4. Sitting on Your Politics
The Irish Among the British and the Women Among the Irish

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'I put aside all my political ideas and Irishness years ago. It gets you nowhere in this country. I just sit on it.'[1]

This chapter examines the lives of the Irish in Britain, with particular reference to the role of Irish women in generating radical discourses about their position in British and in Irish society. Using converging critiques of race, class and gender it locates the Irish woman and her community in contemporary Britain. It argues that theorising about 'Irishness' in Britain involves theorising about 'Britishness', and suggests that the emancipation of Irish femininity is inseparable from that of Irish men. It further argues that any understanding of Irish life abroad can only emerge from a grasp of the dynamics of 'Irishness' at home.

Any theoretical framework which seeks to locate the Irish woman in British society will have to be a complex one. This is because the Irish woman here stands at the intersection of many powerful political forces which contest each other across the stage of her body, her labour and her sense of self. Nevertheless, we cannot reach her through many of the theoretical discourses which have traditionally been used to discuss race, ethnicity, gender, class and identity in Britain. Thus, at least until quite recently, the race-relations debate neglected the position of the Irish in Britain. Theories of migration, on the one hand, tend to ignore the specificity of women's history and labour, keeping instead to patriarchal paradigms which fail to register woman's pivotal role in the production and reproduction of ethnicity and of racial and sexual identity. Feminists also have been at fault here. While claiming to unite all women under an anti-patriarchal banner, they notoriously excluded ethnically-defined and working-class women. Critiques of class, on the other hand, have been marked by a dry, macho syndicalism which banishes the politics of desire from the political agenda. The failure to theorise desire, in particular, naively neglects underlying networks constructed around the libido and the taboo. These in turn underlie many of the national, economic and legal structures. They also underpin much academic theorising about race, identity and gender in British society.

The theorising which is most relevant to the position of Irish women in Britain is probably that of Third World feminists on national social formations. Here too, however, the Irish have been noticeable for their invisibility, a fact brought home to this writer while reading the work of the African-American feminist, bell hooks. At one point in her essay 'Representing Whiteness', hooks suddenly generalises all 'whiteness' as dominant and colonising. In so doing, she ignores the Irish experience as one of several exceptions to the rule of white coloniser/coloured colonised.[2]

This chapter argues that Irish people, and Irish women in particular, must theorise their own location in political space. Surveying extreme polarisations within gender-roles, the obliteration of personal experience, the taboo on desire, the active construction of collective silences, it shows how all these strategies work together to dissolve and distance discontent, protest and desire within Irish women and Irish communities in Britain. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first looks at the low profile of the Irish in contemporary Britain. The second is a brief discussion of their representations in the media and in popular culture. Section three examines Irish social networks in Britain, paying particular attention to the role of class and gender in their formation. Section four is a brief discussion of the Irish home and family life in Britain. Section five considers the psychological health and dilemmas of the Irish under the headings of inner conflicts and migrations for abortions. The chapter concludes with discussion on the specificity of the Irish female body and suggests ways in which Irishness can generate radical discourses about 'otherness' and sexuality in national and international contexts.

THE IRISH IN BRITAIN: THE LOW PROFILE OF A LARGE BODY

Most commentators agree that the Irish community in Britain has a low profile which belies its numerical strength. This low profile in turn disguises important social class and gender divisions within this community. Divisions of class, colonial politics and sexual politics probably cut even more trenchantly within the immigrant community here than they do among the mainland Irish. Moreover, public debates around these issues are not as vocal here as they are in the Republic. In Britain, indeed, 'Irishness' could seem like an irrelevant single thread weaving through the fabric of lives which are very different in terms of privilege, gender and status.

The very status of Irishness and Irish immigrants also problematises the experience of all classes of Irish people in ways which dominant discourses often overlook. Thus, for example, representations of Irish emigration to Britain as straightforward opportunism have been common in Ireland since the early 1980s. This view presents emigrants as pursuing the capitalist dream. The much-quoted interview with Brian Lenihan covered in *Newsweek* in 1987 bears this out. Lenihan remarked:

> I don't look on the type of emigration we have today as being of the same category as the terrible emigration of the last century . . . What we have now is a very literate emigrant who thinks nothing of coming to the United States and going back to Ireland and maybe on to Germany and back to Ireland again . . . We regard them as part of a global generation of Irish people . . . We should be proud of it. After all, we can't all live on a small island.[3]

Mac Laughlin and others have shown that only small proportions of Irish emigrants in Britain end up in middle-class professional occupations.[4] The majority, both male and female, are still in working-class and lower middle-class jobs. This notion of economic opportunism is further undercut when we introduce critiques of sexism and racism into debates about recent Irish emigration. These reveal the racial politics which underlie all decolonising ethnicities, including Irishness in all its social class contexts.

Unlike in the United States, where Irish-Americans constitute a potentially powerful political lobby of over 40 million voters, the Irish in Britain have no such high profile. Neither do they have powerful charismatic leaders who exercise political and financial power on their behalf. Numerically, they occupy similar proportions in the two countries. However, the political environment within which Irish lives are lived out in Britain and the United States is quite different. Overt displays of Irishness around nationalism and ethnicity, commonplace in the US, are unthinkable and dangerous in Britain. The numerical strength of the Irish in Britain, together with their ethnically-distinct concept of themselves, seem to be contradicted by this remarkably low profile. Moreover, the home-based quality of Irish ethnicity in Britain, fostered also in low-key social clubs, together with the anonymity afforded by their white skin, is in marked contrast to the high visibility of the Afro-Caribbean community with its colourful emphasis on street-life and youth culture. Their low profile has rendered the racial trajectory of the Irish a relatively safer one, even as they negotiated the fall-out of the IRA bombing campaign in Britain in recent decades.

Representations

Outside negative images of Irishness constructed around notions of 'mad bombers', the Irish community in Britain has very little contact with the British media. There is no anti-racist organisation which patrols the national media on their behalf. A blind eye is turned on events like the annual Roundwood Irish Festival which can draw crowds of 100,000.[5] Although some Irish male personalities have become minor icons of British television over the years (most notably Gay Byrne, Eamonn Andrews, Terry Wogan, Bob Geldof and Dr Anthony Clare), this assimilation tends to 'screen out' any specific Irishness which could raise political anomalies to the surface of popular consciousness.

One of the most prominent Irish female voices resident in the British press is that of Mary Kenny, columnist with the *Daily Telegraph*. Kenny articulates a neo-conservative perspective on many issues, not least on sexual politics, and describes herself as a 'Women's Liberation Revisionist'.[6] The *Guardian* occasionally imports columns from journalists like Fintan O'Toole and Conor Cruise O'Brien. Famous Irish women who have set up permanent or temporary home in Britain, such as Maeve Binchy, Edna O'Brien and Sinéad O'Connor, are on occasion interviewed as individual artists by specialist publications initiated from Ireland. They are rarely consulted by the popular media for comment on issues such as sexual politics, Irish-British relations or immigrant life in Britain.[7]

This means that Irishness appears in British media only sporadically and problematically. Officially, Irishness is something which happens elsewhere and which periodically irrupts into British consciousness at times when Irishness, viewed like a troublesome, quirky child, is seen to demand a response from the weary, perplexed, benign elder of Britishness. These 'irruptions' range across a spectrum from – most violently – Irish paramilitary bombs exploding in England to – more meaninglessly – the quaint debates and referenda around issues like divorce and abortion which have recently featured very highly on the Irish political agenda 'back home'. From authoritarian outrage to a casual voyeurism, these journalistic moments respond to Irishness as if it called from the far, anachronistic reaches of empire and completely ignore the strong Irish presence in Britain. This active 'unseeing' is maintained very thoroughly in more popular media. In Britain, Irishness is simply not represented in advertising, pop-music, television or in computer-iconography. In terms of market forces alone, it seems strange that designers, marketers and advertisers do not 'bait' the large Irish population with images and references which mirror Irishness in a saleable fashion. In countries like France, Holland and Germany, where Irishness is a relatively neutral and even romanticised label, products such as mineral water, dairy foods, clothing, alcohol, glassware, holidays and music are all marketed from a platform of specifically Irish imagery. This promotes a mythopoetic representation of Ireland, figuring 'positive' Irish stereotypes like hospitality, beauty, artistry, naturalness and Celtic mystique. Such 'positive' Irish stereotypes do not figure in popular British media. For anyone familiar with the exigencies of Irish life in England, it is difficult even to imagine them appearing here.

This absence of the Irish face from the national marketplace cannot be simply dismissed as the avoidance of a politically-sensitive issue. The profiteering attentions of market-promoting media do not respect the boundaries around problematised collectives, or at least not without very deep reason. Instead, where profitable, consumer advertising and product marketing increasingly zone in on the ethnic in order to commodify ethnicity as a saleable, 'packagable' product. Images of Black bodies, lesbians and gay men, Native Americans and their traditions, and the people, landscapes and artifacts of the Third World are

currently in wide use as ethnic or sexual 'wrapping' for the sale of anything from trinkets to cars.

The ethnic gloss in which many of these objects are packaged can also be a double investment. This is particularly so in the commodification of Black bodies and Black culture. Here certain products, like music, clothes, boots and shoes, sports gear, sound equipment, are marketed directly at young Black males. The images of Blackness which they feature serve in turn as glamourised trademarks which embellish sales among other groups, while all the time fortifying racist representations of Blacks in Britain. This repertoire keeps Blacks marginally visible in public media, but only as commodified bodies which are marketplace symbols signalling sporting, animal, unconscious, entertaining or hypersexual energies. This shows that the advertising industry and sales managers willingly risk alienating non-sympathetic customers in order to corner an expanding market. They also actively stimulate the 'lure and loathing' dynamic latent in all mainstream relations with problematised identities, teasing the desire/repulsion ambivalence in which the dominant norm and the disinherited 'other' hold each other.[8] The fact that popular and commercial media in no way engage this, or any other dynamic, between Irishness and Britishness indicates the degree to which Irishness must remain suppressed within the British political unconscious. It stands out by its absence in a cultural marketplace where other problematised identities like the black, lesbian and HIV+ are now ceaselessly and ambivalently engaged.

Of course, as immigrants, the Irish in Britain have been thoroughly commodified as labour across Britain, and across British history (see Mac Laughlin, chapter five in this volume). However, the point being made here is that British society intensely suppresses the imagery, cultural voice and subjectivity of Irishness in direct proportion to its quiet commodification of Irish labour. This analysis in no way suggests that cultural commodification of Irishness by Britain would be a welcome development. Rather, it simply highlights an utter difference, showing that instead of appearing within the arena of minority 'differences', the Irish in Britain are treated as so 'different' that they fall outside the spectrum of all hegemonic discourses in Britain.

