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Ann Flood, Mairéad Farrell, and the Representation of Armed Femininity in Irish Republican Ballads

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Abstract. This article critically considers the representation of armed femininity within the attendant song tradition of Irish physical-force Republicanism, with specific focus on the personal and cultural consequences for two prominent female Republican activists, both of whom successfully traverse the gender demarcation lines of war. While noting the didactic, often misogynistic, trajectory of works narrating “transgressive” females within the broader ballad tradition, this article seeks to determine whether or not the interwoven essentialist tropes of death, martyrdom, and resurrection—all deeply embedded ideological constructs within the framework of Irish Republicanism—successfully supersede calcified patriarchal mores and, in so doing, facilitate an alternative narrative landscape for the cultural documentation of militant Irish Republican women via the popular ballad.

Achoimre. Tugann an t-alt seo faoi anailís chriticiúil ar léiriú na bandachta armtha i dtraidisiún amhránaíocht Phoblachtach na hÉireann. Dírítear sa saothar seo ar dhá shampla ar léith de bheirt bhan Phoblachtacha agus ar na himpleachtaí cultúrtha agus sósialta a éirionn doibh mar mhná a sháraíonn deighilt insce na cogaiochtta. Tugtar faoi deara san alt seo an t-ábhar teagascach, frithbhand a shonraitear go rialta i leith mná sáraitheachta i gcorpas na hamhránaíochta traidisiúnta. Chuige seo, is í sprioc an tsaothar reatha ná deimhin an sáraithe na gnásanna siochta patrarcacha seo ag bunphrionsabail eisintiúlacha idé-eolaíochta an Phoblachtachais mhileata agus más amhlaidh, an soláthraitear deiseanna reacaireachta éagsúla dá bharr, chun gniomháiochtaí mná Poblachtacha mileata a thairfeadh trí mheán an bhailéid traidisiúnta.

As a culturally reflective component of Irish physical-force Republicanism,¹ the attendant ballad tradition has often been noted for its effective silencing of the militant female voice (Dowler 1998:170; Kinsella 1998:188; McDowell

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with one historian pointedly remarking in a recent review of a scholarly collection of Republican song that “the women of the revolution were sanitized to the utmost” throughout the genre. This is not, of course, to suggest the complete absence of militant female Republicans from the canon. When present, however, such women are routinely restricted to marginal and wholly ancillary roles, inhabiting as they do the heavily demarcated gender space of war, with such works often notable for the extent to which they studiously avoid overt portrayals of female revolutionary violence. Within the wider ideological framework of violent Irish Republicanism, such intergender friction is further complicated by the nineteenth-century elevation of the trope of the Republican mother as a grieving mater dolorosa to both her martyred militant son and, by extension, to the nation itself (Zimmerman 1967:54, 77; Steel 2004:97), the early twentieth-century ideological reconfiguration of armed Republican activity as a violence “endured” and not “inflicted” (Coogan 1980:15; Clarke 1987:111; Smith 1995:13; Sweeney 2004:338; Shanahan 2009:40; Beiner 2014:199), along with the ubiquitous nationalist conflations of “female/nation” and “male/warrior” found in Ireland and beyond, a wholly restrictive trope that successfully “defines women’s role in nationalism as passive and secondary” (Ryan and Ward 2004:1).

The popular ballad has long been utilized as a didactic cultural vehicle for the reinforcement of patriarchal hegemony, with such works threatening dire (and often fatal) consequences for women who seek to transcend established gender boundaries, whether in war or in peacetime (Stewart 1993:66; Gammon 2008:49; Tatar 2015:4). While clearly not promoting a political worldview informed by such raw misogyny, the Irish Republican ballad can, nonetheless, regularly exhibit latent male anxieties when confronted with the thematic of the female warrior, regardless of the ideology’s much-vaunted claims to universal equality. This article will now consider two biographical ballads narrating prominent examples of violent women from separate periods of the Irish national struggle with a view to investigating the cultural and societal consequences for female Republicans who successfully transgress the demarcated gender lines of war: Wexford woman Ann Flood, who killed a British soldier in an incident at her home during the 1798 Rising, and Mairéad Farrell, an IRA volunteer from Belfast who was assassinated while on active service for the organization in 1988.

“An Aberration at Best and Demonic at Worst”: Women in the Male Arena of War

At all societal levels, the maintenance of patriarchal order has necessitated an obfuscation of the historical contribution of revolutionary women, and the history of physical-force Irish Republicanism is by no means unique in this regard. This tendency is particularly evident in traditionally male spheres of hegemony,
with the strict reinforcement of calcified gender roles being a direct consequence. Such skewed representations are ubiquitous in both factual and fictional narratives of armed conflict, an arena in which the supremacy of the male warrior has remained largely unchallenged throughout history (Malesevic 2010:275).

Jean Bethke Elshtain points to the predisposition of Western society to assume “an affinity between women and peace [and] between men and war” whereby at their most fundamental level, “man [is] construed as violent, whether eagerly and inevitably, or reluctantly or tragically; women as non-violent, offering succour and compassion” (1995:4). Such jaundiced concepts offer a fundamentally flawed gender paradigm that ignores the chaotic day-to-day realities of conflict and war. The inevitable cultural implications of gender lines being drawn on the basis of such a rigid “active male” / “passive female” dichotomy are expanded upon by Lorraine Dowler, who highlights the widespread perception of “men as violent and action-orientated and women as compassionate and supportive to the male warrior” (1998:159). Thus, it is not simply that women are restricted from entering the male arena of war; instead, they are firmly placed in ancillary, subordinate roles, which they are expected to fulfill in passive (and thus strictly nonviolent) terms, “offering succour and compassion” (Elshtain 1995:4) to violent, swashbuckling males. Gillian Youngs argues that at their most elemental level, both conflict and war have an explicit dependence on such strict gender demarcations in which “dominant forms of the masculine (warrior) subject as protector/conqueror/exploiter of the feminine/feminized object/other” will inevitably prevail (2004:79).

As a fundamental trope of militarism in Western society, such contrived limitations on the role of the female warrior have been stubbornly reinforced, thus remaining largely unchallenged in cultural memory and narrative (Hamilton 2007:132; Banerjee 2012:3). Such historical obfuscation is not achieved without some considerable and deliberate effort. The propensity toward “remembering to forget” the participation of women in conflict is particularly remarkable given the obvious turmoil and chaos of war and the inevitable social upheaval of postconflict society. Despite this, a resultant realignment of traditional gender roles in such settings is very much the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, it is more often than not the case that war will merely facilitate the copper fastening of such preexisting positions (McDonald 1987:9; Dowler 1998:163). Thus, the societal symbiosis whereby males and females are expected to adhere to the narrow parameters of “Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls” (Elshtain 1995:4) are continually reinforced within social and cultural memory.

