 3)

Sectarianism is particularly evident in *Tea in a China Cup*, where discrimination against Catholics is a recurrent theme. The lyrics quoted above stem from a Loyalist song and referred to in this stage direction it introduces the reader to the roots of Protestant supremacy and also sectarianism and hostility against Catholics in Northern Ireland. Reid pointedly initiates her play with a reference to the repeating theme of the playing Orange band in order to then move on to a typical scene of everyday sectarianism in Northern Ireland. Beth is ordered by Sarah to buy a grave in advance to secure her deeply Protestant mother a place at the segregated cemetery. As the old cemetery is full, Beth can choose a grave in

the new one, which “is divided by a gravel path. Protestant graves are to the right, Catholic graves are to the left” (*Tea 5*). While Sarah might be “tickled pink” (*Tea 7*) that her grave is going to be segregated from Catholic ones, Beth cannot hide her sarcasm about this arrangement:

BETH. What happens in a mixed marriage . . . do you bury them under the gravel path? (*The CLERK is not at all amused by this sort of levity.*)
(*Tea 7*)

This initial scene at the council clerk’s office is one of the several incidents in *Tea in a China Cup* that are autobiographical. Reid herself had to buy a grave for her terminally ill mother and reminisces in an interview how utterly bizarre she found the importance of a segregated cemetery. She states that “you walked into this graveyard and on the right were all the English and Scottish sounding names and on the left were all the Irish, Catholic sounding names” and “people felt they were with their own” (qtd. in Doyle 83). By means of Beth’s character Reid transports her own non-sectarian attitude as a member of a critical younger generation at a time when “these differences in attitude are set against the changing socio-political events of Northern Ireland” (Fitzpatrick 329). Beth, who was preferably named after Queen Elizabeth by her loyal mother, regardless of her date of birth suggesting the “very Catholic sort of name” (*Tea 22*) ‘Mary’ after William of Orange’s wife, is already taught the essential difference between Protestants and Catholics in early childhood. A complaint about her unclean face after playing initiates a significant lesson presumably taught in all ‘decent Protestant families’ at that time:

SARAH. She looks like one of them wee street urchins from the Catholic quarter.

[...]

MAISIE (*to BETH*) Keep still, child . . . there now, that’s a bit more Protestant-lookin’.

BETH. Are all the Catholic children dirty?

MAISIE. I never seen a clean one yet.

BETH. Why are they dirty?

GRANDMOTHER It’s just the way they are. They’re not like us.

MAISIE. They never scrub their front steps nor black-lead their fires nor nothin'. They're clarty and poor.
 BETH. Are we not poor? (*Tea 23*)

Confused Beth poses this justified question as poverty is affecting both Catholics and Protestants. Nevertheless, the crucial difference clarified by great aunt Maisie is that there are apparently two ways of coping with poverty: the Protestant way of staying "clean and respectable" (*Tea 23*) and the Catholic way of "whining and complaining" (*Tea 25*):

MAISIE. We don't go about cryin' poverty and putting a poor mouth on ourselves the way they do neither. Did you hear thon oul nationalist politician on the wireless the other day? Tellin' the world about goin' to school bare-fut in his da's cut-down trousers? I would cut my tongue out before I'd demean my family like that. (*Tea 23-24*)

Reid refers to this myth of the 'filthy Catholic lifestyle' and remarks that if there is any truth at all about it, it is the fact that Catholics tended to have a larger number of children, which might have impeded domestic work. According to Reid, the establishment of such a falsehood was "one of the greatest political cons of all time" (qtd. in Doyle 82). Reared with these prejudices Beth's close friendship to the Catholic girl Theresa is all the more ironic and a hint to the absurd hostility in troubled Northern Ireland. The girls naively wonder how one can in fact distinguish between a Catholic and a Protestant confronting the reader with another common prejudice at that time. Their innocent conclusion that the myth is widespread in both communities is again one of the numerous satirical colloquies marking Reid's socio-critical work:

THERESA. By the look of them. Your eyes are closer set. Did nobody ever tell you that?
 BETH. I was always told that the Catholics are the ones with the close-set eyes. (*Tea 40*).

Another issue causing sectarian antipathy is children's admission to grammar school. As opposed to secondary school, attending grammar school involves

numerous expenses that Beth's mother cannot afford, as, in order to contrast with 'immoral Catholics', she refuses to apply for state funding. Whereas Catholic Theresa, whose family is financially better off than Beth's, has the opportunity to visit grammar school, Beth is restricted to 'an ordinary' secondary school. As usual great aunt Maisie expresses her one-sided point of view speaking for the majority of the Protestant population at that time:

MAISIE. They say this Butler Education Act is a great thing for the workin'-class children. My eye is it. [...] No good'll come of this subsidized education, you mark my words. The Catholics will beg, borrow and steal the money to get their kids a fancy education. This country'll suffer for it in years to come when well-qualified Catholics start to pour out of our Queen's University expecting the top jobs, wantin' a say in the runnin' of the country. (*Tea* 31)

Several years later Beth and Theresa do compete for the same job in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, which proves how irrelevant their school education eventually has become as the only actual criteria to get the position is their confession. Moreover, Catholic employees are still denied to work in higher positions. Innocently trusting Beth has difficulties to believe the facts about Northern Irish employment policy:

THERESA. [...] If I'm the only Tague being interviewed, and there are three jobs going, I'm bound to get one of them.

BETH. Why?

THERESA. Why? Because low-grade positions in the Northern Irish Civil Service are allocated on a strict population basis, two-thirds to the Prods, one-third to the Catholics.

BETH. You're joking again.

THERESA. I'm not. It's to prove to the big wide world that they don't discriminate. Mind you, the Catholic third haven't a hope in hell of being promoted to the top grades. They're allowed so far and then it stops, but at least they employ us.

BETH. The firm I'm with doesn't employ Catholics, at least not in their offices. There are a few in the factory.

THERESA. Aye, and if they could get enough Protestants to fill the factory they'd do that too.

BETH. I'm sorry. (*Tea* 40-41)

Despite Sarah's faithful commitment to Protestant values and traditions she accepts her daughter's friendship to a Catholic and appreciates Theresa as a friend of the family. In the only scene where Sarah is directly affected by the Troubles she reveals that her true loyalty is rather towards her family than to England. She vehemently defends her house with all the beloved items that constitute the meaning of her life when a British Army sergeant attempts to evacuate it in order to "keep law and order" (*Tea 57*). The three soldier portraits on the wall help the sergeant to identify 'on which side' the family is. Sarah's dispute with him turns into a plea about the absurdity of the current Troubles and the consequences loyalty to the state have had for the men in her family:

SARAH. Law and order. That's a laugh . . . three generations of my family have fought in your army, and for what? That's my father gassed in the First World War, that's my brother, killed in the Second, and that's my son, my only son, and he can't even come home on leave any more in case he gets a bullet in his back. The IRA shot an oul lad in the next street the other day, an ex-serviceman. He was goin' to the British Legion for a reunion dinner. Wearin' all his medals, he was, proud as punch. If they'll do the like of that to a harmless old man, what they could do to my Sammy doesn't bear thinkin' about. (*Tea 57*)

In *Ourselves Alone* sectarianism does not refer to prejudices or social and economical discrimination, but is rather expressed through active violence and problematic mixed relationships. When Protestant McDermot appears to meet Frieda at the club Malachy commands the men present to attack him ruthlessly as he does not accept a Protestant and member of the Worker's Party at the club; not to mention her daughter's liaison with him. As a consequence, Malachy bans Frieda from his house. By contrast, Catholic Frieda is harassed by Protestant neighbours, who do not approve her presence in their area either. Thus, "a reconciled relationship between a Protestant and a Catholic, which shows possibilities for a future society, such as between Frieda and John, is not tolerated by the sectarian groupings on both sides of the divide" (Urban 289). An argument about the issue of sectarianism triggers the end of their relationship when Frieda accuses McDermot of defending 'his own tribe' against her assumptions. Having

first escaped from her father she now feels compelled to flee to England seeking her personal freedom (Urban 289):

FRIEDA. You think I'm popular here? (*She indicates the brick.*) Whatever England is – it's got to be better than this!