The languages of mainland Irishness are in this decade thawing into catalytic discourses of lamentation, catharsis and reconciliation around diverse, frozen issues like the Famine and the hypocritical stance of the Catholic Church on issues like child sexual abuse, sexual abuse in general and gay and lesbian politics. These voices are energising an emergent culture which is attempting to frame new concepts for areas like divorce, gay legislation and hostilities in Northern Ireland. Around Irish people in England, however, there is a different climate which shows no particular thaw at this time. If Ireland is emerging, Britain would seem to linger still in an intensifying post-imperial crisis and is not yet ready to allow discourse around its own amnesiac numbness about the horrors of its past in Ireland.

However, the Irish Republic suppresses representations of emigrants' lives too. Audio-visual media in Ireland are flooded with fictionalised entertainment from the United States, Britain and Australia. The daily realities of Irish life in these places are never broadcast. The monocultural insularity of mainland Ireland, with its own stringent anti-immigrant policies, is largely ignored. There is a need for inclusion in the school syllabus programmes of information and debate on race relations, colour politics, migration and ethnicity. For at least a decade, host countries like Britain, France and Germany have felt obliged to include these studies in their school subjects. As the immigrants directly concerned, Irish youth needs this even more. Through video links, letter writing, holiday exchanges, electronic-mail, research projects and joint newsletters, Irish schools and colleges can link up to the racial, social and sexual realities of life for students of Irish origin in schools abroad, while Irish church communities and parishes can twin with their counterparts abroad.

We also need regular live connections on Irish television with events in Irish centres abroad, as well as regular columns in newspapers at home on life in the Irish diaspora. Such social and political links with life at home can prevent the ethnicity of the Irish in Britain from closing into a reactionary nostalgia. They can also help them reshape the country to which so many of them say they want to return. Crucially, it can open the channels of liberalising feedback as well as realistically preparing future emigrants. There is a tradition of audiovisual link-up on Irish TV and radio in a 'holiday' context, making contact with emigrants at Christmas and Saint Patrick's Day, but systematically avoiding their daily lives.

The silencing of the Irish woman in Britain is bolstered by her own government's censorship of her emigration. Irish Catholic views of femininity severely censure the mobile, independent, single or adventurous woman. State and Church collude to enshrine within the Irish Constitution the view that by her life 'within the home' woman 'gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved'. This cult of a femininity, safely gelled into a parochial and domestic context, discounts the experience of generations of Irish women who have sought their fortunes across the globe. Neither can we rely on Irish theorists for objective representations of the emigrant Irish. They frequently display an introjected anti-Irish racism where the derisive colonial discourse still speaks through their thinking. A chapter from a prominent book written in 1990 on the migrant Irish, which was hailed by another important Irish studies publication as 'a major essay', has this to say about the Irish in Britain:

> (They) may get called 'bloody Micks' or 'bog-Irish' (but) in Britain, there never has been a really rude word for the Irish . . . (With) the native cunning, all the petty prejudices and simple virtues of an island people . . ., (a) stream of irresponsible Irish people were constantly appearing before employers, landladies, welfare officers . . . (As) inadequate personalities who came looking for the 'geographical cure', something almost endemic in the Irish emigrant situation . . ., their faults were in themselves.[9]

A look at two recent British press reports about Irishness, one from the left and one from the right, further clarifies social attitudes towards the Irish in Britain. In a rare feature on Irish immigrants, the left-leaning *Guardian* echoed the Irish government's notion that Irish immigrants are assimilated into the British middle-class. In an article entitled 'New Irish Bury Paddy Myth', it was suggested that recent Irish immigrants are predominantly university-educated people who are 'twice as well qualified' as their British peers, integrating into the middle-class lifestyles of British urban centres. It was further suggested that 'wine-bar chic' is now the dominant social tone of the London Irish. This was 'supported' by remarks from one frequenter of the Irish wine-bar scene who said that 'there's very little talk ever about discrimination' nowadays. The article asserted that the phenomenon of contemporary Irish education 'debunks the racist stereotype of a thick Paddy.'[10] Printed within a new, regular section which bore the highly ambivalent title of 'Ethnic Monitoring', the feature was riddled with racist, class-prejudiced assumptions, all glossed over into the supposedly liberal sort of package which race-theorist, bell hooks, derides as 'ethnic cool'. Days later the *Guardian* published a deconstruction of their racist 'anti-racist' article by the present writer, including the reminder that:

> it is wholly congruous that 'there's very little talk ever about discrimination' among the professionals in the wine bars . . . Discrimination arises in response to display of difference. Seamless participation in the international bourgeoisie doesn't provoke it. But the merest mention of the truths of Irish/British history usually does.[11]

The paper closed the debate with a firm reassertion of its own ambivalence about Irishness. It achieved this by inventing its own title for this writer's critical text and publishing it under the title: 'Heard the one about the Irish stereotype?' This firmly relocated debate and theorising about Irishness back to the realm of the joke, while skilfully maintaining editorial ambivalence. On one hand, the 'joke' might be on the *Guardian* for having been exposed as racist within its own anti-racist feature. On the other, the title of the above article takes refuge in the stream of British discourse which characterises all Irish contestation and intervention as trivial, over-sensitive, hysterical and essentially comic.

That debate took place across the supposedly anti-racist press. On the right, however, there is no such ambivalence and the joke of Irishness can be a vehicle for more explicit violences. On learning of a proposed research project into anti-Irish racism in 1994, the *Sun* offered researchers a 'flying start' by printing 41 anti-Irish jokes lambasting the sexuality, accent, and supposed stupidity and irrationality of Irish people.[12] Importantly, the joke was used here to dismantle Irish subjectivity across all classes, targeting the doctor alongside the labourer. The jokes depicted all the pivotal experiences traditional to Irish immigrants, thus dramatising the debasement of Irish people not in a vague, hypothetical dimension but systematically, in their actual encounters with British people, with British locations and with British lifestyles. They ranged over the topics of Irish emigration, homelessness, alcoholism, the breakdown of rural Irish communities, Irish people's linguistic misunderstanding in conversation with the English and their unfamiliarity with British versions of daily landmarks like shops, lift-doors and road signs.[13]

The joke is a very significant hinge in Irish-British relations because it is one of the few locations or moments when reference to Irishness rises to the surface of British discourse. Politically, it matters because it simultaneously expresses and obscures racism, facilitating racist interaction while with the same gesture exculpating it as mere fun. When directly addressed to an Irish person, it can constitute an invitation to social bonding which rests on an oblique, mutual awareness of the uneven power-relations which the Irish person is invited to accept. The loaded dynamic typical of Irish jokes in British discourse cannot be carried over so lightly into joking with, or about, Blacks or Asians, where there is no sharing of white skin to disguise and whitewash the power-relations. As *Feminist Review* remarked about the Irish joke issue of the *Sun*, 'It is hard to think of any other group in Britain against whom such practices could go unchallenged'.[14]

Social Networks and the Irish in Britain

Rather than extroverted campaigns of statement, protest and agitation, the Irish community has tended instead to rely on its own informal, discreet network of self-help to resolve the problem of Irishness in contemporary Britain. Across the meeting-grounds of Church, pub and social-club, this network operates through clergy, Irish job recruiters, Irish Centre workers, housewives and volunteers. It organises the distribution of employment, the maintenance of Irish culture, language and arts, social and leisure activities as well as orchestrating the reception of fresh immigrants, helping to provide them with housing, employment, social welfare, orientation and support. This networking is, of course, a feature of Irish immigrant communities everywhere, but the difference in Britain is the fact that it may not be periodically celebrated before the host community as it often is elsewhere.

One report has recently argued that the reason for the prevalence of informal networks is 'the reluctance of Irish people to access statutory and (formal) voluntary services'.[15] This 1994 survey carried out by the Charities Evaluation Services attributed this to the:

> stigma attached to relying on the welfare system and 'anti-Irish racism' in services which fail 'to provide a culturally sensitive service'. Furthermore, it has been established that Irish women, in particular, fail to assert themselves in demanding their rights of such agencies. The 1993 London Irish Women's Centre Report

revealed that 'demands upon . . . welfare agencies in terms of gender breakdown on average show a 66% men to 33% women ratio' and in housing services, 'a startling average of 80% men to 20% women'.[16]

Irish women's contribution to unofficial services in their community is the sort of informal, unpaid social work to which patriarchy has traditionally confined women. This is also something at which they have come to excel. The London Irish Women's Centre, for example, cites as an illustration of this the 'Care in the Community' policy currently being instituted to minimise psychiatric hospitalisations under the National Health Service. It is clear that the relegation of patients to the 'community' is a euphemism for their transfer to the unpaid nursing and caring performed by women in the home and neighbourhood.[17] Their activities in these spheres leave Irish women's contribution to the maintenance of their community difficult to quantify by traditional methods.

On top of their community-centered activities, it still seems to be the norm for Irish women to shoulder most of the burden of child-rearing. For an immigrant woman, family management extends from the battle for accommodation to the negotiation of the ever-tightening National Health and social-welfare systems and on to the fielding of racist or harassing treatment of her children in Britain's huge, unfamiliar, multi-cultural schools. One might expect Irish women's single-handed parenting to be changing in the 1990s, but the pattern may actually be intensifying as the social climate allows more and more women to leave unhappy relationships, or to choose to have children alone. In 1993, 49 per cent of the Irish mothers using social services in the London area were single parents.[18] Now that divorce is instituted in the Republic of Ireland, there may well be a sharp rise in single-parent families in the Irish community in Britain.

The informal, but crucial, community-within-a-community has done its best to serve vulnerable groups like the elderly, children, the homeless, the unemployed and the newly-immigrant. However, it cannot do enough. Certain social problems such as mental illness, housing shortage, domestic violence and HIV status, all pressing problems for the general population but intensified for immigrants, need the attention of professional agencies. Such agencies have not traditionally existed for the Irish, particularly as the latter are still not recognised as a separate ethnic category. The 1994 report, 'The Service Needs of the Irish Community in Britain', declares that:

> Local authorities need to evaluate the information collected in consultation with Irish community organisations and develop an action plan to tackle anti-Irish racism . . . (They must) ensure the needs of Irish people are reflected in the community care plan and adequate resources allocated to meet the needs of Irish service users, especially older people, people with a disability, people with a mental health problem, drug users, alcohol users and Irish people affected by HIV/AIDS . . .'[19]

A major problem with the informal community networking of the Irish is that it can become a self-censoring regime which rejects certain individuals and adopts working practices according to the moral norms it is defending as traditionally Irish. This happens in other immigrant communities also. Thus, Pakistani sociologist Muhammmad Anwar identifies this conservative process as 'incapsulation' which also operates in the Pakistani community.[20] This type of conservatism can hit Irish women particularly badly as lesbianism, reproductive rights, abortion, HIV status, atheism, domestic violence, alcoholism and incest are treated as taboo topics in some or all combinations of Church, Irish social-club and Irish community media. The latter often refuse to help women with these issues. Even if they did, the need for confidentiality might well keep many women away from such networks.