Given the strictures of such narrowly defined and carefully demarcated male-female paradigms, it is therefore wholly unsurprising that the acceptance of women within the muscular, male-dominated arena of political violence should be the source of considerable intergender friction and anxiety, generating what
Sikata Banerjee has termed an acute sense of “social dis-ease” (2012:2). From the male perspective, the inclusion of women within the historical and cultural narrative of political violence is highly problematic and will be subject to some considerable resistance, oftentimes from diametrically opposed ideological viewpoints. Hostility will primarily emerge among male participants in (and supporters of) said activity, who see their established hegemony as susceptible to external challenge and significantly weakened as a consequence. Here, women are deemed to be invading an exclusively male space (Ryan 1999:256–57; Banerjee 2012:9)—a not insignificant undertaking in itself—but in perpetrating acts of violence, they are also vulnerable to the accusation of abandoning their natural, predestined role as caring mothers (McGivern and Ward 1980:69–70; Dowler 1998:168; Hamilton 2007:132, 142). Women who engage in such “transgressive” behavior are seen as aberrative and are consequently vilified as being “less than a woman” (Whaley Eager 2008:3), “desexed” (McGivern and Ward 1980:69), “unwomanned” (Jones 1991:xi), or “desexualised” (Banerjee 2012:9), with their activity condemned as “an aberration at best and demonic at worst” (Whaley Eager 2008:3). When women engage in violent activity, the established dividing lines of gender become irrevocably weakened, with such women being effectively “masculinized” in the process. More problematically, perhaps, men who have not adequately resisted such transgression are vulnerable to accusations of having been “feminized” as a consequence, thus further intensifying male anxieties (Ryan 1999:267; Banerjee 2012:10). Furthermore, the political opponents of such activity will regularly impugn the sexual morality of such women in order to further undermine and discredit the political cause that they represent and, by default, will reinforce the subordinate role of the militant female (Ryan 1999:258, 267; Hamilton 2007:141–42; Banerjee 2012:88).

It should be noted that such male anxieties not only are an outward manifestation of raw patriarchal muscle but also derive to a significant extent from gendered perceptions of “nation” and “warrior” within the broader politicocultural context in which militant women find themselves. Similar to the previously discussed concept of “warrior” as an exclusively masculine trope, the representation of “nation” as a feminine entity has gained almost universal acceptance within modern nationalist discourse (Banerjee 2012:6). By its very essence, political violence will coincide with significant national upheaval, resulting in the “necessity” of (male) liberation, defense, maintenance, establishment, and so on of the (female) nation. With female militancy proving to be such a contested historical and cultural space, this dichotomy creates yet further layers of intergender complexity. Within such a paradigm, women are effectively consigned to a maternal role as begetters of the nation’s male warrior class, who, in turn, must defend the female motherland, thereby further silencing the militant female voice. Thus, the participation of women in political violence creates significant
societal and cultural anxieties, with their transmission from life-givers to life-takers sitting uneasily within the established mores of both militant nationalism and Western patriarchy simultaneously.

“Doomed . . . Dead or Damned”:
Women in Traditional Ballad Culture

Given the noted reluctance of Western society to culturally embrace the virtues of a socially empowered (let alone an armed) femininity capable of disrupting patriarchal norms (and has more often than not shown outright hostility to the very concept), commensurate restrictions on the representation of “transgressive” women in traditional ballad narrative are similarly to be expected. Polly Stewart has argued that since “women have always been relegated to an ancillary position in Western culture,” it is thus wholly necessary to examine traditional ballad culture within this prevailing context (1993:55). As a broad collective, traditional narrative ballads contain diverse and multifaceted representations of female dramatis personae, all of which are to a considerable degree reflective of the prevailing conventions of the society in which the ballad was composed and/or the audience at which it was directed. With appropriate academic caution, therefore, such output can be mined as a source of contemporary social and gender mores and will display cultural shifts (or, indeed, calcification) in the status of women, where evident (Ferris 1970:439–49; Casey, Rosenberg, and Wareham 1972:397–403; Ó Cadhla 2012:69–70; Skinner 2017:205).

As cultural interpretations of women, traditional folk ballads regularly deploy highly moralistic tropes, with their narratives often functioning as blunt devices of patriarchal reinforcement (Gammon 2008:49). Stewart argues that traditional ballad culture rigidly demarcates gender boundaries as “battle lines . . . on a field of cultural expectations, the most prominent of which is that the species must survive” (1993:66). When such expectations are met, it is “at the considerable price of extreme sexual and social oppression of women” (66). While conceding that some ballads will duly narrate subtle shifts in terms of overall improvements in the social standing of women, Bradley Tatar goes considerably further than the allegation of patriarchy, arguing that such works have a tendency to be highly misogynistic in trajectory due to “the severity of punishment [being] out of proportion to [the] crime” (2015:4). Ballads of this hue will regularly contain sinister undercurrents by disseminating thinly disguised warnings to women as to the consequences of breaching established gender demarcations, thus serving as “didactic tools to instil obedience in young women” (4).

Given that such works were manifestly conceived and subsequently disseminated within the context of contested gender space, they have habitually struggled (whether by accident or by design) to accommodate progressive representations
of militant femininity, preferring instead to accentuate the “transgressive female” thematic. This is so whether such “transgressions” are regarded as sexual, moral, class-inspired, or, indeed, violent. Within the parameters of the traditional narrative ballad, it is indeed immaterial whether the latter is in the domestic sphere (be it initiated through female-initiated aggression or in self-defense) or, as is the case in the genre under review, politically motivated and thus underpinned by an overarching moral justification. Therefore, as active participants in political violence, female Republican activists may well be “transgressive” within the restrictive patriarchal parameters highlighted by Stewart and others, but their actions must also be necessarily framed within the context of a violent British colonial occupation, a sociopolitical dispensation that Republicans themselves would no doubt consider a far more insidious transgression than any individual contravention committed by such women. This adds a significant caveat when considering the position of militant females within Republican song: while not ubiquitously celebrated within the tradition, the violent activity of Republican women can, at the very least, be equivocated upon as a consequential response to British state violence in Ireland.