MCDERMOT. Oh, for heaven's sake! You're running away from a couple of drunks!

[...]

FRIEDA: I'm not so enamoured with my life here that it's something I could die defending.

MCDERMOT. Who said anything about dying?

FRIEDA. It said in that note that this is a Protestant street! I have no wish to contest that. You have every right to live here. I haven't.
(*Ourselves* 80-81)

According to Doyle, for the women in *Ourselves Alone*, “endogamy is a form of camouflage of sharing the opinions of the men” (18), such as Josie’s affair with Cathal O’Donnell and Donna’s relationship with Liam. Clearly Frieda’s ‘exogamy’ with a Protestant mirrors her rebellion against the Republican movement, although she does not share McDermot’s beliefs either. Moreover, Josie’s relationship with the British traitor Joe Conran turns out to be ‘fake endogamy’, which has even supported his task as a collaborator (Doyle 18).

5. 2. 4. Women Haunted - Terrorism within the Domestic Sphere

In *Ourselves Alone* Republican men exert power and violence in public against British hegemony and in the private realm against their women, which is a central theme in the play. This violence affects women either mentally or physically. The former refers to Donna, who is haunted by nightmares and perceives her asthma as the incarnation of the devil. However, it seems as if the boundaries between perceiving her disease as inflicted by the devil and the way she perceives her relationships to men are not clear-cut:

DONNA: [...] The funny thing was, I really didn't get over my asthma attacks until my husband was interned. And I haven't seen the devil since.
 (Pause). Until this morning. Liam bent over and kissed me goodbye as he was leaving. The trouble was he blocked my mouth and I couldn't breathe through my nose so I kept having to break away from him. [...] He never really goes away. (*Ourselves*, 53)

Donna subconsciously feels dominated and suppressed by her boyfriend Liam, which is a feeling that she has already encountered in her first marriage. She does not admit these emotions to Liam and her anxiety is not clearly definable as it occurs in the vision of the obsessing devil. Also Josie used to have visions of a dark figure haunting her in the form of a policeman or a priest, "thus a force of masculine authority and subjection" (Cerquoni, "Women in Rooms" 168), which makes her "[take] the wrong way" (*Ourselves* 78). As an adult Josie is haunted by constant somnambulism, which, according to Cerquoni, is a sign of her restless spirit that is releasing itself via nightly sleepwalking ("Women in Rooms" 169). Although she is unconscious, for Josie it is also a way of encountering freedom as "the control exerted on Josie's persona extends to the inside and outside of her body[. S]leepwalking offers a fissure of absence, a liminal point" (Cerquoni, "Women in Rooms" 169) which is entirely open. Also Josie seems to be agonized by her relationships to men and her political obligations. She rushes from one disappointment to another, as both O'Donnell and Conran only exploit and distress her. This agony along with the burden of committing herself to her strictly Republican father, seem to be expressed through this constant sleep walking. Josie's deep longing for love makes her walk into the trap of the apparent attractiveness of Republicanism, as well as apparently faithful men. Thus, this half-consciousness of sleepwalking in a way mirrors "her half-conscious life" (Foley 80).

As Foley aptly points out, "if Josie's life is one of half-conscious ideological confusion, Frieda's is one of fully conscious exploitation" (80). As Frieda openly rebels against her father's politics and refuses to support the Provisional IRA, she constantly comes into conflict with Malachy. Moreover, to stress her rebellion and

inspired by McDermot, she joins the Workers Party and later on moves in with him. Before McDermot decides to share the apartment, a scene at the club collapses and Frieda is exposed to Malachy's violence. McDermot's presence at the club and Frieda's behaviour undermine Malachy's authority in front of members of the club, which stimulates his furiousness. What follows is a disturbing scene that demonstrates how a man, who normally uses violence in the form of terrorism, exerts this politically motivated violence against women (Doyle 19):

SECOND MAN. Have you no control over your daughter?
 (MCDERMOT *is pushed roughly towards the door by GABRIEL and the SECOND MAN. They exit. MALACHY has caught FRIEDA by the wrist to restrain her from following. He now pushes her across the room.*)
 MALACHY: You stay – (FRIEDA *is struck on the back of the head by MALACHY.*) away from him!
 (FRIEDA *remains holding her head, momentarily stunned.*)
 You'll not make a little boy of me! I'm sick to death of hearing about you . . . All I get is complaints . . . bringing that hood in here.
 FRIEDA. (*Recovering*) What do I have to do or say, Father, to get you to leave me alone –
 MALACHY. I'll leave you alone all right. I'll leave you so you'll wish you'd never been born. (*He makes a race at her. She pushes a table into his path.*)
 FRIEDA. Oh, Mammy. Mammy.
 (*He attempts to punch her in the stomach.*) (*Ourselves 39*)

Even the Northern Irish Republican's utmost icon Bobby Sands is accused of perpetuating domestic violence. Malachy and Frieda's argument about this issue right underneath his and the other hunger strikers' portraits provide the symbolic meaning of male heroism with a rather negative connotation:

MALACHY. You'll not make little of me. Siding with the people who condemned Bobby Sands.
 FRIEDA. (*Backing away towards the door*) They didn't condemn him. They said he beat his wife! Hard to believe isn't it?
 MALACHY. Get out of my sight.
 (*Overtured club furniture stands between them.*)
 FRIEDA. They say when he was dying she was so afraid of him. In fact she wouldn't go near him until she was sure he was definitely dead.
 (*Ourselves 39*)

Disapproving of the “sacrosanct hunger-striker” (Doyle 19) is a fairly brave act expressed via the character of Frieda, which proves that “Devlin strongly asserts a relationship between terrorism and domestic violence, and asserts domestic violence as a means by which the men confine and police the women” (Rea 220). In an interview with Enrica Cerquoni Devlin reveals an alarming anecdote that confirms the existing relation between terrorism and domestic violence in Northern Ireland’s reality and made her realize how diverse audience perception can be in England and Ireland. This is one of the reasons why the author has always derived pleasure from confronting two characters with two radically differing view points with each other on stage:

In Derry during the interval of *Ourselves Alone*, a man came up to me saying that Frieda’s father was right to hit her as she was so provocative. [...] I’ve always found it very interesting to put a traditional iconic point of view in one character and then bring another character to question that stance. I think that is really exciting. (qtd. in Cerquoni, “Anne Devlin” 120)

However, violence used by men ‘inspired’ by their radical political attitude is not an exclusively Republican phenomenon as it turns out that when being confronted with the accusation of “becoming something of an apologist for [his] tribe” (*Ourselves* 81) also McDermot uses force against Frieda. McDermot’s submissive and regretting whining for forgiveness to Frieda resembles Liam’s love confession after Donna’s desperate request to kill her. Like almost all male characters in the play, they use their women only for their own sexual and political motives. Thus, their pleadings not to be left by their women after having them abused physically and mentally is also a means of control (Wood 302):

MCDERMOT. If you leave me, I’ll kill myself.