Because the support of women in these neglected areas is a major function of the London Irish Women's Centre and its affiliated Irish Women's Groups around the country, the Centre 'has often evoked hostility from the general Irish community'.[21] It welcomes the tide of women who find themselves in flight from mainland Ireland, on one hand, while censored by the Irish community in Britain, on the other. The Centre organises the annual Irish Women's Conference and attempts, through publicity and cultural activities, to redress the elision of Irish culture and the Irish presence in Britain. However, it must constantly 'make sure we are not discriminated against in the Irish media as well as the mainstream British media'.[22]

The Irish at Work in Britain

Social class

According to a dominant discourse in Ireland, the 'New Irish' abroad are rightful participants in an international labour market where emigration is normalised by market centralisation, by European Union, by the homogenising of global-village transport and communications networks and by non-employment in peripheralised areas.[23] Their commuting between Ireland and the professional labour markets of Europe, the United States and Australia is represented as a dance of success, a story of financial and educational prowess and an exercise of a new liberty in terms of travel, earning-power and lifestyle. Perhaps this view even includes a half-conscious revenge of the colonised as more and more young Irish people, assimilated into the professional class by state-funded university degrees, successfully plunder the job markets abroad. However, this 'New Pride' leaves many stones unturned. As Mac Laughlin argues:

> given the structure and qualifications of recent emigrants, it is difficult to account for the popular view of 'new wave' emigration as an upwardly mobile activity, chiefly attracting high achievers.[24]

In his 1989 survey of 6,000 families in the south and west of Ireland, he found that among their 1,520 emigrants to Britain, 29 per cent had third-level qualifications, 48 per cent were secondary school students with a Leaving Certificate qualification and 23 per cent had only an Intermediate or Group Certificate qualification. Furthermore, 40 per cent of all emigrants in this survey were still teenagers when they emigrated.[25]

Irish immigrant labour patterns also show that gender-stereotyping has clearly survived decades of feminist agitation and still dictates labour options today. Thus, Hazelkorn asserts that despite:

> the recent re-emergence of women into professional and managerial occupations, post-1994 female (Irish) immigrants are most heavily represented in the 'caring' professions of education, health and the welfare (16%), clerical (26%) and catering (16%) . . . Together these areas represent two-thirds of (Irish) female employment. . . While there is a greater range of employment options for (Irish) male immigrants, they are concentrated in construction (37%), metal processing (16%) and administration (13%), representing two-thirds of all Irish male employment.[26]

Her pithy conclusion is worth quoting, reflecting as it does a further complication of the Irish experience of class in Britain, namely the fundamental lack of solidarity which capitalism fosters everywhere between the middle and working classes it creates.

> Irish immigration into the UK reflects the impact of class inequalities of opportunity in line with characteristics of the indigenous society, (that is) the class structure of contemporary capitalism. It is this factor in addition to gender-stereotyping that accounts primarily for the performance of Irish immigrants in the London/UK labour market.[27]

The ties of ethnicity tend to loosen or be repressed out of embarrassment in the encounter between a homeless Irish person, or an Irish Traveller begging their way along a London Underground carriage, and the Irish financier clutching a commuter-briefcase in the seat by the window. Ireland will have to become a very much more radical society before we can assert that our sense of ethnic or cultural belonging overrides our capitalist class-interests.

Although a small proportion of Irish immigrants disperse into the British professions and others flee what they see as the Irish community's 'ghettoised' mentality, the majority continue to rely on the community's informal networks to provide them with employment contacts. In fact, this networking is often cited as an explanation for the maintenance of Irish employment within fixed patterns – in domestic service and factories for women and on the railways, docks and building-sites for men.

Irishness and Gender Issues in Britain Today

The gender-stereotyping evident within Irish immigrant labour merits closer study. A new corpus of oral histories and documentaries is beginning to sketch out the anthropology of the Irish male labourer in Britain. These examine how the myths of the 'Paddy' have recuperated a compensatory empowerment through excellence at risky, demanding labour often eschewed by the 'natives'. Here, dislocation and discrimination are partly subverted within densely-bonded, improvised, homosocial environments. Ryan goes so far as to describe a quasi-military ethos where urban lorries transport nomadic squadrons of Irish men, loyal to their different 'captains', from site to site. This does seem to be borne out by building-site ballads such as 'McAlpine's Fusiliers' and 'Murphy's Volunteers'.[28] Irish men labour to erect the infrastructures of British cities, moving on to vacate them for the middle-class professionals – the doctors, engineers, lawyers, lecturers and business-people, some of them Irish themselves – who will use them. This pattern constitutes:

> an enduring tradition in which young men's working conditions today reproduce the pattern of their grandfathers' lives.[29]

The construction of the identity of the 'Paddy' partly mirrors the story of the Kahnawake Mohawk males who specialise in the dangerous high-steel industry in the US.[30] The Mohawks improvise within urban dislocation a similar, almost ritualistic labour pattern which maintains a positive image for them as men.[31]

The fact that Irish men in Britain have traditionally improvised the compensatory public image of a highly visible urban physicality highlights several important points about hierarchies of representation and disempowerment in contemporary Britain. Their position parallels that of the Black man in Britain and the US who is renowned for his maintenance and projection of some degree of personal power through investment in his bodily self-image. In her essay, 'Representations – Feminism and Black Masculinity', bell hooks explains this phenomenon thus:

> The concern is with the black male image, who will control it, who will represent it. A central aspect of black male aesthetics has always been the construction of an image, particularly the dissembling image.[32]

We urgently need an Irish Men's Movement which will unleash the truth of the Irish man's experience in Britain, however tormented, in the manifold dilemmas of his decolonising, erotic, emigrant, labouring, military and religious worlds. Only when the real discourse of Irish male experience is released will our men cease to punitively project their repressed difficulties onto women.

Although the disinherited male's concerns over his own image are essentially a strategy to assert a threatened virility, the concomitant relegation to the status of a visual body rings strangely of feminine experience. This 'feminisation' of

ethnic men needs to be understood before their female counterparts can be drawn out of invisibility and located in political space. A growing body of theory is currently emerging around such processes, both in terms of 'the feminisation of Ireland by masculine, controlling England', and of the black male by the dominant white culture.[33] These analyses are separate rather than comparative developments.

The gendering inherent in national subordination has long been implicit in the sort of metaphors which describe colonisation as the 'rape' of a nation and the 'castration' of its autonomy. But if imperialist racism 'feminises' men, where does it leave women? I suggest that the dynamic is best understood as a three-tiered hierarchy which descends from full subjectivity down to secondary status as a commodified body-image and on down to the non-status of invisibility and non-representation. Clearly, the second tier is traditionally occupied by women as sexual objects with their male counterparts above them as whole subjects. However, where the entire collective is subordinated by a dominant 'Other' as blacks are by whites or as the Irish are in England, the disempowered male is nudged into second position. He becomes 'staged' as a flimsier object in relation to the primary, dominant male subject. When the projection of physical visibility which is the prerogative of secondary status is the only power left to access, males will occupy it. The females of the disempowered collective then slide from objectified status to complete invisibility below males. This is precisely where Black, Asian and Irish women are struggling from inside British social hierarchies and pyramids of power today. The masculine imagery of 'Paddy' 'hides the existence of Irish women in Britain'.[34]

Here we can rejoin the traditional voices of comment upon the Irish woman in Britain. All are agreed upon her invisibility, although few politically examine it. Commentators remark that she failed to gain a public profile to parallel her 'Paddy' brothers, unlike in the US where a 'Bridget' is synonymous in the public mind with a female domestic worker. Ryan attributes this to the fact that 'Irish girls [*sic*] never had quite the same working-class image in Britain as their men-folk'.[35] For one thing, chambermaids, domestic cleaners and caterers everywhere are expected to remain invisible to the users for whom they daily service buildings. Workers in the construction industry and in road-building, on the other hand, are a highly visible, nomadic presence on the urban landscape of contemporary Britain.

The invisibility of Irish women in modern Britain must be understood within its patriarchal capitalist context before specificity of the Irish experience can be discussed. The fantasy that women do not work is a fundamental construct of capitalism. Images of women as workers are rigorously censored by popular iconography. These are substituted with constructs of women as simply existing and consuming, limiting themselves to acts of sexualised labour only, ranging from the explicitly sexual to working at looking good. To fully control both genders, it is important that patriarchal capitalism 'serves' or sells women to men as luxury items in reward for male labour. Thus, women are figured as products rather than producers. The fact of their extensive, non-sexual labour is carefully suppressed in the capitalist psyche. This is one of the contexts in which the labour of the Irish woman in Britain today is ignored, although Irish women provide many of the essential services that underpin the day-to-day functioning of London.[36] However, we can look further into their invisibility. It could be suggested, for example, that the obscuring of the Irish woman in Britain has not just been incidental to her work. It has been a deliberate concern for dominant sectors of Irish society throughout this century. Her 'enclosedness' was formally engineered by a coalition of family, community, clergy and government at home, together with Catholic clergy and employers in Britain. The reason for this intense protectorate has been, predictably enough, the sexual control of the Irish woman which has always been extremely important to the fragile national psyche ever since the establishment of the Irish Republic. This concern to control women's sexualities was exacerbated for those exporting them to Britain in a way that did not apply when they headed for the United States or Australia. Throughout the colonial period, Ireland's nightmarish territorial anxieties have been expressed and acted out upon the Irish female body in an elaborate theatre of containment and proprietorship. This pattern is common in other decolonising and ethnic societies also, where 'women's bodies have seemed to be a battlefield where the cultural struggles of post-colonial societies were waged'.[37] It was the emigration of multitudes of these bodies to the territory of the former coloniser which raised near-hysterical concerns to restrain the libidinous expression of the Irish female body in Britain. The insistence upon 'sheltering' poor Irish women, in particular, helped to steer their work options, limiting them to jobs which provided immediate, live-in accommodation. Up to 65 per cent of Irish nurses, for instance, have traditionally been recruited from home into pre-arranged jobs and accommodation.[38] In nursing, there was the additional moral 'protection' offered by hospitals overseen by nuns who would undertake the moral control of their charges as diligently as their professional training.[39] This seamless transfer directly from family and Church at home into all-female and religiously-run milieux in England was part of the 'sanitisation' and sanctification of female emigration from Ireland.