Within Republican ballads, the accurate representation of the armed female fighter is further complicated by the opaque and obfuscative treatment of political violence within the ideological framework of physical-force Irish Republicanism. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the trope of the heroic, self-sacrificial martyr gained ideological primacy within the Republican belief system, becoming duly elevated into a quasi-theological construct within the tradition (Smith 1995:13; Sweeney 2004:338; Shanahan 2009:40; Beiner 2014:199). At this juncture, the philosophy of violent Republicanism, while still firmly committed to a wholly physical-force approach to achieving Irish independence, adapted a parallel juxtaposition of heroic passivity. In doing so, the ideology embraced a markedly essentialist position of lionizing the sacrificial endurance of violence by Republicans, as opposed to its blunt infliction on others, regardless if such violence was either proactive or in self-defense (Kearney 1980–81:62), a thematic stemming from what Liam Clarke has termed “the perverse relationship between suffering and strength in the history of physical-force nationalism” in Ireland (1987:111). Such opaqueness and ideological selectivity regarding the deployment of political violence further constricts the potential narrative landscapes available for the articulation of the militant female voice throughout the corpus of Republican song.

This article will now consider two notable exceptions to this obfuscative tendency: “The Ballad of Ann Flood,” a narrative from the 1798 Rising that relates the killing of a British soldier by Flood in her home, and “The Ballad of Mairéad Farrell,” a commemorative work composed in the aftermath of Farrell's
assassination by the Special Air Service (SAS) while on active service for the IRA in March 1988. Given the very specific exceptionalities regarding the deployment of Republican violence, along with the deeply essentialized theoretical belief system embedded within the physical-force tradition in Ireland, the current research seeks to examine the personal and societal consequences for the militant female Republican activist and whether the ideological complexities of Irish Republicanism demarcate such women from comparable representations of “transgressive” females found within the wider ballad tradition.

“Oh, I Took Up the Mallet and Hit Hard”: “The Ballad of Ann Flood”

As a work narrating an undiluted incident of female-on-male violence, “The Ballad of Ann Flood” is a wholly unique extolment of militant femininity from any time frame within the corpus of Republican song. While not strictly a Republican ballad per se (Flood was not a member of any armed organization), the work was nonetheless deemed worthy of inclusion in a local commemorative songster that marked the two hundredth anniversary of the 1798 Rising (Berry 1997).

Set in the town of Garrenstackle, county Wexford, in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of New Ross, the ballad is narrated by Flood herself, who, in the opening verse, speaks frankly of her killing of a British soldier. Significantly, she also implies that by such open documentation of female violence, the ballad seeks to correct both historical and cultural omissions in this regard:

Come listen, my children, and I will relate,
A rousing story of ’98.
You’ve heard of the battles o’er and o’er,
When our nearest and dearest died by the score.
But this is about myself, Ann Flood,
And how I spilled a Hessian’s blood. (Berry 1997:45)

The reference to subsequent local narration of the incident is used deliberately not only to record the heroism of Flood but also to pointedly accentuate it in the context of male failure during the 1798 insurrection. Upon mention of Flood, local men lament not having her among their ranks:

When this tale was told in days gone by,
You had to be sure no foe was nigh.
And the women who heard it said a prayer,
And the men: “Ann Flood had courage to spare.
She should have been with us on Vinegar Hill,
With a fine pike, the foe to kill.” (Berry 1997:45)
While said men were engaged at New Ross, the female population of the locality had been left vulnerable to assault. The context of male abandonment again deliberately emphasizes the bravery of Flood in the ensuing incident:

Ah, when the men went off to fight,  
Lonesome it was day and night.  
Would they ever come back to us again,  
Our fair young sons and stalwart men? (Berry 1997:45)

Patrick Kavanagh notes—albeit with considerable hyperbole—that to avoid the “savage debauchees” of the British Army, “the women fled from their homes and took refuge in the fields,” save for Flood, who “refused to follow the example of her sex, and remained at home” (1898:334). Thus, to defend both her home and herself, she is compelled to confront the armed, brute masculinity of the soldiers alone, save for the company of Máire O’Shea, a twelve-year-old girl from the locality who assists her in domestic duties. As a group of mounted soldiers pass the house, the last member of the troop dismounts for no immediately discernible reason:

He banged on the door and I faced him straight,  
My eyes—can you blame me?—ablaze with hate.  
For where do the men of the house be now?  
Killed by his like? And when? And how? (Berry 1997:45)

Ostensibly, the British soldier was merely seeking to light his pipe, but a darker motive quickly emerges: the attempted sexual assault of the child:

“I just came in for a light,” he said,  
And he pushed past me to the settlebed,  
Where our Máire sat, all frozen with fright.  
He caught her arm—‘twas a sorry sight,  
To see a soldier so brutal and cold,  
And little Máire with her hair of gold. (Berry 1997:45)

Fueled by a combination of her now being in loco parentis to Máire, as well as her clear desire to avenge the local men killed by the British, Flood proceeds to beat the soldier to death with a mallet. Both Flood and the child immediately dispose of the soldier’s body before facing down British soldiers during subsequent questioning about the incident:

Oh, I took up the mallet and hit hard,  
And we shook as we dragged him into the yard.  
We covered him over with faggots dry,  
And they came and they looked for him, by and by.  
But they never found him alive or dead,  
“We never saw any such man,” we said. (Berry 1997:45)
It should be noted that besides the seminal account contained in Kavanagh (1898:324–26), detailed historical sources on Flood are scant, with local folklore recollections providing much of the information on the incident. She is recorded alternatively as having killed the soldier either with “a mallet . . . [and] hid his body in the haggard,” with “a square-headed mallet . . . and buried him in the heap of manure,” or with “a long-handled mallet, which was used for washing potatoes.” Another account tells that “she took a mallet from a box and hit him on the back of the head and killed him [and] brought him out and buried him in the dung-heap.” A further version again cites a mallet as the weapon involved, stating that Flood “hit him between the two eyes and knocked him dead [and] covered him up in the dung hill.” She is named as “Biddy Flood” by another local informant, who again cites “a wooden mallet she had for washing potatoes” as the weapon used to kill the soldier. Only one account differs from the rest by recording that “she went in and shot him and dug his grave in a field at the back of the house.” The latter was related by “Mrs. Byrne of Cornmarket, Co. Wexford,” who accentuates the gender dynamic of the incident by pointedly adding that “she did the work very thoroughly indeed, and she succeeded where the Irish lads might have failed.”