FRIEDA. If I stay, you’ll kill me – or they will.

(He gets up and immediately bangs his head against the door again.

Alarmed, she pulls him away to restrain him.)

All right. All right. I won’t leave. But stop doing that! Please stop it!

MCDERMOT. I love you, Frieda. I’ll never let you go. I love you.

(He embraces her. She looks distressed.) (Ourselves 82)

LIAM. In the Kesh they told me about you after the dances. They all had you. But now you don’t want me! Were they better than me, was that it?

(DONNA *takes up a knife from the table, and hands it to him.*)
 DONNA. Take it. Kill me, love. Kill me. Kill me. [...] If you don't believe that I love you - I wish I were dead. [...]
 LIAM. Don't say that, Donna. [...]
 I just had to find out (LIAM *ruffles her hair.*) I love you so much you see. And I can't get enough of you. [...] And I thought because I'm not around so much you'd find someone else. [...] I'd like to go to bed now.
 DONNA. I can't! Josie's upstairs.
 LIAM. (*Becoming cold again*) All right. I'll be back in an hour.
 DONNA. Liam! Please. Where are you going?
 LIAM. I'm going to the club!
 (*He leaves, slamming the door. DONNA sinks down, beginning to cry*)
 (*Ourselves 55-56*)

Also Rea notes that “violence, whether the domestic violence that exerts the controls of gender politics or the military violence that results from the political conflict, permeates the sphere that is supposed to be safe and private - the home” (220). This security of the home and the apparent safety of motherhood are finally again endangered when Liam threatens to force Josie to abort Conran's child. His priority is the community's honour and to preserve it he would even use violence against his pregnant sister.

In *Tea in a China Cup* domestic violence is not an actual issue. However, its absence in Beth's family obviously provides an excuse for other negative characteristics men have instead. The fact that Beth's father never used violence against the women in his family is a reason for Sarah to defend all his other vices. She even blames herself for her husband's lack of concern and responsibility, which Beth is not willing to endure:

SARAH. [...] He could have been worse . . . he never lifted a finger to any of us in his life, he just had a weakness for the drink and the bettin' . . . he couldn't help it, he was only a man, God help him.
 BETH. Next thing you'll be saying it was all your fault.
 SARAH. I sometimes think if I'd been a stronger sort of person, you know, took him in hand a bit more, that he'd of turned out all right. I was always too soft.
 BETH. You *do* blame yourself.
 SARAH. A bit . . . mostly I blame his mother and his sisters for the way they spoilt him . . . What are you smiling at?

BETH. You, and all the other women like you. No matter what a man does wrong it's always some woman's fault, isn't it?

SARAH. Men need lookin' after, like children, sure they never grow up.
(*Tea* 38)

Sarah's statement proves the women's paradox situation in *Tea in a China Cup* as, even though their men are kept in the background, they "are made to acquiesce in the unwritten laws of a community dominated by men" (Roll-Hansen 391). Thus, it is the women who are supposed to sustain the outwardly intact family life and keep "the home-fires burning" (O'Dwyer 241), a silently accepted duty which is meanwhile questioned by the younger generation. Beth does not tolerate the view that a man's failure is a woman's responsibility; regardless of existent or non-existent domestic violence.

5. 2. 5. Women Silenced under Male Hegemony

According to Foley, Devlin expresses the political conflict as a male construct more than any other Northern Irish playwright (76). In *Ourselves Alone* she depicts three women who are dominated and governed by men in a politically tensed period of time. The representation of women being silenced, either by men or due to their community's morality, is central in both plays. In Devlin's work we are confronted with this issue in the first scene of act one, when Frieda, the non-political member of the family, is supposed to rehearse a Republican song at the community's club and tries to refuse as she wants to sing her own songs:

FRIEDA: I don't want to sing this anymore! [...]

DANNY: (*Stops playing*) Why not?

FRIEDA: Because it's about a man.

DANNY: The song's about Internment, Frieda!

FRIEDA: I'm fed up with songs where women are doormats!

DANNY: It's a Republican classic!

FRIEDA: I want to sing one of my own songs. (*Ourselves*, 13)

The restrictions Frieda encounters with regard to her own music mirror Republican women's dependence and lack of freedom and function as a recurrent image throughout the play; the image of "women being silenced, censored, and being forced into accommodation with male concepts of patriotism and republicanism" (Fitzpatrick 323). Also Foley states that in the play "silence, and especially female silence, seem to be a pre-condition of republicanism" (78). Moreover, Frieda is told "to work hard against the tempo" (*Ourselves* 14) of the Nationalist song "The Men Behind the Wire" in order to conform to the male-dominated lyrics. Apart from Frieda, there are women who are even more silenced, as they play, or used to play, an important role in the characters' lives, but are unspoken or only mentioned marginally: Josie's, Frieda's and Liam's deceased mother about whose role in Republican patriarchy we do not learn at all, Cathal O'Donnell's wife who is betrayed by her husband's affair to Josie, Joe Conran's wife and above all, aunt Cora, Malachy's sister. According to MacGurk, "Cora is emblematic of [Malachy's] ultimate linguistic control [...]. She is the most grotesquely imagined of many 'silent women' throughout the play [...] and is reduced to a kind of image, one with neither history – for that has been removed from her – nor subtext a blank page to be written on" (55). Cora's serious disabilities caused by her "patriotic duty" leave her blind, deaf and consequently in total silence (Rea 212). Her absence in the play signifies her entire isolation, not only from her own family but also from her whole environment. Cora conveys the ultimate dark side of nationalist paramilitary, but as she cannot speak for herself, her situation seems to remain unquestioned. On the contrary, her doom is even praised. Moreover, her silence fulfils a rather concrete purpose that could never work with her being intact as "she is denied both subjectivity and authority" (Fitzpatrick 324).