Of course, Irish women's stereotyped work environments have traditionally had certain practical benefits for them, just as invisibility can have subversive benefits for any collective. For one thing, they were used to homosocial contexts at home and often missed their mothers and sisters most.[40] They could recoup this feminine solidarity in living with work-mates. They had safe, clean accommodation and were earning money independently now for work which often would have gone unpaid within the home in Ireland. Their public invisibility

also spared them the strongly working-class image of Irish men. This meant that when a chance came for upward social mobility, some Irish women at least could readily profit. As Mac Laughlin and others have shown, one of the benefits of World War II for Irish women and their British counterparts was their wartime access to jobs which had hitherto been closed to them.[41] After the war, many managed to maintain their foothold in fields like clerical work and nursing, as well as gaining access to employment in the new social welfare bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, the 'demonisation' of Irish female emigration to Britain continued. The Catholic Social Welfare Bureau, an organ of the Catholic Church in Ireland, admonished female emigrants in its 1956 Report:

> As in other recent years, registry office marriages, laxity in attendance of religious duties and, in the case of young girls, irresponsible conduct and moral delinquency continue to provide the main case problems.[42]

This discourse around female emigration reflects the fact that the primary locus of this sanctification/demonisation dichotomy in Irishness is the female body and that body's movements, displacements or translations within the intertwining processes of desire, reproduction and emigration. The taboo on the mobile woman is, of course, universal in patriarchal society where physical mobility is damningly associated with sexual freedom in notions of the 'loose' or 'fast' woman. But, for Irish women, physical displacement in emigration does actually equate with greater sexual freedom. This, together with the related fact that Irish women travel more than most, has heightened the taboo. An emotive polarisation between purity and filth is evidently one of the most crippling dysfunctions within Irish discourse as it spreads itself across the whole field of Irish experience.[43]

The 'sanctification' of women's emigration ensured a remarkable feat, namely that the forces which colonise Irish women's sexuality could actually extend their hegemony beyond the national borders to ensure sexual control over 'their' women abroad, especially over those who were single and earning money independently and on their own account. This policing of female sexuality as a response to collective political trauma is common to many nations. In her essay 'Gender and Nation', Yuval-Davis explains how:

> often the distinction between one ethnic group and another is constituted centrally by the sexual behaviour of women.[44]

Viewed thus, women are obsessively projected as 'cultural signifiers' accorded with the task of defining boundaries around the group by the actions and messages which they do or do not engage with their bodies.[45]

The patristic urge to control adult Irish females within paradigms of immaturity and minority is reflected not only in the traditional institutions and discourses of their emigration. It is also evident in the language currently used in the literature of Irish emigration. In 1994, a major Irish studies publication characterised our emigrants in Britain as 'Irishmen' and 'Irish girls'.[46] As well as the implied seniority of the male term, its status as a single, iconic title suggests the robustness of achieved identity. The maintenance of this vigour would seem to require restraining Irish women from the full integration of gendered adulthood and ethnic identity which the potent title of 'Irishwoman' would imply. Similarly, in the statement quoted above about working-class images among 'Irish girls (and) their menfolk', Ryan relegates females to minority or child-like status while elevating males to a doubly-substantive noun which establishes them as at once male, adult and assuredly human (as 'folk').[47]

Overviewing Irish workers in Britain, we see them rigorously channelled into hypertrophied gender-stereotypes, with millions of Irish women intensely engaged in the feeding, cleaning, healing, caring and teaching of Britons and millions of Irish men focussed into clearing, constructing and fabricating the economic landscape of contemporary Britain. Their labour patterns form an exaggerated caricature of the divided gender-roles through which sexism ensures control over all individuals within patriarchal capitalism. Sexism first invades individual subjectivity, splitting off and suppressing the 'masculine' qualities within the female and the 'feminine' within the male. This half-functioning of the self facilitates control over individuals who would revolt if they were responding from the wholly-gendered self. This splitting then extends across society, guaranteeing the suppression of solidarity between the genders, who are left relating across an extreme and punitive polarisation, as they do in Ireland.

It is clear that this destruction of solidarity between the genders is necessary for the subjugation of a collective, as is the case among Blacks in Britain and the US today. As one writer argued:

> As we look at our contemporary past as black people, we see a weakening of political solidarity between the sixties and the nineties, we see a weakening of political solidarity between black men and women. It is crucial for the future black liberation struggle that we remain ever mindful that ours is a shared struggle. . .[48]

We urgently need much more analysis of the ways in which reactionary forces have institutionalised antagonisms between the genders in Irish society since the creation of the 'Free State' in order to deflect attention away from economic and territorial policy problems. Both in Irish labour patterns in Britain and in sexual mores in the Republic, it is clear that revolutionary impulses are split and defused by the repression and depression which sexism institutes.

The Irish Home

Women and Irishness in families

Why do we need an analysis of the Irish immigrant home? We need it because, both in ethnic and sexual terms, the home is fundamentally a political space.

Both the idea and the actual experience of the domestic space embody strong political dynamics for a variety of groups. For differing reasons, all women within patriarchy, and all immigrants within alien societies, stand to be strongly affected by the home. These two sensitivities coincide in the woman immigrant. For Irish women, they are layered over by the intense locus of the home and family within Irish traditions, Irish politics and within the Irish psyche.

Examining Irish home-making in Britain, we discover the path towards the establishment of 'home' to be a deeply gendered trajectory. Standard analyses of the migration patterns of women tend to expect and find that women 'follow' their men in emigration. The home is seen as a naturally-existent entity which passively follows the earning power of the male, with wife and children being sent for and imported once the male can finance them. This perspective, while acknowledging some link between women and the physical, social, emotional, educational and cultural entity that is the domestic home, ignores the almost single-handed physical and social labour of females in the construction of it.

Any exploration of this unpaid, uncredited labour of females in turn exposes the sexist underpinning of our whole society and economy. For the immigrant woman, her labour in the construction of domestic space and the production of citizens will go unacknowledged, as will the home-labour of women of all classes. However, her labour in the socialisation of children will be further problematised by the dilemmas of assimilation. If she chooses to transmit ethnicity to her children, her labour will no longer just pass unacknowledged but may be seen as actively subversive. In Tory Britain, for example, the dominant discourse calls unabashedly for assimilation of immigrants into mainstream society. Here the ethnic woman may be labouring, not just on behalf of the national mores, as do native women, but against them as they present themselves in school subjects the media, legislation, sexual politics and popular opinion. In educating children, she must 'counteract the devaluation of Irish culture in the mainstream media' and 'the total exclusion of any Irish material in the education system'.[49] She also confronts the more general problem of cultural imperialism inherent in school subjects and in the media.[50] Furthermore, the strategies of racism and sexism are liable to combine forces in particularly trenchant ways which can aggress the immigrant woman in her home. She may find herself at a pivot where racism and capitalism buttress each other on a support of sexism, where the three interlock to stabilise each other. One of the ways they do this is by forming a pecking-order of disempowerment. Within this pyramidal hierarchy, males who are disenfranchised by dehumanising labour within a culture of racial prejudice can still wield a compensatory sexist power within their own gender relations and in the home.

The domestic threshold of immigrants can also mark a boundary of difference inside which identity and cultural practices which refer to the country of origin may be maintained and shielded from the alien environment of the street. In this way, the domestic space of immigrants can be an intermediary dimension where the values of the original culture can be conjugated against those of the surrounding society. The maintenance of such a political space is usually the work of women. Thus, bell hooks sees the construction of 'Homeplace' as follows:

> This task of making homeplace . . . was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds of racist domination, (by) making home a community of resistance.[51]

However, this is a complex struggle which can make of the home an arena of warring cultural practices where language, politics, accent, sexual behaviour and so on can be hotly disputed both between parents and immigrant youth who may be juggling a half-assimilated or 'double' identity.

Much of the active opposition to anglicising cultural imperialism among the Irish comes from the enduring ethnic affiliations of Irish women, their powerful role within the Irish family, and their traditional responsibility for the rearing and socialisation of children. In discussion, Irish women who have reared families in Britain typically stress the commitment they made towards instilling an Irish identity in their children. This deliberate socialisation of the second and third generations into Irishness is significant. In interview sessions, these groups often evoke the almost insistent emphasis laid on Irishness by their mothers in the home as crucial to the formation of their own identities. This contradicts the traditional perspective among those migration-specialists who have tended to suggest that women's emigration leads to a rapid and smoother assimilation into the host culture.[52] In Britain, where Irish women's immigration is particularly prevalent, their determined sense of themselves as unassimilated is revealed, both statistically in the numbers of self-declared Irish at census and in discussion with Irish women. They enrol their children in cultural activities like Irish dancing-classes and *feiseanna* at Irish centres and make a point of discussing life in Ireland. Many express regret at not having command of the native language to pass on to their children in the home, as they see Indian and Pakistani mothers can do. Observing how other ethnic women can maintain and transmit a native 'mother-tongue' to their British children, they must lament that most of themselves cannot.[53]

The main thrust of this ethnic commitment in the home seems to be the regular trips to Ireland towards which many parents save sacrificially throughout the year. These trips maintain connections with families back home and give second-generation children an experience of the Irish landscape. Adults of the second generation routinely evoke these holidays as treasured experiences of the Irishness their parents persistently told them was theirs. These trips seem to have the desired effect of anchoring the identity of the second-generation children in experiences of the Irish mainland that they can call their own. This

gravitation of the ethos of the family towards Ireland can be so intense that some second-generation Irish speak of growing up within a constant sphere of oral reference to another location that was called 'home'. This dislocated sense of place meant that they grew up in the housing-estates of Kilburn and Camden, but accepted unquestioningly for the first five, six or seven years of life that home was an elsewhere they had not yet seen. Without dramatising the issue, this unshakable sense of continued belonging to their native neighbourhood in Ireland must be recognised as a distinct feature of the Irish community in Britain, particularly those from rural areas in Ireland. Geographical proximity to Ireland may foster this nostalgia with a vividness which the Irish in the United States or Australia must do without.