Along with yet another version citing Flood’s use of a mallet, Maureen Murphy (1998:182) documents several comparable narratives from the 1798 Rising in which a lone woman kills a soldier, all of which involve the use of a kitchen utensil as a weapon. Eleven comparable episodes were collected in Longford relating to a similar incident following the Battle of Ballinamuck (182), with Guy Beiner (2007:192) noting additional versions collected in Mayo and Leitrim. Murphy has suggested that, given the geographical spread of the versions collected, “the lone woman who kills a soldier may be an Irish version of an Apocryphal legend that can be traced back to the story of Jael and Sisera . . . in the Old Testament Book of Judges” (1998:184). Indeed, the biblical connotations associated with the incident had been recognized one hundred years previously by Kavanagh, who described the soldier as being “dead, to all appearances, as Holofernes when that tyrant fell under the edge of his own sword wielded by the heroic Judith of Scriptural renown,” further describing Flood as “our Wexford Judith” (1898:325). Whether Flood’s actions were, in fact, an attested historical event or simply an exaggerated local incident grafted onto a preexisting legend will perhaps never be known for certain. What is clear from the multiple versions documented from oral sources, however, is that the trope of an armed, violent heroine was certainly not considered aberrative among the local community in Wexford and was deeply embedded within the collective consciousness of the area well into the early twentieth century. Regardless of such contention, the narration of such an unvarnished act of blunt violence carried out by a specifically named Republican is exceptional within the song tradition (even among
works detailing male protagonists) and clearly points to a didactic motivation on behalf of the ballad writer.\textsuperscript{16}

This instructive thematic is facilitated by the deliberate positioning of Flood as her own narrator, a noteworthy literary device on several fronts. First, it purposely portrays a woman wholly at ease with the deployment of extreme violence by herself and, by implication, other females. Second, it also serves as a very public admonishment of men for confining women to the homestead during times of conflict, a conflict in this instance in which said men were comprehensively routed at the Battle of New Ross. Third, Flood very effectively disempowers the men by putting her own words into their mouths (“She should have been with us on Vinegar Hill, / With a fine pike, the foe to kill”), resulting in their own self-admonishment for their failure at New Ross. Furthermore, her appropriation of the mallet—a tool with obvious phallic connotations and one routinely deployed throughout folk song as a trope of male supremacy (Sweers 2005:178)—is clearly no accident either. Most importantly, perhaps, Flood’s self-narration confers a specific inspirational agency on the work and allows the ballad to function as a totemic exemplar for potentially similar-minded Republican women.

The message conveyed in “The Ballad of Ann Flood” is unambiguous: female violence is not only a wholly justifiable response to male transgression but one that is to be unashamedly celebrated. In the case of Flood, her violence has yet further agency. By spanning both domestic and political spheres, she succeeds in fusing the tropes of warrior and mother into a totemic embodiment of empowered, militant femininity, an exemplar that Western society has shown such reluctance to accommodate (Dowler 1998:168). Without question, this identifies “The Ballad of Ann Flood” as a representational high-water mark in terms of armed femininity within the tradition of Republican song, with the narrative not only extending well beyond the parameters of simply extolling (and thus endorsing) acts of female violence but also serving as a protofeminist text within the genre.

\textbf{“I Took Up My Gun, until Freedom’s Day”:
“The Ballad of Mairéad Farrell”}

The outbreak of widescale civil unrest within Nationalist communities in Belfast and Derry in the late 1960s led to a split within both the IRA (1969) and Sinn Féin (1970), with what was to become the more dominant of the two factions—known colloquially as the Provisionals—immediately rededicating itself to an almost exclusively physical-force approach to the national struggle.\textsuperscript{17} While Cumann na mBan was still an active organization during this period, an IRA General Army Convention held in late 1968 had voted to permit women
to join the IRA as full members and to serve alongside male volunteers in the organization (Reinisch 2013:116; White 2017:78). This resulted in a significant shift in terms of active female participation within the IRA, with women now openly visible as armed volunteers. From the early 1970s, Armagh Gaol saw a large influx of female Republican activists, first as internees and subsequently as sentenced prisoners. This would, in due course, provide the women with a further arena of conflict, when they engaged in the protracted campaign for the reintroduction of political prisoner status after its withdrawal in March 1976. As female prisoners were permitted to wear their own clothes, the women in Armagh Gaol were specifically engaged in a no-work protest. In February 1980, following the severe beating of the prisoners by a prison staff riot squad and the subsequent refusal of authorities to allow the women out of their cells for a twenty-four-hour period to bathe or empty chamber pots, the protest escalated to emulate the male no-wash protest in Long Kesh. At this point, the women engaged in a considerably more extreme form of protest than that of their male counterparts by smearing both excrement and menstrual fluids on their cell walls. Three female prisoners had also gone on hunger strike in late 1980, alongside the seven male hunger strikers in the H-Blocks.

The most prominent of the three hunger strikers was Mairéad Farrell (1957–88), an IRA volunteer from Belfast who had previously come to public prominence after a smuggled photograph of her in a cell smeared with her own bodily fluids was first published in 1980. Farrell was arrested in 1976 and sentenced to fourteen years’ imprisonment for her alleged role in an IRA bombing operation in Belfast. While in Armagh Gaol, she served as officer commanding of the Republican prisoners and played a leading role in the campaign for the reintroduction of political status and subsequently in the anti-strip-search campaign of the early 1980s. At the height of the 1981 hunger strike in Long Kesh, Farrell contested the Irish General Election in absentia on the Anti-H-Block/Armagh ticket. Upon release in 1986, she immediately rejoined the IRA, ultimately becoming a member of the organization’s GHQ staff. During this period, Farrell gained a significant public profile and was widely recognized as a Republican spokesperson, giving several media interviews on the subjects of feminism and the armed struggle. Along with fellow Belfast IRA volunteers Seán Savage and Danny McCann, she was assassinated by the SAS in Gibraltar on March 6, 1988.

Thus, by the time of her death Farrell had comprehensively occupied all roles available to the contemporary Republican militant, regardless of gender. Both as an IRA volunteer on active service and as a political prisoner, she had demonstrated a consistent willingness to transgress calcified gender norms (particularly via the weaponization of menstrual blood) and was without question a singularly totemic representation of armed femininity within modern...
physical-force Republicanism. All of the above—and particularly the circumstances of her death—assured Mairéad Farrell’s iconic status within Republican collective consciousness and prompted the composition of a well-known commemorative ballad in the early 1990s.  

Similar to Ann Flood, Farrell is consciously positioned in the work as her own narrator, again giving deliberate articulation to the militant female voice. While the repeated opening and closing verses appear to have been appropriated from the opening and closing couplets of a poem from the early 1930s, they are illustrative of a ubiquitously deployed trope of Republican song: the explicit guarantee of eternal life for the fallen warrior.  

Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there, I do not sleep.
Do not stand at my grave and cry.
When Ireland lives, I do not die.