Devlin points out some of her silenced female figures as the 'listening women'. One of them is Donna, as referred to in her note to *Ourselves Alone*: "I began this play with two women's voices – one funny and one serious – and then I found I had a third – the voice of a woman listening" (10). Donna, "the quiet figure of authority" as MacGurk names her (59), who gave up questioning her position as a woman in this conflict-ridden society seems to quietly and powerlessly accept the

circumstances due to its apparent inevitability; “a kind of sad, passive understanding in the face of a hostile world” (MacGurk 59-60). This is particularly revealed when it is her who ends the play with the words “How quietly the light comes” (Ourselves 90). Donna, as well as Josie’s, Frieda’s and Liam’s mother, represent another kind of ‘women listening’ for they have always had to cautiously listen to the constant danger of British troops or members of the RUC picking up their men in nightly missions in order to intern them. Donna’s and Josie’s statements reveal their frustration about this regular and torturing situation of listening to any noise:

DONNA. It makes me nervous. Nights like this. I’m glad Liam’s in prison – God forgive me – it means I don’t have to lie awake waiting for them to come for him. Listening to every sound. I wouldn’t go through that again for anything. (*Sound of helicopter faintly in the background*)
 JOSIE. My mother spent her life listening. My father was picked up four times. (*Ourselves 20*)

Malachy is the embodiment of patriarchy, control and male hegemony in *Ourselves Alone*. His strong authority becomes apparent when he approaches Donna’s house and the three women are hastily trying to tidy the place in order to hide traces of alcohol and cigarettes which they have consumed earlier. Frieda refuses to participate in pretending to be the submissive daughter she does not want to be:

JOSIE. Wait a minute (*To FRIEDA*) Get rid of that ashtray! And open the back door.
 FRIEDA. (*Unmoved*) What for?
 JOSIE. To let fresh air in.
 FRIEDA. The whole place stinks. He’ll know. (*Doorbell more urgently*)
 JOSIE. (*To DONNA*) All right, open it.
 (*DONNA exits to open the front door. JOSIE rushes into the kitchen with the three glasses and the bottle of wine, while FRIEDA refuses to cooperate.*)
 FRIEDA. What are you tidying up for? Why don’t you be yourself?
 (*Ourselves 24-25*)

Three women of age still have to justify themselves for inappropriate behaviour, such as consuming alcohol and cigarettes or dying hair. It is one of the situations when the women are forced to adapt to norms set up in a hierarchy governed by men and without the allowance to actually be themselves, such as Frieda is questioning above. As Fitzpatrick remarks, Devlin stresses “the importance of the public community in the formation of masculine identity” (326), whereas female identity is restricted to the private sphere where women form close bonds to support and help each other (Fitzpatrick 326). Josie seems to be the only one who is accepted on equal terms with Malachy, mostly due to her active involvement in the Republican community. While he behaves suspiciously and dominantly against Frieda, he addresses Josie in a warmer, but also ‘comrade-like’ manner:

MALACHY. (*Reacting in the smoke-filled room; he waves his arm in front of his face.*) In the name a’Jesus! Is this how you spend your time? Who’s been smoking here?

FRIEDA. I have!

MALACHY. Oh yes. (*Coughing violently*) It would be you. You think because you’re living round at your auntie’s you can do what you like. I’ll bring you home one of these days if you’re not careful.

FRIEDA. Suits me. I wouldn’t have to look after them.

MALACHY. What have you got on your head?

FRIEDA. Tinfoil.

MALACHY. I can see that! (*JOSIE returns, he puts his arm round her to draw her near in a bear hug.*) How’s my mate! Hey!

JOSIE. (*Resisting the embrace*) I’m not your mate. I’m your daughter.
(*Ourselves 25*)

The relationship between Malachy and his two daughters illustrates a significant contradiction: on the one hand, Frieda is longing for the status of an emancipated individual enjoying things that are absolutely legitimate for men, though apparently not for women. On the other hand, Josie, who is accepted in the male world of Republicanism, is inwardly longing for a father’s love to his daughter, rather than a companionship that is common within the Republican movement. In the end ‘impertinent’ Frieda is once again silenced:

FRIEDA. (*Sweetly to JOE*) Don't mind our father. It's just that we don't have a mother any more and he's kinda protective.
MALACHY. That's enough from you. (*Ourselves 25*)

As these quotes reveal, men control and direct the public sphere in the Northern Ireland Conflict just like they rule the domestic sphere. In the play the home becomes some kind of synonym for the nation, "bastions of paternalism" with men being the "state fathers" (Rea 206-207) regulating women's behaviour. According to Rea, in *Ourselves Alone* "men must enforce their authority, and every father has not only the right, but also the duty to regulate and dominate his home" (207). Here the home is the only space where men can fully act out their authority with their aim to prevent the family from corruption and to preserve nationalist ideology. Only other male family members are able to challenge this authority, as in this case Liam who "contests the father's authority" (Rea 207). In *Ourselves Alone* male hegemony even influences female sexuality. It is regulated by men when Liam tries to force Josie to abort her child, whose father is a treacherous British agent. Again, Malachy wields his power as the 'leader of the domestic sphere'. To Liam's surprise, within their power struggle fundamental nationalism and ethics collide. However, even if Malachy's statement appears to be a protective measure by a loving father, it is again an expression of dominance:

MALACHY. Take your hands off her!
(LIAM *lets go of JOSIE's arm*)
MALACHY. I'm the father here son!
LIAM. What's wrong with you? She is carrying Conran's baby!
(MALACHY *puts his arm around JOSIE*)
MALACHY: My baby now. (*Pause while he looks around*).
Josie's going to live with me from now on. Isn't that right, love?
JOSIE. (*Hesitant*) Yes.
MALACHY. This baby's my blood. If anyone harms a hair on its head. . . !
(*Ourselves 88*)

In *Tea in a China Cup* women are silenced differently. Here female silence is part of a courteous behaviour and of avoiding any shameful manners that are rejected in the community, both Catholic and Protestant. In this regard, Lisa Fitzpatrick also contrasts Reid's and Devlin's work: "The silence that is imposed on Devlin's

characters in the name of patriotism and the national struggle, finds a counterpart in Reid's characters who silence themselves in the name of respectability" (328). We are first confronted with this 'proper' silence when eleven-year old Beth is told that she is not supposed to tell anybody in the neighbourhood about her self-made dress, as this is an indicator for an underprivileged lifestyle. However, naive Beth obviously does not provide understanding for this restriction:

BETH. Mammy made this dress out of one of her old skirts.

SARAH. Don't you ever go sayin' that to strangers.

BETH. Why?

SARAH. Because you just don't, that's why. I don't know where I got her at all. She hasn't the sense she was born with. (*Tea 24*)

Beth constantly receives only brief and unsatisfying answers, which enhance the girl's insecurity even more. With their offended reaction to her questions the adults seem to attempt to suppress Beth's natural curiosity and honesty. The Grandmother and great aunt Maisie adopt the role of the educators not only once:

BETH. Well, what's wrong with saying she made it out of her old skirt?

GRANDMOTHER. It's all right to say it in front of us, your own family, it's strangers you don't say that sort of thing to.

BETH. Why?

MAISIE. *Why?* I swear to God, that wain was born askin' questions.

GRANDMOTHER. Because it's family business and it's private. No matter how hard times are, you don't let yourself down in front of the neighbours. (*Tea 25*)

The fact that silence "in front of the neighbours" is not particularly a Protestant phenomenon becomes obvious when Catholic Theresa is confronted with a similar 'shame' that has to be hidden in public, namely her illegitimate daughter:

THERESA. My daughter. . . This is all top secret, Beth. For God's sake don't tell a soul. I promised my mother I wouldn't disgrace her in front of the neighbours. (*Tea 50*)

Furthermore, avoiding shame by ignoring sexual matters is another aspect that is achieved via silence in *Tea in a China Cup*. Sarah tries to be silent about any sexual issues, which is why her attempt to explain menstruation to Beth and her lack of appropriate anatomical vocabulary ends in mutual embarrassment (Fitzpatrick 331).