Another difference between Irish ethnicity in Britain and that in other countries is the assimilationist approach of Britain towards all expressions of Irishness, whether immigrant or not. This cultural-imperialist attitude affects not just immigrant Irish in Britain. It extends even to Irish people who have always lived in their own country, but who were shadowed by 'the colonisers from a culture which has always sought to appropriate Ireland and the Irish'.[54] The dominant discourse in Britain does not recognise any Irishness to be as valuably different and distinct from Britishness as the Irish typically feel themselves to be. This long assimilationist history, extending its influence beyond immigrant locations, is clearly different from the type of assimilative pressure extended towards Asians, Blacks, Italians or Poles. It greatly complicates the task of ethnic socialisation for Irish child-raisers in their attempts to inculcate a self-concept of positive difference in Irish youth in Britain.

Housing and the Irish community in Britain

Historically, large populations of Irish men and women have lived and worked in Britain long before establishing family homes there. Male Irish labourers typically boarded in cheap lodgings or in workers' hostels. The latter provided a densely homosocial environment both for single men and for married men whose families remained behind in Ireland, surviving on the earnings they sent home. Meanwhile, Irish women tended to distinguish themselves among other emigrant nationalities by migrating separately from men and establishing themselves independently with employment, accommodation and social circles.

We have seen already how labour opportunities and sexual politics dictated housing patterns for generations of Irish women, establishing them as live-in labour in hospitals, hotels and private houses. The search for private housing, however, remained particularly difficult in the decades which preceded the recent emergence of an anti-racist discourse, and it is readily evoked as a nightmare by older Irish women reminiscing about their pasts today. Because of their traditional role as single-handed family managers, many Irish women have memories of tramping the streets in search of housing for their husband and children. In the words of one woman:

> So from that night on, when Bill came in from work, the children were in bed, they were always in bed by half-past six, I'd everything done, Bill's dinner was on the table and I'd get up and go out. I'd have read the local paper for adverts. I'd have gone to shop windows but always 'No Coloured or Irish need apply'. It was Houses to Let, Flats to let, Rooms to Let, but every one of them 'No Irish or Coloured need apply'. So I thought, I'll present myself at their doors. But when they'd hear my accent some of them would say, 'It's gone'. . .[55]

Later, in the 1980s, while Thatcherism was making racist politics socially 'acceptable', it was also introducing a newly-pervasive anxiety about housing which spread across all social classes in Britain. While homelessness escalated among poor and immigrant sub-classes at this time, many in the established middle classes also lost their homes to sudden redundancy, escalating interest rates and the 'negative-equity trap' of wildly fluctuating property values. Thus, the Conservative Party's problematisation of 'family values' extended beyond the home as a political location to a new national insecurity which now threatens the survival of the home as an actual, physical space. This generalised housing crisis has particularly heightened the difficulties of secure tenure in appropriate housing for immigrant women and mothers. During the 1980s, rents and house-prices increased faster than the cost of living. By 1990, an estimated seven out of ten people living below the 'decency threshold' wage were women.[56] Most recent surveys have found that Irish people are under-represented among those who own their own homes and over-represented among the homeless and those occupying substandard accommodation.[57] In 1991, 44 per cent of Irish-born people in London owned their homes. This figure compares unfavourably with the 59 per cent of the remaining white population who owned their own homes. Twenty nine per cent of the Irish in London at that time lived in local authority housing, compared to 22 per cent of the remaining white population in this category. In terms of housing quality, the Irish-born population was found to have 'the worst conditions' compared to other whites, Afro-Carribeans and Asians. They were particularly disadvantaged by a lack of privacy and by the lack of independently-controlled accommodation.[58] Information supplied by agencies working with the homeless in London reveals that:

> more than 30% of homeless people encountered on the street at night were Irish, . . . one in five staying in emergency accommodation were Irish, . . . one in three clients attending drop-in centres for the homeless were Irish . . . (and) the largest ethnic group using severe-weather shelters in London (since) 1991 were those of Irish origin.[59]

Another survey carried out in London in 1986 found that 'fifty-seven per cent of recent Irish immigrants had made no prior accommodation arrangements

before leaving Ireland (and) seventeen per cent of the total slept rough on their first nights in the city'.[60] Under the controversial Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, sleeping rough can be prohibited now as the government targets the festivals and encampments of Britain's 'New Age Travellers'. This has had repercussions for Irish Travellers, too, as the Act criminalises their nomadic lifestyle and closes halting-sites traditionally used by this group.[61]

The Prevention of Terrorism Act and Irish Women

The Prevention of Terrorism Act affected women and children particularly violently in that it targeted Irish home-life as the focus of a campaign which claimed to be concerned with pursuing terrorists. The methods in this campaign aimed quite specifically to demoralise the women of the Irish community through the detention and interrogation of ordinary mothers and children brought to police stations during armed night-raids on the home. Women were further demoralised through the institution of sexually abusive strip searches of Irish women held in custody. The home became the frontline for night-time confrontations with armed police, and often whole families were taken in and interrogated for days. One report of such raids recalls:

> For instance, (on her arrest) Kate Magee's child, aged 6, was taken away from her. Information on her child's whereabouts and health was refused for the first 6 days of her detention. . . After 66 days in prison, the prosecution dropped the major criminal charge, leaving the charge of witholding information.[62]

This became a familiar pattern throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. Of the 7,052 people arrested under the Act between 1974 and 1991, only 3 per cent were charged with any criminal offence and a quarter of those were found innocent.[63] As recently as 1986, the London Irish Women's Centre could assert that:

> Every Irish woman is aware that whenever she speaks out about our situation here in Britain or in Ireland, she is liable as a target for arrest.[64]

The Charities Evaluation Service denounced the Act in 1994 as 'institutionalised racism'.[65] Here, Sister Clarke, an Irish Catholic nun engaged in social work with Irish families, explains:

> The conditions in which women and children were held were dreadful. They refused women sanitary towels, held them for seven days without policewomen present, refused them medicines, clean blankets or washing-facilities – it was appalling. Young children were questioned about their fathers' and mothers' habits and friends, and they were bribed with sweets for information. In at least one instance, young children were kept all night in a police station, questioned for long hours and left to sleep on a window-ledge. Their mother had gone to the police station to report her husband missing and they came and arrested her and all her family.[66]

The Prevention Of Terrorism Act revealed governmental attitudes both in Ireland and in Britain which cannot lightly be forgotten. It provided insights into the actual status of Irish citizens in Britain during times of crisis, even while it repressed or refused all insight into the complexity of their actual political orientations by casting them all as potential terrorists.

The Act signalled the Irish home as an explicitly political site, a location appropriate for armed police intervention. This version of ethnic harassment by police is in contrast, for instance, to that waged at present on Britain's Black minority. For Blacks, the locus of police aggression is the street. Here, young Black males are frequently intercepted for searches and interrogation when on foot or in vehicles. The pathologising of the Black family and home, however, is achieved through a 'moral' black-listing in the press, rather than by physical intervention in domestic spaces.

The raiding of the Irish home under the PTA was an extravagant strategy and reveals aspects of governmental views towards Irishness in Britain. It would appear that under a rising, hysterical pressure from Provisional IRA operations in mainland Britain, the authorities lunged about blindly for a comprehension of what the relationship could possibly be between Irishness itself, including Irish political violence, and the millions of individuals who quietly, anonymously laboured in Britain's own cities. One report describes PTA interrogation in this way:

> the range of questions broadens and deals with family and friends – dates of birth, where they live, in-laws, number of children, political beliefs of family and relatives, political beliefs of friends . . .[67]

The very anonymity of Irish people's white skin must partly explain why their harassment was home-based while that of Blacks occurs in the street. Or perhaps it was the British government's most recent memory of direct, military antagonism with Ireland which provided the paradigm for the Prevention of Terrorism Act in Britain. The guerilla-based Irish War of Independence (1919–21) had been fought out and won upon a network of undetectable but pervasive community support, not least in urban centres like Dublin and Cork. It had been waged almost literally from the subversive, sheltering home. It may have been the shadow of that defeat which threw up a pathetic, long-outdated idiom for the Act, whereby the ordinary home would be raided in order to resolve the war with the present-day IRA. There may also have been some intuition of the extensive, covert role played by femininity throughout the history of Irish resistance. Here the issue of 'information' became central, and the charge of 'witholding' it became the sole allegation against many of those held under the Act. This left Irish women painfully sandwiched between the British authorities, on the one hand, and the Irish government, on the other. The latter made few attempts to intercede on their behalf and would themselves

soon be prosecuting women in the Irish Republic for the holding of information about reproductive technologies abroad. The PTA's conflation of Irish ethnicity in Britain with involvement in the IRA reflected a complete misunderstanding of the complexities of the Irish identity there and of the political allegiances of the majority of the Irish population in Britain. It also reflected the existence of a 'hostage'-mentality within establishment circles in Britain which meant that women and children would be used to somehow force paramilitaries out of the woodwork.

This often destroyed the delicate relations which Irish people were trying to maintain with neighbouring British families already alienated by IRA bombings and the propagandist press. Racist violence was at an all-time high in Britain during the early 1980s, and large-scale arrests of innocent Irish people in residential areas repeatedly shattered hopes for their complete integration into British society. Here is the testimony of Mrs Annie Maguire, who, following her wrongful arrest, spent ten years in prison in Britain for alleged participation in an IRA bombing. She describes her arrest during a night-time raid at her home by police with dogs:

> I told Anne-Marie who had started to tremble, not to cry. I told her I wouldn't be long. I'm going to help the police and I'll be back, I said . . . The next time I saw her it was five months later. They just put us away . . . After ten years when I was released, I knew that I had lost my children . . . Anne-Marie was a young woman . . . (During interrogations), I had my period and they made me stand spread-eagled against the wall . . . I hadn't changed my sanitary-towel . . . They called me names saying I wasn't a mother, I was 'a prostitute' . . . As a mother and a woman I stood up to the beatings because I knew the truth.[68]

Abuse and Family in the Irish Community in Britain

Part of the gendering of the experience of home is the fact that the work patterns of males tend to mean that they retreat to a homespace which, however impoverished, is in opposition to the public spaces in which they labour. However, women, including even middle-class women engaged in careers outside the home, know few physical or temporal spaces which are reprieves from the call to labour. The home certainly is not one of these places. This doubling and disguising of women's labour can leave them overstretched and vulnerable in a number of ways. While raising children in the home, women may be even more firmly hedged within patriarchal control and, thus, more likely to be targeted for abuse by a male partner than a childless woman would be. In terms of finances, social stigma and physical refuge, a mother may have fewer escape options than single women have. Recent statistics about Irish immigrants in Britain bear this out. One commentator found that:

> women with children were more likely to be in situations where domestic violence occurred. Twenty nine per cent of women with children said they experienced domestic violence within the last twelve months compared with 15 per cent of all women in the sample. This means that women with children are twice as likely to be facing domestic violence.[69]

The reflex of males to express crisis through various forms of gendered violence against the women of their own community is at present a major problem within Black communities in the US and Britain. The incidence of domestic abuse, addiction, absent or irresponsible fatherhood and the abandonment of Black women in favour of white women is posited in current debates as threatening the very continuance and survival of the Black family in the US. One black theorist critiques her own community in this way:

> We are daily witnessing the disintegration of African-American family life . . . black people daily perpetuate sexist norms that threaten our solidarity . . .[70]

Racism seriously complicates discussion of such social problems and often encourages silence among ethnic women who are unwilling to provoke or reinforce negative stereotypes about their community perpetrated by the dominant majority. The breaking of silence erupted for Black women in the West following the release of the film *The Colour Purple* which exposed Black-against-Black sexist abuse. In reaction to this disclosure of female experience, the community itself asserted that:

> the issue . . . was not accuracy but whether certain aspects of black life should be talked about (ie. revealed) in a non-black context.[71]

The tentative silence-breaking which is proceeding in Irish society at present is also a double-edged sword for many Irish people. As Ireland's intense history of child sexual abuse comes slowly to light, this welcome disclosure is exposing the pathologised sexuality of our culture to foreign eyes. The representation of this pathology in foreign media, however, can tend to simply elaborate upon a pre-existent racist text about Irish people rather than radically critiquing its causes. Irish people may therefore have ambivalent feelings about any disclosure in British contexts. An Irish psychiatric doctor, on a tea-break with English colleagues in a London hospital, reports glimpsing a TV documentary on sexual abuse among Irish clergy:

> I was really interested in it and I would have liked to watch it myself but, to be honest, I turned it off because it would have been embarrassing in front of them.[72]

Before approaching Irish communities in Britain, we need firstly to acknowledge that the country from which they derive some of their social behaviour is still a long way from routine exposure or correction of sexual and child abuses. Irish society continues to normalise some social abuses, such as

alcohol-addiction and punitive behaviours towards pregnant women, and has not yet reached the stage of pathologising them. Given that this whole chapter argues that the construction of silence is a pivotal, idiosyncratic dynamic within Irish social discourse even at home, it must therefore be more forceful and rooted dynamic within Irish experience in Britain.

It is clear that solidarity with their own ethnic community, as well as isolation from other forms of social support available to women in the host society, can seal Irish women in Britain into an excessive tolerance of masculine dysfunction, whereby disclosures of rape, beatings, irresponsible fatherhood and addiction threaten to evoke and affirm the original racist stereotypes of their men as 'brutish' and 'drunken'. This can leave women trying to absorb and contain the circular violence of a racism that facilitates sexism which, in turn, facilitates racism. It seems then that the roles of stretching their resources and of cushioning others, characteristic of the lives of all women, are exacerbated in women living within ethnic minority populations. They may find themselves nurturing children and socialising them into their ethnic heritage, labouring doubly, both inside the home and outside of it, in a racially dispriviIeging environment and absorbing abuse from frustrated, disinherited males while resolutely shielding that abuse from the surrounding society.

In terms of vulnerability to abuse, the inward-turning quality of the Irish community in Britain is a mixed blessing for women. On the one hand, close neighbourly connections are maintained, often with whole families or even neighbourhoods of people who were known at home and who have emigrated en masse. This counteracts the isolation which can be the curse of the immigrant woman marooned in the home with small children, removed from her matrilineal network of sisters and female friends and relatives in the home-country. However, the introversion and apoliticisation of the Irish community can cause the maintenance of social norms from which the woman was fleeing through her emigration. One survey explains that:

> for Irish women, leaving a violent partner or family situation is particularly hard. The cultural and religious beliefs within Irish society instil the duty of preserving the family.[73]

Dysfunctions like alcoholism, domestic violence, sexual abuse and incest, as well as traditional gender roles that are detrimental to women, can often continue to dog the family in emigration as they did at home. All of these traumas require for their healing a long process of re-education and rehabilitation in a supportive environment as they tend to be reproduced along the generations if left untreated. However, for any minority, the climate of immigrant life, with its discrimination, environmental alienation and its social, legal and financial insecurities, tends to actually heighten the sorts of pressures that can cause these abuses within the family, rather than providing a chance to heal. The options can seem stark. The large numbers of Irish women who reach Britain with memories of alcoholic family life, of sexual abuse and a harmfully repressive education, often feel obliged to flee their compatriots abroad in order to undertake treatment in a therapeutic environment. In interviews with second-generation Irish women in Britain, this author has found sexual abuse, alcoholism and male, domestic violence to be unfortunately common. These women are left with painfully mixed feelings about their Irish heritage. They long for the Ireland of their cultural and genealogical roots, but abhor the cycles of domestic dysfunction and violence which they perceive, rightly or wrongly, to be norms within Irish circles. Some recoverers from sexual abuse and incest are now forming support groups for survivors of abuse in Irish contexts. The mixed feelings of these women extend to their sense of Irish femininity. They see their Irish mothers and grandmothers as capable women who exude an earthy natural warmth and a robust integrity. However, they are shocked by what they see as the inexplicable subservience of such women to violent, drunken or irresponsible men, and they feel disinherited by these foremothers' failure to protect their children from domestic abuse. A second-generation woman recovering from sexual abuse by her immigrant Irish grandfather has this to say:

> They see their husband as some sort of God and will put up with anything from him and it makes me so angry. These guys just get really drunk and she just takes it all from them as if it's normal, as if just because he says he's sorry next day then everything is OK.[74]

Understandably, these women feel deeply torn over whether or how to call themselves Irish, because of the searing associations with abuse.

Inner Conflicts

The tensions and belligerence in Anglo-Irish political relations make emigration to Britain a challenge with which most other destinations cannot compare. Just being an Irish person in Britain plunges Irish people there into a dramatisation of their identity because Britain has been so thoroughly and problematically involved in the construction of what we now know as Irishness and the Irish. Whenever an Irish person enters England, or when an English person enters Ireland, a hurricane of history is blowing on them. The fact that although Irish people may condemn British exploitation of their country, they are now forced to seek financial, professional or sexual refuge there is shaming and humbling for many Irish. It requires a very thorough political education to steer oneself through the conundrum of Irish dependence on Britain. This is the testimony of an Irish woman living in Britain since 1966, whose words gave this chapter its title:

> I used to have a lot of political ideas. My father was Republican at home and I was into left-wing politics here. I used to read the 'Socialist Worker' and I had

all the terminology, you know. I took a young person's interest in politics, like. But I tell you, the propaganda in this country is just unbelievable. About India or Africa, all any English'll tell you is the good they done. Built schools and civilised them, they tell you. But I put aside all my political ideas and Irishness years ago. It gets you nowhere in this country. I just sit on it. I suppose it's being untrue to yourself but my only views these days are to have no views.[75]

The truth remains that Britain has long been salvaging Irish people from the disasters of successive Irish governments. For centuries, the Irish have poured into the belly of the British economy, assured a place below the working-class shelf of British life. And access into middle-class professions is now possible. Without a radical analysis of this dependence upon Britain, and because of their ethnic need to maintain a positive nostalgia in relation to Ireland, it is very difficult for most Irish emigrants in Britain to fault the Irish Republic's policies on economics and emigration. Yet these confusing ironies around economics, labour and imperialism are nothing compared to the ones that twist around the specifically sexual exodus of Irish women to England. The reception accorded Irish women who went to England for their illegitimate pregnancies, for the adoption of their babies, or more recently, for abortions is the hushed underbelly of the Irish tradition in Britain.

Every Irish person knows about this clandestine run between Ireland and England. Even people in very isolated parts of Ireland who have never left their own region know all about this feminine channel across the water. There is no parish in Ireland which has not produced these women. Their forbidden stories map the suppression of feminine experience across every townland of Ireland. Overtly, the relationship between the two countries is seen as being historically violent and exploitative, which has now become tamed and expedient as Britain absorbs more and more young adults from Irish dole-queues. However, the topography includes a shadowy, unofficial area where whole sectors of the Irish female population pass through a secret tunnel to sexual amnesty and asylum. These women are caught in multiple double-binds between their host communities and those of the home country. In possessiveness around territory and community resources, host communities tend to view immigrant fertility with unease. In times when the tide of racism is high, they often demonise immigrant libido and procreation as undisciplined, distasteful or threatening. Here there is a cumulative, domino-effect of painfulness and difficulty for Irish women in Britain who are often already sexual refugees from Ireland's hijacking of their fertility. For generations of Irish women, and especially for women who are politicised as anti-imperialists or nationalists on the one hand, but who have been sacrificed to Ireland's misogyny on the other, the terms invader and oppressor spin dizzyingly around Ireland and England. Such women can denounce colonisation, but on shifting from the paradigms of nation-states to those which define the intimate borders of their own bodies, they find that their own country has been up in arms against them for decades, tyrannically colonising their biology. Faced with archaic legislation concerning contraception, sex education, reproductive information and abortion at home, as well as by a fortress of punitive social attitudes which maintain Catholic sexual dogma as hegemony, the Irish woman may well find that the imperialist invader becomes her liberator, or at least a benign nurse. As Irish people, we must urgently examine how infringement of the territorial autonomy of the sexual and/or feminine body, from the microcosm of the home to the macrocosm of state legislation, relates to national experiences of territorial violation. This connection between the sexuality and the territoriality of peoples, with its massive implications for collective well-being, is not just a historical dynamic confined to the heyday of empire but is critically relevant now as increasing numbers of the world's population become migrants and refugees amidst a climate of heightening racial tensions.

Left-wing political psychiatry since the 1960s has demonstrated how colonisation causes profound pathology in the individual and collective psyche and libido and has established a clinical, diagnostic picture of the 'colonised personality' where 'successful colonisation' depends upon imposing 'a regular and important mental pathology' or a 'massive psycho-existential complex'.[76] One of its principal contributions to post-imperialist understanding has been its diagnosis of the ways in which negative introjects, framed into the colonised psyche as part of the imperial process, long outlive the official end of colonial regimes and the military decolonisation of occupied societies. It hardly needs arguing that Irish society is a text-book illustration of post-colonial libidinous trauma. What we do need, however, is for this healing awareness to become popularly available to the Irish mind and no longer to be rigorously suppressed away from the cautious, reactionary spectrum of our national discourse.