Here, Farrell is pointedly shown to have transcended the grave and is presented to the audience not as a martyred hero to be mourned but as a living Republican volunteer. Revenant figures and apparitions are a common feature of Republican song (Ó Cadhla 2017b) and represent a politicocultural continuum of Patrick Pearse’s famous 1915 panegyric, which proclaimed that “life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations” (Farrell Moran 1994:146). The ideological thematic deployed in this instance is a familiar one. By proclaiming her own eternity (and deliberately conflating it with that of the Irish nation), Farrell declares that the struggle for freedom must be maintained until completion or she will, in fact, “die.” This alludes not merely to her own physical demise but to a more lasting ideological death coinciding with that of the aforementioned Irish nation, which she now embodies. Only when national freedom has been won can she ultimately rest. Such deliberate blurring of the liminal space between life and death is consistently deployed throughout the canon and successfully constructs a form of Republican limbo from which living IRA volunteers routinely endure postmortem hauntings from revenant Republican martyrs (Ó Cadhla 2017b:126).

While such a thematically traditional opening positions the work very firmly within the established parameters of Republican song, the folkloric theme is immediately interrupted by the opening lines of verse 2. The blunt (and markedly unencoded) gender message “a woman’s place is not at home” is proclaimed not as an aspiration toward an ill-defined gender equality but pointedly because “the fight for freedom, it still goes on.” As evidenced previously with Flood, Farrell exhorts other women to disregard gender restrictions and assume their own role in the Republican struggle, similar to that occupied by her while alive. The theme of unvarnished militant femininity is reinforced in the lines “I took
“up my gun, until freedom’s day / I pledged to fight for the IRA.” At this point, Farrell temporarily parts company with Flood. Unlike the latter, she does not wait at home for the fight to come to her but is proactive in this regard. With biographical Republican song traditionally eschewing any overt reference to the infliction of violence by its subjects, the unambiguous militancy of the reference carries some considerable force, particularly so, as it is related by a woman who took up “her” (and not “a”) gun.

With Farrell unambiguously traversing into the male arena of armed conflict, the appearance of British prime minister Margaret Thatcher in verse 3 adds a significant complication to the gender landscape. At this juncture, the audience is now presented with a woman “ordering” violence against Farrell, herself a self-proclaimed violent woman, as per verse 2:

Gibraltar was the place I died.
McCann and Savage were by my side.
I heard the order so loud and shrill
Of Thatcher’s voice, said “Shoot to kill!”

In this instance, it is clearly the colonial—and pointedly not the gender—context that is decisive, with Thatcher alone (and consequently, not Farrell) consciously depicted as the aberrant, transgressive female, despite the latter’s self-proclaimed participation in political violence, along with her public exhortation of other women to engage in same. Thus, as part of the IRA’s armed campaign, Farrell’s “transgression” can be redefined as a necessary and defensible form of “contratransgression” to British occupation and is wholly justified as a consequence—to Republicans at least, if to no one else. Therefore, the juxtaposition of two politically violent women in “The Ballad of Máiread Farrell” highlights a certain exceptionality regarding the representation of militant femininity within Republican ballads. While the violence of female Republican volunteers is certainly “transgressive” from the perspective of societal patriarchy, it is clearly not deemed as such by the Republican audience. Rather, it is British state violence that represents the actual transgression in the ballad, and it is aberrative regardless of the gender of the person who orders or inflicts it.

Ann Flood and Máiread Farrell: Narrative Outcomes

Given that Flood and Farrell are both women who have successfully deployed violent methods in pursuit of their goals and display no discernible reticence in doing so (despite a certain narrative vagueness in the case of Farrell), it is worth considering both in greater detail as exemplars of the consequential outcomes for Republican women who traverse the traditional gender boundary of political violence.
With some minor exceptions, the parallels between the two narratives are immediately obvious:

Both women are the titular focus of the ballads. Unlike other female-inspired works in the genre, both appear in every verse and are clearly the central focus of the narratives. By Farrell stating that “a woman’s place is not at home” and the contention that Flood “should have been . . . on Vinegar Hill,” both ballads accentuate feminine militancy while simultaneously repudiating domestic confinement. Both embrace Republican and feminist liberation in tandem with their rejection of British and patriarchal domination. Both are unambiguously prepared to deploy violence against the British state in Ireland. Perhaps most importantly, both ballads are self-narrated, giving clear articulation to the militant female voice. In the case of Flood, this is achieved by her appropriation of the male voice following their defeat in battle; with Farrell it is a postmortem narration from beyond the grave.

There are two significant distinctions between the respective works, however. First, where the violence of Flood is described in some graphic detail, that of Farrell has been elided by the composer. Second, there is a marked divergence in terms of the consequences for both protagonists due to their involvement in political violence: while Flood has lived to tell the tale of her militant actions, Farrell has clearly paid a significantly higher cost for hers, with her life.

In her analysis of gender power relations in the Child ballads, Stewart (1993) posits a framework of potential outcomes for women who transgress societal (and specifically male) expectations of gender-appropriate behaviors. While aspects of Stewart’s thesis have been questioned by some scholars (Wollstadt 2002:297), and the findings cannot, of course, be applied with complete universality across multiple genres, her analysis does nonetheless provide a useful paradigm for analyzing the resultant personal and societal consequences for militant women such as Flood and Farrell. Furthermore, as the thesis has as its central analysis “[women] depicted agonistically with a man or with a male-headed authority structure” (Stewart 1993:56), it has an additional relevance to works narrating protagonists in armed conflict, given the propensity for strained gender relations in such situations.

Stewart argues that in the Child ballads, women “are caught in the bind that has been made evident through the feminist critique of the patriarchy: females in a male-dominated world are subject to oppression whether they act or do not act” (1993:55). Consequently, she juxtaposes “success” and “failure” in the context of women who seek to confront such patriarchal restrictions, further arguing that both outcomes can be either “personal” or “cultural.” Within this framework, “personal success” can be defined as a woman reaching a stated goal
and averting harm in the process. Such achievement can be accompanied by either “cultural failure” or “cultural success.” In the former, the woman realizes her personal ambition but is considerably diminished from a societal perspective as a result (56). In the latter (a rarity in traditional folk song), the personal goal is successfully reached alongside the fulfilling of societal expectations. This is largely achieved by women “appropriating the masculine decision-making prerogative . . . or by appropriating masculine dress” (65). In terms of “personal failure,” Stewart gives several examples of women who are attacked or who need male rescuing as a result of their unsuccessful pursuit of personal goals but are subsequently promoted to an elevated societal status by the ballad’s conclusion, thus attaining “cultural success” (60) in the process. “Cultural failure” follows “personal failure” due to “a women’s use of violence, or unsanctioned sex, or both” (59) in confronting patriarchal mores. Such instances involve “doomed women, who end up dead or damned whether through someone else’s actions, or through their own” (57).

As women who have the stated personal objective of inhabiting the male-dominated arena of political violence, it is clear that both Flood and Farrell have unquestionably succeeded from a personal perspective; therefore, the issue of “personal failure” does not arise.