SARAH. [...] It happens once a month. . . you know where you go to the toilet . . . down there . . . (*Tea* 28)

Another moment of silencing women is Sarah's beseeching order not to talk about the issue to men:

SARAH. [...] When it happens, you tell me, you don't go telling your father or our Sammy, do you hear?
 BETH. Do my daddy and Sammy not know about it?
 SARAH. You don't talk to men about that sort of thing, it's not nice. (*Tea* 29)

Sarah finishes this tense talk with the pressing warning not to "let [men] do anything that's not nice" (*Tea* 29); an order that the obviously confused girl only hesitantly confirms to do. The belief that the 'doom' of menstrual cycles and marital sex "is just one of those [many] things women have to put up with" (*Tea* 29) and a general ignorance about female sexuality are particularly highlighted in the play where young Beth and Theresa believe in all kinds of myths due to inappropriate sexual education. Thus, the concern to withhold knowledge about sexuality from young people for the sake of their 'innocence' is a practice shared by Catholics as well as Protestants in Northern Ireland (McDonough 186). Christina Reid obviously processed her personal experiences with regard to sexual education into the play, as she reveals in an interview with Elizabeth Shannon:

I was fifteen years old before I knew how a baby was born. I went to work, and the girls in the office were going to see some French movie showing a live birth. I mean, it was a documentary about natural childbirth, but here it was considered a 'dirty movie', so these girls took me with them and I sat there dumbfounded! [...] I had this vague idea in the back of my head that

they came out the navel! I was absolutely shocked by the violence of it, the hugeness of it. And I was fifteen! (qtd. in E. Shannon 214)

Due to her questions, Theresa is silenced by her mother in an even more radical way:

THERESA. Do you know what that big lad down the street says those sort of knickers are called?

BETH. What?

THERESA. Passion killers.

BETH. What does that mean?

THERESA. I don't know. I asked my mammy and she hit me and made me go to confession.

[...]

THERESA. I have a cousin who's not married and she got a baby.

BETH. How?

THERESA. I don't know. I asked my mammy about that too, and she hit me again. (*Tea 27-28*)

After the two girls' first menstruation they again exchange their experiences about their mothers' insufficient and wrong explanations:

THERESA. [My mammy] told me I wasn't to wash my hair while I had it or put my feet in cold water, or the blood would all rush to my head and I'd die. Did your mammy cry?

BETH. A wee bit. She said, 'God help you child, this is the start of all your troubles.'

THERESA. My mammy calls it the curse.

BETH. I wish somebody would tell us what it's all about. I mean if it's going to bring us some sort of trouble, do you not think we should know?

THERESA. Sure they never tell you anything. (*Tea 30*)

The start of all of Beth's "troubles" interestingly coincides with the period right before the start of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, which is why the term conveys ambiguous meaning. On the one hand, the term 'troubles' refers to political and military struggle. On the other hand, in the play it expresses that women's struggle seemingly begins with the initiating interest men have for them. Merging the two connotations the 'troubled woman' can be construed as 'colonized' territory, which is being fought for; a female incarnation of Ireland. As Carla O'Donogh points out,

“the political story of Northern Ireland is a colonial story, and as postcolonial theory has pointed out, colonial discourse is a gendered discourse” (183). Hence, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is mirrored in the relationship between men and women in a patriarchal society. While the colonizer stands for the strong and powerful masculine leader, the colonized is represented by the weak and submissive ‘female object’. Moreover, colonialisation implies the fight for power and control of a territory between men whereby this “battle is fought symbolically or literally over the body of woman” (O’Donough 183).

Several years later, at the age of eighteen, the girls are still wondering about the mystery of sex and the fact that women seem to be distressed after their first sexual experiences. When Theresa wants to find out more about it, she is again confronted with silence:

BETH. Do you ever wonder what it’s like?

THERESA. All the time. When my eldest sister got married, I thought she’d tell me all about it, we were very close.

BETH. And she did not?

THERESA. She came back from the honeymoon with such a stunned look on her face that I hadn’t the nerve to ask her . . . Do you ever notice the way women giggle a lot before they’re married but they don’t giggle much afterwards? I wonder why? (*Tea* 42)

This way of tabooing describes the Irish attitude towards womanhood and sexuality rather radically, yet accurately. O’Donough raises the question, how women can make reasonable decisions and choices in the world without knowing how their own body works (185). Hence, according to her, this mystification of female bodily functions and the repression of related information contribute substantially to Beth’s and Theresa’s wrong decisions about their marriages (185). Remarkably, even towards her best friend Beth makes use of the ‘order’ to remain a ‘respectable woman’ by being silent about her marital difficulties, although with a bitter undertone:

THERESA. Why didn't you ever mention any of this in your letters?

BETH. I come from a long line of respectable women, who never let themselves down in front of the neighbours.

THERESA. I was never one of the neighbours.

BETH. No, you're the one that got away. (*Tea 60*)

With regard to female decency achieved by silencing women, such as in Beth's case, it is worth noting that Beth's function as the narrator revealing family secrets and her way of gaining knowledge about sexuality to the audience is an actual betrayal of the family and the whole community with its carefully set norms of respectability and loyalty (Fitzpatrick 330). Beth does not pretend to be the omniscient narrator, but by preserving her identity, she gives a more detailed account of what really happened to her and her family. Her voice is one of a more mature Beth than the one we get to know at various stages in her life throughout the play (Roll-Hansen 392-393); a voice that finally seems to have gained the courage to speak out.

5. 2. 6. Women Waiting – Loyalty to Men vs. Loyalty to the State

The image of women bound to the home waiting for their men while the latter fulfil their public duty appears in manifold ways in both works. In *Ourselves Alone* we are initially confronted with this theme in the first scene of act one. Josie is desperately waiting for her lover Cathal O'Donnell, whose marriage is hardly endurable for her and whose arrival is doubtful:

JOSIE. I can't live like this anymore. I sit here night after night wondering
will he come tonight.

DONNA. We are all waiting on men, Josie.