The Irish Body and Suppression of Information

Historically at least, the Irish body was deeply pressured and problematised by colonial processes which included starvation, evictions, martial policing, mass emigrations and eugenicist, highly racist depictions of Irish people. We have already seen that the Irish body has been globally commodified as exported labour in processes contemporaneous with the colonial ones of past centuries as well as in the present and, most likely, in the future. We have also seen how the local presence and face of the Irish body on the British mainland has been registered in British national iconography only as the 'Paddy', while the female Irish body has been occluded from view, despite its daily presence as labour in service to the British public. In her unseeable, unspoken location in political space between Ireland and England, the Irish female body has been active, problematical and difficult to repress or control. The efforts to maintain hedges of silence and invisibility around her have been in no way conclusive. Rather,

they are an ever-renewed struggle, a Sisyphean task for successive Irish governments, absorbing high proportions of the energies of public and national debates, discourses and legislative measures in Ireland.

When discussing Irish women's relationship to Britain, it must be understood that the relationship is important even to women who reside permanently in the Republic and have no cause to see themselves as immigrants. This is because large proportions of Irish women 'complete' their inner picture of the reproductive life-choices available to them in Ireland by 'supplementing' them with the possible option of availing of British social services and climates. Thus, most Irish women know that if they needed an abortion or a non-accusatory climate or childbirth or a relationship, one available option is to try to get to England to find it. This means that mainland Irish women's inner mapping of their country's relationship to Britain is silently, but urgently, different to that of Irish men. Britain, or more usually England, fringes their experience of their own country with a sort of virtual reality of possible escape-hatches in case of reproductive crisis. This unofficial, inner map shades in an extra, politically-loaded dimension which utterly differentiates their potential or actual migrations from those of their male counterparts.

Even for Irish women who for ethical or religious reasons would never contemplate using such facilities, England features just as prominently on their socio-sexual map as the place they would never go to do such things. Unfortunately, such ethical positions in Irish society have up to now tended to overwhelmingly implicate the policing of others' positions. This has meant that the sectors which would never use the abortion route to England nonetheless feature that location very strongly on their inner map as a place to which others should be prevented from going for that purpose. This crucial dynamic around ethics in modern Irish society came to an extraordinary legislative climax in 1991 with a new Irish High Court injunction ruling that:

> Irish women (who were not in imminent danger of death) did not have the right to travel abroad to avail of foreign abortion services.[77]

This injunction clarified that the political climate for women in Ireland is not necessarily liberalising with the passage of the decades. This legislation emerged from the infamous 'X' case in the same year, which provoked the passage of emergency legislation to prevent a raped 14-year-old girl from travelling to Britain for an abortion. Through the scapegoating of 'X', Irish women have learnt that not-telling is not a thing of the past but the golden rule for the future. 'X' infringed the unwritten Irish law about migration to Britain for abortions: she wilfully provided a piece of information (by offering the police forensic evidence to convict her rapist) and this was what brought the might of a police state slamming around her pregnancy. The legal precedent that was set for the future also set an injunction in concrete in Irish women's hearts which made it safe to tell absolutely no-one – even fewer than before – if you are one of this year's thousands making the trip to England for an abortion.

The literature on Irish immigrant life in Britain often devotes an irritated line or two to the absence of information about Irish women, despite the fact that they make up about half a million of the population. According to the author of one study on race and racism in Britain:

> There is no satisfactory . . . survey of the Irish . . . the sizeable number of Irish women immigrants has remained particularly neglected in historical accounts.[78]

If foreign specialists are surprised at the lack of information surrounding Irish women, they are plainly unaware of the legislative time-warp by which Irish women are cut off from their European sisters. Words like 'information' and 'travel' may be neutral in the lexicon of migration-studies, and perhaps even within feminism, but they send a shudder down the backs of Irish women and they have no neutrality in the legal lexicon drawn up by the Irish state. 'Information' is in no way an automatic, guaranteed or integral part of Irish feminine life. Silence on the other hand is just that. If reflexive information for the Irish woman about herself is legislatively banned by her society, it should come as no surprise that the flow of expressive information emergent from her is stemmed too.

Since the debates over legislation allowing Irish women access to information about abortion abroad, the term 'information' has become a stinging legal by-word that is like a moat around women who live in the Irish Republic. This often results in farcical state-behaviour like the once-off confiscation of the section of every copy of the *Guardian* which carried abortion clinic telephone numbers for Britain. The debates around women's 'information' constitute an explicit recognition by Irish society, institutions and government that information is not a neutral, secondary term but a powerful catalytic agent in itself. It seems that foreigners looking on, even British observers, are simply not aware of the impassioned, draconian debates of the 1990s and the ensuing legislature surrounding Irish women's 'right to travel'. Here the Republic manages, not only to silence and incarcerate its women, but also to shroud its actions with impunity and invisibility. A mystical fog seems to descend around Irish legislature when convenient, cloaking it off from comparison with European mores as if normalising institutions like the European Court of Human Rights did not exist. Our European counterparts seem unaware of the extent of the convergence of (Catholic) Church and state in Ireland and of the rigour of our anti-feminine legislation.

With half an eye to Muslim immigrants, liberal European media often publish critical features on the lives of women in countries where Islamic law is legally imposed, critiquing 'the heart of the Islamic revolution – the restraint on women' with provocative titles like 'Sex, Women and Islam' and 'Hidden Agenda':

> The Islamic state bore down on me . . . There is no real role for women outside of marriage . . . An Iranian woman cannot check into a hotel alone, nor can a couple get a room without proof they are married.[79]

But the Irish Republic, so much closer to home and exporting its sexual casualties wholesale into the arms of Britain, manages to escape unexamined. We really need to know how the ruling classes in Ireland achieve this sort of immunity, although it is already clear that the anti-Arab discourse and colour-racism in the international media will focus criticism on Islam while ignoring the misogynist excesses of a white-skinned European Community member like Ireland.

Right now in the 1990s, when Ireland is exporting many university-educated women, this question of women's information remains a searing political issue which divides the country almost hysterically into religious, medical, ethical and legal camps. This not only involves abortion information but also plain education for women abut their own biology and about present-day medical procedures around their reproduction. Interviews with Irish women in Britain reveal this tormenting ignorance about their own bodies and sexuality with which they faced life abroad. Many speak of attempts to get information from their mothers or teachers or from older women who had children, and of being bewilderingly rebuffed with jokes and disapproval.

One woman stated:

> When it came to sex I basically went along with what men expected of me. It was something I don't think I felt I had any control over . . . If I made any decision at all, it was that I wouldn't sort out anything about contraceptives, so it was like allowing things to happen, not taking responsibility, which I think is very much connected with our lack of education to do with sex – not really knowing our own bodies, not taking any pleasure in our bodies, not knowing that women could have orgasms, not knowing that I had a clitoris until a man told me – crazy![80]

This is a testimony, not from 50 years ago, but from an educated Irish woman who emigrated to England in the late 1970s. Here is an account from Annie Maguire (see above). She describes an exchange where she seeks information from her English landlady:

> 'Aren't you supposed to have them every month?' She said 'Don't you think you're having a baby?' I was shocked. 'It's natural, love, when you're married', she said. I said 'I didn't know'[81]

We have to recognise that this blockade on sex education for women is a reality right now in Irish schools. Across the early 1980s, when about 4,000 Irish women were officially registered as having abortions in British clinics every year, three-quarters of these women were single, middle-class Dubliners who had been having sex without contraception.[82] This statistic is alarming in that it represents the sector which one would expect to be the most liberated in terms of reproductive technologies. It leaves us to guess at the plight of poor and isolated women in more remote, rural environments.

Migrations for Abortions

The 1990s' debates over the banning of gynaecological information led to a saga of prosecutions of women in Ireland for possession of such information. This was the visible end of a spectrum of subversive, sexually-political activism operated by Irish women between Ireland and Britain. A clandestine network of female volunteers, feminists and psychotherapists clandestinely staff a top-secret telephone number in Ireland which pregnant women can call to obtain the number of an abortion clinic in Britain. The voice at the other end immediately offers to ring the woman back if necessary, as the coins quickly running out in a provincial phone-box is a familiar scenario. The woman is given the number of a London clinic if she wants it, along with the number of a safe guest-house near the clinic with a sympathetic family who are used to daily receiving Irish girls and women who are 'on the run' in this way. There may also be the possibility of being met and escorted by a member of a group like the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group run by Irish women in Britain, if the woman is very young, alone or traumatised.

At the British abortion clinics, there is generally an intense and supportive awareness of the traumatised condition of Irish women, who are automatically treated as a case apart from the British and other nationalities. The pre-operative counselling explores these extra layers of trauma with the woman, including the difficulty of concealing her trip abroad, the silence in which she must endure the post-operative phase on returning home and the condemnatory atmosphere in which she is forced to live on return to Ireland. Irish women are often given rooms apart from their English counterparts and are given special pamphlets on counselling information. This dimension of awareness and solicitude extended by British abortion services towards Irish women is, of course, passed over in silence by the Irish public and the Irish government. Ireland makes no acknowledgment of the assistance given by the British feminine health-care system to Irish women in their desperate migrations across the water over the past decades.

Because so many women migrate temporarily to Britain, or flee Ireland permanently in search of reproductive rights, one might expect that the misogyny of Irish legislation would be trumpeted the world over and that this constant exodus of feminine refugees out of the country would have a liberating, feedback effect. Irish women gaining reproductive rights abroad, as well as financial power and access to foreign media, could theoretically be shaming and lobbying the Irish Dáil into egalitarian legislation, thereby exercising a relentless gender-political pressure from abroad much as Irish-Americans have

exerted constant pressure over Northern Ireland. However, we must consider the depressing possibility that women resolve their experience of oppression in Ireland by simply getting out as quickly as they can and by not looking back. This however is belied by the typical maintenance by Irish women abroad of as much connection as they can with the island, by their resolve not to assimilate and by their raising of their children as Irish. For such radical, liberalising feedback to operate would require a much more strongly pro-feminine atmosphere than currently exists in any western political sphere – British, American or European. For strategic reasons also, all Irish traditions of resistance and protest have tended to be secret, underground, improvised, local, spontaneous and camouflaged. Overt campaigning, exploitation of the mainstream media, flooding of the public with resistance-information, mass-demonstration . . . these are not part of the inherited Irish tradition of resistance. Instead, Irish people know in a visceral, experiential way that 'information' is not a neutral item, but the pivot between success and disaster for processes of secret resistance. Having evolved most of their sense of identity within the imperial paradigm of invasion, occupation and very long-term conflict with a formidable power, Irish people deeply understand that a gulf can lie between what appears and what is, while another related, but different, gulf lies between what happens at home and abroad.