Flood experiences “personal success” by

- appropriating the militant male voice as a device to extol violent revolutionary femininity and consequently in order to publicly admonish Republican men for the failure of the 1798 Rising;
- protecting both herself and the young girl in her care from assault;
- reinforcing the safety of her homestead;
- killing a British soldier;
- escaping the consequences of the killing and living to tell her story; and
- being elevated into an inspirational prototype of militant Republican femininity.

Similarly, Farrell enjoys significant “personal success” by virtue of

- joining the IRA, a male-dominated, armed revolutionary movement;
- engaging in armed activity on an equal footing with men;
- serving a lengthy sentence as a political prisoner;
- engaging in extreme forms of prison protest action (smearing bodily fluids on cell walls and engaging in a hunger strike) that were traditionally the preserve of male Republican prisoners;
- immediately rejoining the IRA upon release, rising to the rank of GHQ staff member;
- enjoying an elevated social status within the wider Republican community as a political ex-prisoner;
- articulating the militant female voice in unambiguous terms; and
- being elevated into an inspirational prototype of militant Republican femininity.
But what of the resultant “cultural successes” and “cultural failures” of the two? This will, of course, depend largely upon both the societal and the political parameters that we may apply to their respective narrative outcomes. Given the noted propensity of physical-force Irish Republicanism to reconstitute outright military defeat as an effective ideological victory (Kearney 1980–81:62–70; Bishop and Mallie 1987:455; Clarke 1987:11; Bell 2017:585), the concept of what constitutes “success” can often be very much in the eye of the Republican beholder. Thus, the consequences for Farrell and Flood ought not to be solely gauged against the “meeting of male expectations” (Wollstadt 2002:297) in a patriarchal society, as such mores are obviously secondary to the individuals under review. As both have publicly spurned the restrictions of patriarchy, they have clearly not met such male expectations in the first instance and are quite happy to have not done so. Instead, the measure of whether or not they have achieved “cultural success” must be necessarily framed within the very specific ideological tenets that underpin the theoretical framework of violent Republicanism.

Regardless of such ideological intricacies and nuance, as discussed previously, Flood has achieved “cultural success” by gaining the tacit approval of physical-force Republican men for her actions, albeit by her own appropriation of their voice. While such an acknowledgment from martial males is, of itself, obviously significant, their gender (similar to that of Margaret Thatcher) is essentially unimportant, as she has met the more important cultural expectations of physical-force Republicanism. Regarding Farrell, the consequences are not quite so clear-cut. Her “personal success” led to a prolonged period of imprisonment and ultimately to her assassination at thirty-one years of age. It could be reasonably argued, therefore, that she effectively meets the criteria for “cultural failure” and is one of Stewart’s “doomed women, who end up dead or damned” as a consequence of her “use of violence” (1993:57, 59). Despite Farrell having been killed, however, the ballad deliberately presents her as having physically overcome death by transcending the grave and returning to narrate her own political narrative as a “living” IRA volunteer. As argued, this is not an instance of the standard folkloric motif of cathartic revenance found commonly in traditional folk song; instead, it is representative of the ideological adherence to glorious martyrdom and heroic self-sacrifice necessarily preceding national liberation and rebirth, an essential thematic within the Irish physical-force tradition.

Therefore, within the very constricted and specific ideological context of violent Irish Republicanism, it is possible to further expand upon Stewart’s thesis. In terms of the cultural consequences for Farrell, the Republican tropes of everlasting life and national rebirth supersede any moral disapproval from patriarchal or wider societal sources. Thus, the potential “cultural failure” created by
her “death” is immediately erased, as she has gained instantaneous “ideological success”—albeit at the ultimate cost—by entering the pantheon of Republican martyrs. Similar to that of Flood, the inspirational agency created by Farrell’s death is further accentuated by the subject transmitting her own narrative (in this case postmortem), thereby facilitating her elevation into a totemic exemplar for future generations of Republicans and for female militants in particular to emulate.

Thus, whether Republican women live to tell their tale like Ann Flood or lose their lives prematurely in conflict like Mairéad Farrell, their actions by transgressing into the male-dominated arena of political violence cannot incur the dire, often fatal penalties of “cultural failure” as posited by Stewart. While Farrell’s death is clearly not her desired outcome, the innate ideological essentialism of physical-force Republicanism allows death—the ultimate “cultural failure” in any social context—to be effectively reconfigured as “ideological success,” providing a significant addendum to Stewart’s system of classification. This tendency is not, of course, reflective of any particularly progressive gender thematic deliberately promoted by the composers of Republican song. Nor is it to suggest that the politicocultural ideology of violent Irish Republicanism is underpinned by some morose subculture of death. Rather, such narrative outcome is a consequential representation of the interwoven essentialist death tropes of heroic martyrdom preceding resurrection and national rebirth, along with the paradoxical Republican tendency to reconstruct outright military failure as ideological victory, all of which effectively combine to provide militant Republican women with a unique set of criteria that facilitates their circumvention of the misogynistic, didactic consequences for “transgressive” women evident elsewhere throughout the corpus of traditional narrative song.