JOSIE. If he has to go away for any other reason than her I can stand it.
(*Ourselves 15-16*)

Considering Donna's own 'waiting situation' Josie's circumstances seem entirely natural to her as she is constantly waiting for her interned fiancé. It is a condition that Donna appears to patiently accept and even welcome as she prefers waiting

for Liam's return after imprisonment to waiting for the British Army to come for him. After all she went through, she resignedly stopped to hope for a better life or even happiness, as "life just turns things out as they are" (*Ourselves* 89). Frieda struggles to comprehend Donna's motivation to wait for someone like her brother Liam, yet admires her persistence for this is loyalty to a beloved person:

FRIEDA. [...] That's the only loyalty I know or care about. Loyalty to someone you love, regardless! I'd like to think if I loved someone I'd follow that person to hell! Politics has nothing to do with it. (*Ourselves* 23)

Frieda, who feels quite lonely at times, is also a 'woman waiting' since she is longing for the true love; someone "to be happy with" (*Ourselves* 34). By contrast, the only true loyalty the male members of the family have is towards their community and its ideology of a united Ireland. As a dutiful and loyal participant of the Republican movement Josie at least outwardly confirms this radical view point. She is therefore particularly worried about Frieda, who is spending time "where the Officials hang out" (*Ourselves* 22) and who is in touch with the Protestant John McDermot, since she could be abused as an informant. That in times of the Troubles loyalty between old friends becomes invalid as soon as they differ in their ideologies is clearly expressed by Josie:

FRIEDA. [...] John McDermot is an old friend. You used to like him yourself when he was Liam's mate.
 JOSIE. Not these days, my girl. The only loyalties you are allowed are ideological. (*Ourselves* 22)

What the passionate socialist McDermot obviously shares with Josie is the priority when ranking ideology and personal reasons, as opposed to Frieda, to whom the person is paramount:

MCDERMOT. There are no personal reasons anymore. Everything is political.
 FRIEDA. On the contrary, I tend to judge ideas by the people who utter them. (*Ourselves* 61)

Non-political Frieda particularly interprets Josie's attitude as nonsense, when contemplating Liam's unstable, politically motivated loyalty. As a 'political follower' Liam failed to adhere to one political loyalty, not least because since the beginning of the Troubles numerous splits and discrepancies within the Republican movement have provided opportunities to do so:

FRIEDA. Balony! Look at her! She's not living with an ideology. My brother's changed his political line three times at least since 'sixty-nine. He joined the Officials when they split with the Provos, then the INLA when they split from the Officials; the last time he was out on parole he was impersonating votes for the Sinn Fein election. And I hear lately while he's in the Kesh he's joined the Provos! Now what does that tell us – apart from the fact that he's a relentless political opportunist?
(*Ourselves* 22)

Josie's radical view that "there are no personal differences between one person and another that are not political" (*Ourselves* 23) might originate in her personal negative experiences with Cathal O'Donnell. As opposed to Josie, who would have been willing to wait two years "for the right man" (*Ourselves* 43, O'Donnell does not wait for her:

JOSIE. He knew I was going to be there, but he didn't wait! [...] He left before I arrived [...]. Half an hour. He's in this town, he talked to Frieda tonight, but he wouldn't wait for me! (*Ourselves* 35)

The women in *Tea in a China Cup* experience war as the source causing their loneliness, as they are left behind while their men fight at war. Pelan points out that "Reid [...] sharply contrasts heroic male war stories with women's perception of war as an experience of abandonment, loneliness, and isolation" (89). Until the women finally receive the notification of the men's life or death, they are left behind waiting in uncertainty. The 'Samuels' in *Tea in a China Cup* are linked by their military career; a relation that is metaphorically expressed by their identical names. That little Sammy might have to face the same fate as his uncle is illustrated symbolically in the first act: simultaneously to Samuel's departure to France Sarah is anxiously searching for the missing three-year old Sammy; a situation indicating

his future absence. In act two this kind of departure is recreated when Sammy is leaving for war more than twenty years later (Roche 232).

Men in *Tea in a China Cup* are not only absent due to war, but also because they appear to avoid their responsibilities as husbands. This is represented by the fact that Reid does not even provide a separate role for Sarah's husband, who is only indirectly referred to throughout the play. All we learn about him is mostly his vices of betting at the dog track and spending his wages on endless stays in the pub, while his wife is waiting at home meeting the requirements of a skilled housewife and mother. Even when their child is due, Sarah is left alone without any means to go to the hospital:

SARAH. I've no money for a taxi... I've no money for anything... he hasn't been home for two days... not since he lifted his wages. (*Tea*, 22)

Sarah's mother, who is calmly coordinating the emergency situation, does not seem to be surprised about her daughter's plight, not least because she has possibly led a similarly difficult marriage. Her own experiences make her strong and resistant against those daily burdens since she has often been forced to manage her life independently. Presumably just like Sarah's husband, Beth's grandfather handles difficulties, such as the grief about Samuel, by running away from them and drowning them at the pub. How resilient Beth's grandmother has meanwhile become shows the cynical way she deals with her husband:

GRANDFATHER. I'm away to the pub for a bit of cheerful company.
GRANDMOTHER. You're late today. Your owl stomach's probably beginnin' to wonder if your throat's cut. (*Tea* 46)

When her husband refers to the possibility of receiving money as a result of Samuel's death in the war, she even appreciates having to stay at home and wait:

The Grandmother takes some money from her purse and hands it to the Grandfather.

GRANDMOTHER. Here, away down to the pub and give my head peace.
(*Tea* 20)

The price of a marriage to a professionally successful husband already becomes apparent in Beth's wedding night when she is waiting alone in their hotel room while her husband is meeting some clients in the bar. Beth is looking for comfort and understanding by calling her childhood friend Theresa and to amusedly thank her for an ironic gift, a book entitled "*The Invisible Man*" (*Tea* 53). Yet, for Beth the gift does not only revive amusing memories, as its title also conveys a depressing reference to her current situation. Although set in a different time and context, there are striking parallels to her mother's and grandmother's marriages. All three women are neglected by their men, who in addition are not able to deal with money due to the temptation of pubs, betting at dog tracks or speculating at the stock exchange. Thus, men in *Tea in a China Cup* are portrayed as 'failed patriarchs', as opposed to the suppressive and controlling male characters in *Ourselves Alone*. Despite men's disloyal behaviour, social conventions dictate that the women in both plays are meant to loyally stick to their male partners. However, this 'female loyalty' starts to be questioned by the younger generation of female characters in *Tea in a China Cup* and *Ourselves Alone*. Neither of the young women Beth, Theresa, Donna, Frieda and Josie stays in her original relationship; a development that illustrates how opportunities for women start to change at a time that is marked by upheavals regarding women's rights.

The loyalty or disloyalty to men is also revealed in the loyalty to the state. Particularly Sarah embodies faithful loyalty on both sides: all her life she has been stuck with her unreliable husband and when she is eventually waiting for her death, she is only counting the days until the 12th of July, which illustrates how deeply she is rooted in the Protestant community. Nevertheless, the loyalty to men 'swallows up' women's identity, which is expressed by Beth on the eve of her wedding:

BETH. I'm getting married tomorrow, I'm moving from my mother's house to Stephen's house. . . I've been my mother's daughter, and now I'm going to be Stephen's wife . . . I've never been just me. (*Tea* 50)

Expressing her discomfort about her own community and her arising disloyalty towards men Frieda's complaint is quite similar to Beth's:

FRIEDA. When did I ever have the chance to be myself? My father was interned before I was born. My brother's in the Kesh for bank robbery. You mention the name McCoy in this neighbourhood, people start walking away from you backwards. I'm fed up with living here, this place is a hole! (*Ourselves* 21)

The fact that it is the Catholic women who seek to find their fulfilment in England is a striking detail in both plays. In *Ourselves Alone* it is Frieda who claims that she doesn't see herself as "that kind of Irish" from the South (*Ourselves* 89), and whose disloyalty to Irish Nationalism and her critical judgement of the Troubles is a disgrace for Malachy and the entire Republican movement. Donna's childhood memories about kicking Frieda out of bed as she kept on turning are a prognosis of Frieda's future attitude and the fact that Malachy will 'kick her out' of the family too (Wood 300). The play finishes with the juxtaposition of the image of the girls fleeing "to swim leaving the men arguing on the beach" (90) and her final realisation: "it's not [McDermot]; it is Ireland I am leaving" (90). This image in combination with Frieda's desire to implement her dream of making her own music accompanied by her packing and unpacking represents the central issue of emigration from troubled, man-centred Northern Ireland and is also a central theme in *Ourselves Alone* (Fritzpatrick 326).