Irish society has tended to run along these double rails, and the gulf between the actual and the articulated in Ireland runs back into a centuries-old tradition of secret resistance and subterfuge. This splitting can be traced to the effort to survive overwhelming collective trauma, to the adoption and hegemony of psychically unbearable sexual repression, to the imposition of a foreign language and the violent suppression of the native one and so on. Study into contemporary Irish society at home or abroad establishes that these are not, as neo-colonial revisionist history would have us believe, outdated or inaccurate cliches, but are rather motivations which are still shaping Irish behaviours and institutions today.

Conclusions

The next ten years should constitute a window of opportunity for the healing of Irish culture, and this will only be achieved through renewal in one of the most crucial areas of Irishness, that is in the discourses that we permit ourselves. It is clear that the silencing inherent in modern Irish society is constantly threatened by a natural, compensatory urge to divulge. This drama of contestation between the collective Irish psyche and soma, between a repressive national 'ego' and a longing, libidinous 'id', between law and the body, depicts the efforts of a repressed organism to right itself to wholeness and health. The institutionalised suppression of the history, libido and truth-telling of Irishness locks in constant struggle against the innate Irish urge to show, reveal, enquire, expose and share. As repression squeezes more tightly in social and legislative discourse, then the body erupts ever more often, more unsparingly to the surface of the public mind. As Fintan O'Toole has commented:

> In the abortion referendum of 1983, wombs, periods, sperms and eggs, unpious ejaculations and ectopic pregnancies became the terms of political debate.[83]

This polarised tension has been heightening in the Republic in the 1990s while voices of disclosure and catharsis have been emerging. We can use the elaborate range of communication technology now available to decentralise, generate and entice this sort of proliferation. According to Betty Purcell, producer of RTE's *Questions and Answers* programme, 'radio was the real facilitator' in turning a 'culture of caution' towards a 'culture of transparency'.[84] The *Guardian* newspaper explains:

> It was radio which was largely responsible for transforming Irish newspapers . . . They had to abandon parish-hall reporting and tackle the issues – contraception, marriage break-down, clerical child abuse – which were being discussed uninhibitedly on the air.[85]

However, we need to make a further shift beyond the disembodied and faceless disclosure of confessional radio. Famous male hosts in the Republic like Gay Byrne and Gerry Ryan have innovated upon the Catholic paradigm of the confession-box by moving it onto the airwaves, stimulating radical disclosure from their overwhelmingly female listeners and encouraging a climate of desire and libido.

Now we need also to retrieve the physicality of Irishness, restoring a balance that is lost to the profuse, addictive orality of our talking and our drinking. The whole-body experience of Irish presence has been deeply undercut historically by processes of eviction, 'transportation' and emigration, where racial, legal and financial dynamics beyond individual or community control transplant, relocate or banish the Irish body in massive numbers across the globe. This causes what Seamus Heaney has described as 'a lacuna in your midriff'.[86] The 'deterritorialisation' of Irish society has made Irish people fatalistic about their physical presence, 'prepared to put up with any amount of personal discontinuity', just as hegemonic forces dictate where it is possible for the Irish body to literally exist – to be or to dwell.[87] This has led to what Cheryl Herr in her essay 'The Erotics of Irishness' calls 'a social repression of the body on a grand scale' in Irish society.[88] We are sick of it – literally, in our mentality and our physiques and metaphorically, in our discourse. When the body is repressed, the discourse emergent from it will be not an expressive depiction of reality but an anti-reality strategy which denies actual experience. This is characteristic of the spate of national 'debates' and referenda in the Republic which stretch issues of sexual politics and personal morality across the poles of demonisation and sanctification. Citizens are invited to literally assemble around the poles/polls of

these 'arguments'. Clearly, 'debate' and 'argument' are inappropriate modes of discourse for such intimate territories, being more suited to the economic policies from which the state is deflecting attention. In these referenda, language is used to construct and impose neurotic, national prohibitions rather than to disclose and explore the impulses of desire and fear that emerge from the individual body.

It is important to realise that repression and silencing are recent phenomena to Irishness and will be outdistanced by our deeper passion for subtle, idiosyncratic discourse, which it is now time to restore. Our culture stands over an ancient oral tradition that delights in the telling of experience. This is a description by Seán Tom Pheats Ó Cearnaigh of the lifestyle of one of Ireland's most famous female tellers, 'Peig an Scéalaí'. In her passion for *cúntas* (giving a reckoning or narration) and *cómhrá* (giving and receiving discourse together with others), for exchanging with friends, family, strangers and foreigners personalised narrations and accounts of things which couldn't be further from fixed, hierarchical dogma, Peig Sayers was typical of her community and illustrates the withering of our discourse over the past eighty years.

> Thosnaigh na strainséirí ag teacht ansan agus, pé an diabhal cuma, bhí sí an-oiriúnach dóibh leis. Bean anshocair ab ea í. Chuadar chuichí . . . Bhí an-chúntas ar a saol ar fad, mar nuair a saolaíodh i mBaile Bhiocáire í, sin é an cuileachta a bhí acu istoíche – scéaltóireacht – agus bhí a lán lucht siúil an uair sin ag imeacht timpeall. Agus bhíodh oíche agamsa agus oíche agatsa, agus b'é a gcúram ar fad i rith na hoíche ná scéaltóireacht. Do bhíodh Peig agus cluas le héisteacht aici, agus choimead sí gach aon scéal acu ina ceann no gur chuaigh sí síos an don chré.[89]

or, in English translation:

> Then the foreigners started to come around, and whatever the devil they looked like, she'd still give them a great reception. A very calm, steady woman she was. They would go to her . . . She could give a great account of her life, because when she used to live in Baile Bhiocáire, that was the entertainment they had in the evenings – storytelling – and there was a great number of people travelling around in those days. I'd have a night (of company-keeping) at my place and then you'd have a night at yours, and their whole concern during the course of the evening was storytelling. Peig had a fine, listening ear and she kept every one of those stories in her head until she went down into the brown sod.[90]

Ireland's original, indigenous culture is known as *béaloideas*, meaning the knowing and teaching from the mouth. It sifted, celebrated and transmitted the daily experience of ordinary individuals in a neighbourhood, lovingly framing it in humour, philosophy and myth. We urgently need to revive and amplify this heritage and to launch a culture that tells of our femininity and masculinity, that celebrates personal biographies down along our matrilineages and patrilineages. This is our chance to release the pent agony of silenced emigrations, sexual abuse, adoptions and abortions as well as to promote joy and pride in our menstruations, miscarriages, abortions, pregnancies, travels, innovations and lesbian and gay culture. Perhaps mistakenly, the national fear of 'losing' Irishness to modernity, of it being dissolved by forces encroaching from abroad, is rarely directed against the Americanisation of all cultures, against modern technology nor even against mass emigration. It is often instead directed against every sign of sexual and reproductive innovation. We should take courage at least from the fact that, apart from the open wound of the loss of our language, 'modernising' forces seem to operate at another level which cannot threaten the enduring, spiritual reality which is Irishness, nor strip any more layers from it than colonisation has already done. Meanwhile, reproductive paranoia may be understandable in a people who have survived the genocidal contexts of the Cromwellian campaigns and of the Famine and who experience constant emigration. However, we need to enquire more deeply into these national concepts of territory, population and posterity and to take the pressure off our sexuality.

We certainly struggle with post-colonial trauma, but we need to direct our critiques towards the renewed colonisations we have imposed upon ourselves since the establishment of the Republic. Most importantly, we need to recognise the pattern we share with decolonising societies all over the world. With a post-independence regime which has been reactionary and non-egalitarian, with our cycles of social pathology, and with our punitive loss of solidarity between ourselves manifesting in civil wars, gender subordination and mass emigration, we are typical. The international context at this time is an unhappy one where social crisis is the norm and an apocalyptic vision is the ethos. However, as a culture which is 'emergent' in the present decade, we contrast with the climate of the day and are importantly placed to shape radical discourses which will be needed by other societies in the decades ahead. Irishness occupies a pivotal location in the world's political space. It hinges crucially between the Third World (with its colonised history, the post-imperialist war in Northern Ireland, mass emigration and loss of native language) and the First World (with white skin, EU membership, Western standards of living and autonomous access to media and education). Ireland balances on a fulcrum between punishment and privilege and this is an ideal location from which to evolve and transmit radical discourses. Wherever they end up, Irish emigrants find themselves peripheralised away from the homeland in the same way that Ireland's economy is peripheralised by larger foreign powers.[91] However, just as being outside Ireland is often the best location from which to understand our Irishness, so too Ireland's location in the international margins could be a fertile, irrepressible matrix for radical bodies and voices.

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5. The New Vanishing Irish
Social Characteristics of 'New Wave' Irish Emigration

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This chapter focuses on traditional and 'new wave' emigration with particular reference to the social characteristics, age structure, the professional and educational qualifications and destinations of those emigrants who left Ireland on what has been interpreted as a 'new wave' of emigration in the 1980s. It also examines changing perspectives on Irish emigration which have caused it to be interpreted as a voluntary activity, a product of Irish youth enterprise culture and an inevitable contemporary manifestation of a long-drawn out historical and cultural tradition of emigration. It suggests that, while a significant proportion of recent emigrants have undoubtedly achieved social mobility abroad, not least in Europe and in the United States, this 'emigrant aristocracy' is not so significant as to allow for the gentrification of most recent emigration. The chapter also suggests that, while Irish attitudes towards emigration have altered quite significantly since the nineteenth century, the causes and consequences of emigration have not altered all that much. To argue thus is also to caution against any premature categorisation of 'new wave' emigration as a 'European phenomenon' and a new development in Irish emigration history.

THE DE-NATIONALISATION OF IRISH EMIGRATION SINCE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Social and political attitudes to Irish emigration have generally been refracted through social class and ethnic lenses. They have also shaped, and been shaped by, prevailing political orthodoxies, not least by free-market economic policies and by conflicting attitudes towards nation-building and nationalism in Ireland.[1] As we have already seen, nineteenth-century Malthusianists on both sides of the Irish Sea long regarded the large-scale exodus from rural Ireland as a necessary accompaniment to the modernisation of an island economy at industrial Britain's back door. By mid-century, they were advocating state support for Irish emigration and implying that those who left Ireland fared well outside it. They particularly linked emigration to revolutions in transportation