Concluding Remarks

This article has noted the dearth of academic output within the historiography of physical-force Irish Republicanism that documents armed female activists’ contribution to the Irish national struggle, along with how this narrative neglect has also been mirrored throughout the attendant song tradition. When present in such output, militant women are routinely consigned to marginal, secondary roles indicating thinly disguised male angsts in the face of an empowered, armed femininity. In the context of Irish Republicanism, such intergender friction is considerably accentuated due to the widespread promotion of the trope of the grieving Republican mother, the conflation of “woman” as a totemic representation of “nation,” obfuscative ideological constructs attached to the infliction and endurance of Republican violence, along with the deeply essentialized concepts of martyrdom, resurrection, and eternal life, all of which effectively
combine to further constrict the narrative space available to the female militant in Republican musical narrative. The societal expectations of women (specifically as noncombatants) have been highlighted, along with how such patriarchal mores have been routinely presented in traditional ballad culture via didactic, misogynistic texts that at times promote fatal consequences for women who successfully breach gender restrictions. With a view to examining the personal, societal, and cultural consequences for female Republican militants who challenge male hegemony in the arena of political violence, the work has focused on two exceptional musical narratives of violent Republican women: “The Ballad of Ann Flood” and “The Ballad of Mairéad Farrell.” The system of classification posited by Stewart (1993) for analyzing the relative successes or failures of “transgressive” females was utilized as a comparative framework for investigating the personal and cultural consequences for both women’s involvement in political violence. The analysis noted that while both Flood and Farrell achieved “personal success” by virtue of their respective involvement in the Republican armed struggle, their cultural consequences were at odds due to Flood’s survival and Farrell’s assassination at a relatively young age. It was further demonstrated, however, that the heavily essentialized ideological constructs that underpin physical-force Irish Republicanism allow Farrell to effectively escape the fatal consequences of her actions. Republican Valhalla—with all of its attendant politicocultural immortality—and Farrell’s postmortem appearance in the ballad narrative as a living, active IRA volunteer combine to effectively reconstruct the “cultural failure” associated with her “death” as an effective “ideological success.” Therefore, while the consequences for “transgressive” women as posited in the theses of Vic Gammon (2008), Stewart (1993), Tatar (2015), and others can provide us with useful comparative frameworks up to a certain point, they cannot be applied seamlessly to militant women in the Republican song tradition. Due to the highly nuanced and selective attitudes to political violence, along with the essentialized tropes of martyrdom, resurrection, and immortality promoted within the broader ideological parameters of physical-force Irish Republicanism, the severe consequences for women found elsewhere in traditional ballad culture do not predominate Republican song. As demonstrated in the instance of Mairéad Farrell, such militant women may well pay with their lives for their “transgression” into the martial male arena, but this cannot be construed as “cultural failure.” Rather, death—the ultimate “cultural failure”—is effectively inverted as a form of “ideological success” that complements the “personal success” of their militant involvement. As ever, “the perverse relationship between suffering and strength” (Clarke 1987:111) within Irish Republicanism provides a uniquely paradoxical framework with which to record the narratives of its heroic martyrs. While acknowledging the obvious paucity of militant women recorded within the genre, this article
has demonstrated that Republican ballads provide an effective dichotomy of “cultural success” for militant women whereby even when their “transgression” results in death, they are ultimately victorious, with any nascent “cultural failure” immediately negated as a result.

**Appendix: Song Lyrics**

**The Ballad of Ann Flood**

Come listen, my children, and I will relate,
A rousing story of ’98.
You’ve heard of the battles o’er and o’er,
When our nearest and dearest died by the score.
But this is about myself, Ann Flood,
And how I spilled a Hessian's blood.

When this tale was told in days gone by,
You had to be sure no foe was nigh.
And the women who heard it said a prayer,
And the men: “Ann Flood had courage to spare.
She should have been with us on Vinegar Hill,
With a fine pike, the foe to kill.”

Ah, when the men went off to fight,
Lonesome it was day and night.
Would they ever come back to us again,
Our fair young sons and stalwart men?
The townlands all were quiet as ghost,
And Garrenstackle ’twas quieter than most.

I was here in this house with Máire O’Shea,
A little girl who came each day.
From the first house at the top of the road,
She talked and she helped to lighten the load.
She was barely twelve that time, I been [and being?]
A handsome girl, she looked sixteen.

We were working easy about the place,
When we heard the tread of quicken [sic] pace
Of soldiers on horseback coming the way,
We closed the door and started to pray.

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They they'd pass along and let us be
And off they galloped away—but see!

The last man looks, he stops, dismounts,
And we're in for it now, by all accounts.
He banged on the door and I faced him straight,
My eyes—can you blame me?—ablaze with hate.
For where do the men of the house be now?
Killed by his like? And when? And how?

“I just came in for a light,” he said,
And he pushed past me to the settlebed,
Where our Máire sat, all frozen with fright.
He caught her arm—’twas a sorry sight
To see a soldier so brutal and cold,
And little Máire with her hair of gold.

Oh, I took up the mallet and hit hard,
And we shook as we dragged him into the yard.
We covered him over with faggots dry,
And they came and they looked for him, by and by.
But they never found him alive or dead,
“We never saw any such man,” we said.

With the Kellys to aid at the fall of the night,
We buried his body out of sight.
Over the way in the grey marl hole,
And may God have mercy on his soul.
And when to your children this tale relate,
Tell them times were bad in ’98.

The Ballad of Máiréad Farrell

Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there, I do not sleep.
Do not stand at my grave and cry.
When Ireland lives, I do not die.

A woman’s place is not at home.
The fight for freedom, it still goes on.
I took up my gun, until freedom’s day
I pledged to fight for the IRA.
In Armagh Gaol I served my time.
Strip searches were a British crime.
Degraded me, but they could not see—
I suffered this to see Ireland free.

Gibraltar was the place I died.
McCann and Savage were by my side.
I heard the order so loud and shrill
Of Thatcher’s voice, said: “Shoot to kill!”

So, do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there, I do not sleep.
Do not stand at my grave and cry.
When Ireland lives, I do not die.

Notes
1. The delineating prefix “physical-force” is deployed as a descriptor for Irish Republicans who support and/or engage in armed struggle in pursuit of a thirty-two-county Irish Republic. Given its common association with political violence (Connolly 1998:508; English 2006:509; Moloney 2007:707), the appropriation of the term “Republican” has often proven to be highly contentious in Ireland and has been the source of much friction, depending on respective political or, indeed, historical vantage points. For the purposes of this and previous articles, I have deployed the term “Republican ballads” universally, as the composers of said works would no doubt have regarded the personalities narrated therein as such (see Ó Cadhla 2017a:280).
2. Diarmuid Ferriter, “Review: The Indignant Muse: Poetry and Songs of the Irish Revolution, 1887–1926,” Irish Times, April 23, 2016. While acknowledging that female militants have been largely neglected in Republican song and in wider historical narrative, the fact remains that women and men were not similarly represented within militant republican organizations at any stage of the Irish national struggle. For example, while discussing the 1916 Rising, Ferriter notes how “about 1,000 men and 200 women . . . answer[ed] the call of the Irish Republic” (2004:141) during Easter Week. Even accepting a putative five-to-one gender split, the absence of militant females from the Republican song tradition is still particularly stark. Indeed, the monograph reviewed by Ferriter and that prompted his “sanitised to the utmost” remarks yielded only seven female-themed narratives from over 550 texts.
3. For complete lyrics of both ballads, please see the appendix.
4. This pointed failure to adequately document the active role of militant female Republicans has been highlighted by several scholars. See, for example, McGivern and Ward (1980:71); MacCurtain and O’Dowd (1992:1–5); Tallion (1999:iv); McCoole (2004:16); Ryan and Ward (2004:i); McCarthy (2007:1); McDowell (2008:35); Matthews (2010:9); Gillis (2014:7); Reinisch (2016:151).
5. McDowell (2008:337) cites the widespread use of military commemorations as a cultural vehicle for the restoration of patriarchal order disrupted by conflict and war.
6. Dowler (1998:168) argues that such hostility to the notion of women’s ability to span the motherhood/warriorhood binary is particularly prevalent in Western society, where the concept continues to be largely rejected.
7. The Special Air Service is an elite undercover unit of the British Army.
8. The Battle of New Ross, County Wexford, took place on June 5, 1798, during which Irish separatist forces were roundly defeated.
9. Beiner (2011:70) cites the possibility of Kavanagh (1898) influencing the narrative of oral versions of the incident collected in the early twentieth century.