"The importance of place, of departure and returns, of journeys away" (Cerquoni "Women in Rooms" 161) characterizes all of Devlin's works and particularly "England regularly features as a means of escape for Northern Irish women in the plays of Anne Devlin, a place where they go to find, or be, themselves" (MacGurk 54). Choosing disloyalty and the exile over the home for the sake of art is a phenomenon that numerous Irish went through, with Joyce and Beckett

presumably representing the most famous examples (Lojek 62). Devlin describes her own 'disloyalty to her nation' as follows:

I feel I'm not at home in Ireland and I'm not at home in England, in the sense of where I should be and who I'm writing for. I have this feeling that I go to places for a while and then I move on....What I'm saying is that I have to keep moving – it's as if I can't put down roots, history won't let me. I do have a sense of a real absence of roots, but I think that's not just my experience ("About that" 96)

Catholic women in Northern Ireland appear to be burdened twice as they are not only restricted by Protestant authority, but also by their own community's controlling value system. Hence, in *Tea in a China Cup* it is Catholic Theresa who is leaving for London in order to flee from the conservative Belfast society not to "end up marrying some boozy Catholic layabout who'll give [her] a baby a year and little else" (*Tea* 41). Nonetheless, she does not necessarily encounter a better life in England. By contrast, Reid, who stems from a Protestant background and considers herself as Irish rather than British, states that in Northern Ireland Protestants were taught to be proud to be Irish, and even more to be British. However, "really they don't like the English very much. [...] And they don't like going away to live in England, sort of letting the side down. [...] It's ridiculous, they just want an English set of values and an English set of rules" (qtd. in Doyle 80).

5. 2. 7. Women Betrayed

Betrayal is a theme evident in a variety of ways in the two works, particularly in *Ourselves Alone*. As Wood sums up the issue in Devlin's play:

Men do not feature well in *Ourselves Alone*, even those who seem to be trustworthy and supportive. [...] Although the lives of all three women revolve around men, however, it's obvious that men can't be trusted. They lie, cheat, and manipulate their way through women's lives. (303)

Malachy, who outwardly pretends to be a caring father providing candy for his 'little' daughters, in fact only tolerates those who support his political view and turns violent when one of them does not comply. Moreover, Cathal O'Donnell betrays his wife, whereas he denies committing himself to Josie. Also Donna, even though wrongly accused of infidelity by Liam, has been deceived by Liam several times. The incarnation of betrayal, however, is the spy Joe Conran, who deceives the IRA. Nonetheless, Conran not only betrays the IRA, but also Josie, whom he merely used for his own needs as a spy until he abandons her during her pregnancy (Wood 303):

JOE. I hate tots! I hate this whole fertility business! I'm not interested in fucking children! [...] Of course I'll be with you. But you mustn't depend on me [...]. (*Ourselves* 78)

Demanding from Josie to abort her child Liam not only regards Joe as a traitor, but also Josie, who is carrying "an enemy fetus" (Rea 214). For Liam, Josie represents a potential danger of treachery and her body symbolizes inadequately monitored national territory: "Joe has not only penetrated the national boundary between definitions of 'English' and 'Irish' but he has also impregnated one of the daughters of the nation: a threat to Malachy's and Liam's masculine authority to their nation" (Rea 214). Rea raises an interesting aspect when she argues that Josie's, Cathal's and Malachy's failure to distinguish between an alleged IRA man and a member of the British Army is a crucial challenge of the nationalists' entrenched principle that a person is defined by national identity. Liam is the only one who has always been suspicious of Conran and thus represents a member "of the new, increasingly uncompromising generation of nationalists" (Rea 214). In her chapter "Brits behaving badly" Elisabeth Butler Cullingford remarks that Devlin breaks a traditional convention by letting an English informant triumph over an Irish one, which she affiliates to Devlin's upbringing by the Northern Irish trade unionist Paddy Devlin (85). Nevertheless, Joe Conran's character is one of the most treacherous English figures in twentieth-century Irish drama (Cullingford 85).

By contrast, Reid's play does not feature political treason, neither cases of adultery. However, men in *Tea in a China Cup* betray their women by secretly gambling at the dog tracks or speculating with money at the stock market. What these numerous forms of betrayal evident in both plays have in common is that all the women involved are left behind in a distinctly disadvantageous position.

6. Conclusion

The saddest thing I heard in my travels around the North was women saying, “Oh, we’ve played a big part in these Troubles.” Then you find that their “big role” was banging garbage lids to signal the arrival of British troops, or making sandwiches and tea for the lads. “Oh we’ve really changed and grown because of the Troubles”, they say, and then admit that their “growth” is the discovery that they can run their households and raise their children by themselves if their men are dead or in prison, and many times they discovered that they like it better that way. (E. Shannon 248-249).

The primary purpose of this thesis was to demonstrate that the two communities that have fought out the Northern Ireland Conflict are constructed according to predominantly masculine norms and traditions with clearly divided, gender-specific roles. Particularly Republicanism is almost entirely based on a construct set up by men who “[seek] to exercise control of women, the family, sexuality, the home, and reproduction as part of its formulation of national identity” (Rea 222). While political and paramilitary violence has shaped Republican women’s everyday life and their home, Unionism has rather urged its women to a fundamental loyalty to the English ‘mother country’ and a life according to Protestant ‘decency’ and ‘humility’. Although differing on the surface, both communities, whether contemplated from a political or a religious angle, feature similar suppressive elements that restrict Northern Irish women in the development of their personal identity and self-fulfilment.

The investigation of *Ourselves Alone* and *Tea in a China Cup* has attempted to reveal these significant similarities between gender norms in Republican and Unionist communities addressed by Reid and Devlin. All in all, even though the plays’ plots originate from different backgrounds, they relate to the same fundamental issues. Both authors focus on Northern Irish women and their strong sense of unity, their repression and silence in a male-orientated public world and the expression of female identity and community via the domestic world and its

symbols. In both works female characters, such as Frieda and Beth, attempt to critically question the Troubles and the principles and values that the patriarchal authority in their communities has determined. Having categorised the literary analysis into seven subjects it has turned out that all of these themes, such as women's duties, symbolism and traditions or domestic violence – to name but a few – are marked by an interplay of the sectarian and politically tensed environment of late 20th century Northern Ireland and a rigid patriarchal order. Thus, in the plays each of the seven subjects that have been attributed to the female protagonists in the domestic world has to a certain extent a dominant, masculine 'equivalent' in the public world.