11. “A Local Hero,” https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/5009279/5004170/5132808. This particular version was documented in 1937 and noted that Flood’s descendants were still residing in the locality at that time.


15. The Battle of Ballinamuck, County Longford, took place on September 8, 1798.

16. For further reading on the obfuscation of Republican violence in popular song narrative, see Ó Cadhla (2017a:275–79). See also note 33.

17. The 1969–70 split was a public manifestation of major internal divisions that had arisen in the Republican Movement during the earlier part of the decade. For detailed discussions of the events, personalities, and ideologies leading to the split, see Patterson (1997:110–35, 140–56); English (2004:81–108); Hanley and Millar (2010:108–48).

18. Cumann na mBan translates as Council of the Women. Cumann na mBan was an all-female Republican paramilitary organization founded in 1914 that served as an adjunct to the Irish Volunteers, the forerunner of the IRA. For further reading, see Ward (1995); Tallion (1999); McCarthy (2007). The decision to allow women to join the IRA as full members was strongly opposed by a number of female activists who viewed it less as a case of gaining equal status with men within the IRA and more as a loss of their autonomy as Cumann na mBan volunteers. White describes the move as “an attempt to control women activists” within the Republican Movement (2017:151).

19. The increasingly frontline military role for women continued to expand in the 1980s. Moloney notes the rewriting of the IRA’s constitution at the 1986 General Army Convention “to excise sexist language” and that women “had become [IRA] brigade commanders and had even made it to the staff of Northern Command” by this period (2007:376).

20. Following a Republican hunger strike in 1972, the British government introduced what it termed “special category status” for those charged with and convicted of political offenses. (Despite being “political prisoner status” in all but name, the term was pointedly never used by the British state or indeed by Irish authorities for prisoners in their jails.) Special category status was abolished on March 1, 1976, following the British government’s decision to pursue an explicit policy of criminalizing its political prisoner population. In line with well-established Republican tradition, the (male) prisoners in Long Kesh (now officially renamed as HM Prison, The Maze) eschewed convict uniforms, instead opting to cover themselves solely in blankets. As prison rules required the wearing of a prison uniform, the “Blanketmen” were confined to their cells for twenty-four hours a day. The protest escalated in 1978 when prisoners began smearing excrement on the walls and ceilings of their cells and emptying chamber pots under cell doors and out windows. This followed the prisoners’ refusal to leave their cells to wash or empty pots due to consistent allegations of assault by prison staff, along with a decision to deny prisoners permission to wear a blanket or towel to cover themselves with when accessing the washroom and toilet facilities. The Blanket Protest culminated in the hunger strike of 1981, during which ten Republican prisoners died. For further reading, see Coogan (1980); Beresford (1987); O’Malley (1990); Hennessy (2014).

21. For detailed accounts of the conditions of the protesting prisoners in Armagh Gaol at the time, see Murray (1998); Wahidin (2016:107–96).

22. The various protest actions by women prisoners in Armagh—particularly the deployment of menstrual blood as a form of protest—were the cause of some considerable division among feminist activists at the time. For further discussion, see Loughran (1986:64); Weinstein (2006:24).
For further reading on menstrual fluids as a form of protest in Armagh, see O’Keefe (2006:535–36); Banerjee (2012:126–30).

23. The three female hunger strikers were IRA prisoners Máireád Farrell, Máireád Nugent, and Mary Doyle. The fast at Armagh Gaol began on December 1, 1980, and ended on December 19, the day after the Long Kesh hunger strike (October 27–December 18) had ended in heavily disputed circumstances. No hunger strikers died in either prison during the period of the 1980 hunger strike.

24. For detailed accounts on the strip-searching and assault of female Republican prisoners during this period, see Aretxaga (2001:1–27); Wahidin (2016:169–96).

25. Farrell stood in the June 1981 General Election for the constituency of Cork North Central and received 2,751 votes.

26. Interview footage of Máireád Farrell recorded shortly before her death can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXXSQvBwpxA and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2TyzJQVL4o.

27. While Farrell, Savage, and McCann were on active service for the IRA in Gibraltar, all three were unarmmed when shot dead by members of the SAS.

28. The work was composed by Patricia McBride of Maghera, County Derry.

29. The original lines read: "Do not stand at my grave and weep. / I am not there I do not sleep, . . . / Do not stand at my grave and cry. / I am not there; I do not die" (Shapiro 2006:295). The authorship of the original poem was disputed for several years but has since been attributed to American poet Mary Elizabeth Frye (1905–2004). While such recycling of text from other sources is by no means a unique phenomenon within Republican song, the genre is more notable for its appropriation of preexisting musical scores. For example, "Kevin Barry" and "Shall My Soul Pass Through Old Ireland?" both share the same melody, as do "Roddy McCorley" and "Seán Sabhat from Garryowen." Indeed, "The Ballad of Máireád Farrell" is itself set to the familiar air of "Black Is the Colour of My True Love’s Hair."

30. On May 3, 1916, Patrick Pearse (1879–1916) was executed by firing squad in Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin, for his leading role in the Easter Rising of that year. Pearse’s famous polemic—which has become a staple of militant Republican narrative ever since—was made in a graveside speech at the funeral of veteran Republican activist Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa (1831–1915). The latter was convicted in 1865 on conspiracy and treason charges and sentenced to penal servitude for life.

31. The poetic depiction of Ireland as a woman—often in goddess-like apparition—is a well-established trope of traditional Irish song that appears regularly across multiple cultural disciplines. Popular descriptors for the “nation mother” include Róisín Dubh, Dark Rosaleen, Caitlín Ní hUalacháin, Síle Ní Ghadhra, and Mother Ireland, among others. For further historical context on the allegory, see Zimmerman (1967:56).


33. As noted, ballads commemorating an identified Republican volunteer are notable for their tendency to avoid linking the subject to any explicit acts of violence, preferring generic references to their activity instead. Note here how the final line of verse 2 ("I pledged to fight for the IRA") moves seamlessly into the opening of verse 3 ("In Armagh Gaol, I served my time") without any explanation as to how Farrell came to be convicted and imprisoned.

34. Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013) was British prime minister from 1979 to 1990 and was a particular bête noire of Republicans due to her role in the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981.

35. "Shoot to kill" is a reference to what Republicans termed the shoot-to-kill policy of the 1980s, whereby suspected IRA and INLA members were summarily shot dead by the RUC and British army without first attempting to apprehend and arrest them.
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