While men's duty is to defend the nation in wars or paramilitary action, women are meant to fulfil their duty in the background, either as supporters in the Republican movement or as ambitious housewives and mothers. Crucial symbols in the plays can be clearly ascribed to either the feminized domestic sphere, or the masculinized public sphere which is marked by 'participation' in wars. Sectarian prejudices and discrimination, a disturbing consequence of the Northern Ireland Conflict, has an additional devastating influence on certain women who are in many respects disadvantaged in society anyway; an aspect that has particularly been pointed out with regard to Reid's work. Moreover, the analysis has revealed how the violence that men use against the opponent within the political conflict in Northern Ireland is in some way also transferred to the home and used against women. Silence imposed on women is yet another aspect women are exposed to in order to 'function' under male hegemony. Furthermore, the women in the plays attempt to adapt themselves either willingly, like as Sarah in *Tea in a China Cup*, or unwillingly, like the majority of the female characters in both works, to the society's norms and values. Hence, they develop a faithful loyalty not only towards their community, but also towards men. In the plays both authors represent this issue via women's constant waiting for their publicly active men and once again the boundaries between the public and the private spheres are merging. In addition, as especially evident in *Ourselves Alone*, political treason and betrayal within relationships are sometimes also interrelated.

Christina Reid and Anne Devlin, the pioneers of critical Irish women playwrights in the 1980s, have transferred the discussion about women's position in Northern Ireland to the stage. Since the gender debate is still an ongoing political matter within Northern Ireland, they have paved the way for further dramaturgical engagement in the issue. In this respect, the theatre has served as a powerful and influential means and will hopefully continue to do so in the future.

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Abstract

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit hat die Textanalyse zweier zeitgenössischer Dramen, welche von zwei nordirischen Dramatikerinnen verfasst wurden, zum grundlegenden Ziel. Es handelt sich hierbei um Anne Devlins *Ourselves Alone* und Christina Reids *Tea in a China Cup*. Die Analyse der Dramen basiert vorwiegend auf historischer und ethnographischer Recherche mit dem primären Zweck, den sozialgeschichtlichen und politischen Hintergrund von Frauen im loyalistischen und irisch-republikanischen Umfeld zur Zeit des Nordirlandkonfliktes darzulegen. Das Hauptaugenmerk liegt hierbei darauf, die unterdrückte Position von nordirischen Frauen, sowohl in der patriarchalischen Gesellschaft, als auch innerhalb des Konfliktes, kritisch zu beleuchten.

Ein Überblick zur Geschichte des Nordirlandkonfliktes, der so genannten „Troubles“, befasst sich eingangs mit den Ursprüngen des Konfliktes zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts, seinem Verlauf ab 1969, den Auswirkungen auf die nordirische Gesellschaft, sowie den Friedensverhandlungen gegen Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts. Basierend auf der Relevanz hinsichtlich der beiden Dramen, folgt dem eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Status der Frau in der nordirischen Gesellschaft und ihrer Rolle innerhalb der „Troubles“. Letzteres beschreibt vor allem die politisch und paramilitärisch aktive Beteiligung von protestantischen und katholischen Frauen am Nordirlandkonflikt. Darüberhinaus wird die Situation der Frau hinsichtlich Sexualität, häuslicher Gewalt, Feminismus und ihre Position am nordirischen Arbeitsmarkt zusammengefasst. Schließlich folgt eine allgemeine Darstellung über Dramatikerinnen in der Irischen Theaterwelt des 20. Jahrhunderts und das Bestreben von Frauen in einem männerdominierten, irischen Theater zu bestehen. Frauen leisteten einen erwähnenswerten Beitrag zur Gründung eines staatlichen Theaters, sowohl im Süden als auch im Norden Irlands. Schlüsselfiguren wie Lady Augusta Gregory werden hier besonders hervorgehoben. Insbesondere während der 1980er Jahre konnte sich in Nordirland ein erfolgreicher „weibliches“ Theater positionieren;

eine Zeit in der auch Devlin und Reid ihre ersten großen Erfolge vermerkten. Diese ersten drei Kapitel bilden die Basis, um die Primärtexte im nordirischen Kontext zu lesen und gewähren einen Einblick in den politischen und sozialhistorischen Hintergrund, dem die beiden Dramen zu Grunde liegen. Auch wird verdeutlicht, dass Autorinnen, wie Devlin und Reid, im zeitgenössischen, nordirischen Theater keinesfalls die Norm darstellen. Wie viele weibliche irische Dramatiker, etablierten sich Anne Devlin und Christina Reid in den 1980er Jahren. Es war eine Zeit, in der der Nordirlandkonflikt noch immer ein zentrales Problem darstellte und nur erste, vage Versuche in Richtung einer friedlichen Einigung unternommen wurden. Mit ihren Werken gaben diese Autorinnen den Frauen dieser gewalttätigen und politisch stürmischen Zeit eine Stimme.

Die weiblichen Protagonisten stammen in beiden Stücken aus der Arbeiterschicht Belfasts, in der die untergeordnete Rolle der Frau stets von patriarchalischen Gesellschaftsstrukturen und dem Konflikt in Nordirland geprägt war. Die beiden Dramen unterscheiden sich insofern, als dass in *Ourselves Alone* politische und paramilitärische Aktivität im Vordergrund steht, während der Fokus in *Tea in a China Cup* auf dem häuslichen Bereich liegt. Devlins Stück thematisiert das Leben dreier Frauen im nationalistisch geprägten Umfeld der IRA, in welchem Männer eine absolute Vormachtstellung übernehmen. Es spielt in einer Zeit, in der die IRA neuen Aufschwung nach den IRA-Hungerstreiks in den frühen 1980er Jahren erfuhr und stellt Frauenfiguren, die versuchen, sich von dieser männlich-dominierten Kontrolle zu lösen, dar. Die Textanalyse zeigt vor allem, dass die Dominanz der Männer im privaten Bereich mit ihrer Dominanz in der terroristischen Bewegung einhergeht. In *Tea in a China Cup* hingegen, steht weniger politische Involviertheit der Charaktere, als der häusliche Lebensalltag von protestantischen Frauen aus drei verschiedenen Generationen im Vordergrund. In der Zeitspanne von 1939 bis 1972 fokussiert das Stück vor allem auf traditionelle, protestantische Werte und die Loyalität zum britischen Königreich. Diese uneingeschränkte, politische Loyalität scheint sich in gewisser Weise in der Loyalität der Frauen zu ihren Männern widerzuspiegeln; zu stereotypisch dargestellten, irischen Ehemännern, die ihre Zeit in Pubs verbringen

oder ihr Einkommen verwetten, aber auch als „treue Soldaten“ für „King and Crown“ kämpfen. Was beide Stücke verbindet, sind starke patriarchalische Strukturen, welche die weiblichen Protagonisten bewusst, und teilweise auch unbewusst, zu durchbrechen versuchen. Einigen von ihnen gelingt dies tatsächlich, für andere bestimmt letztendlich weiterhin ein veraltetes Wertesystem ihren untergeordneten Status. Unterteilt in sieben verschiedene Themenbereiche, wie zum Beispiel ‘Women’s Duties’, ‘Domestic vs. Political Symbolism’ oder ‘Women Silenced’, wird in dieser Arbeit versucht, Gemeinsamkeiten der beiden Stücke hinsichtlich der Darstellung von Frauen im Kontext Nordirlands hervorzuheben und differenziert zu thematisieren.

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