

Quiet Revolutions: Food Security and Power in West Belfast, 1969-1998

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This paper addresses the issue of food security during conflict in the context of a bitterly divided Belfast. The most recent prolonged period of conflict from 1969-1998, incorporated many but not all the features of modern day war. Ambiguously known as ‘the Troubles’, the conflict had entered its fifth year when the international concept of *food security* emerged at the first ever World Food Conference in 1974. However with Belfast being a part of the United Kingdom, access to food naturally was not high on the political agenda of the day. Rarely does food security get emphasised on a local level in the developed world.

Considerable attention has been paid to the main aspects of the conflict in Northern Ireland, yet the *normalised* issues surrounding food have been given little credence. Cities in general are platforms for expression and social tension and throughout the city *power* was organised at a local level such that violence was stronger in working class communities. For residents of the barricaded rubble filled streets of this segregated city, local corner shops were their main lifeline. Food was generally considered a woman’s issue which exerted added pressure to their lives in an often unnoticed way. Tragically, though food practices ordinarily created spaces for women to come together, venturing out during the Troubles meant heightened vulnerability. By addressing the significance of the social spaces from which ordinary women built identity and meaning, this paper aspires to highlight the revolutionary attitudes they adopted to feed their families.

The terror, threats, and dread
in market, hearth, and field
We know, when all is said,
we perish if we yield (Kipling 1994).

Key

Part of the research for this paper is ethnography based. For the purposes of clarity, sections of this text contain information and direct quotes from the person who took part in interviews and discussions. Direct quotes by these participants are italicised as distinct from regular literature based quotations. Although many people were involved in the research for the purposes of this paper four individuals will appear throughout this text.

- Morrow: a prominent social figure, campaigner and researcher, cited as (M). Morrow’s wife also took part in this interview. The views are expressed jointly.
- Bell: a hotel receptionist whose parents were active republicans, cited as (B).

- McDonagh: schoolteacher and former local resident whose father ran a typical corner shop in a residential area, cited as (McD).
- Brady: a hotel owner and member of Corrymeela Peace and Reconciliation Community, cited as (Br).

BELFAST – Each time I approached the city via the motorway I was reminded of its history. Goliaths of the industrial era still crowd the skyline. Old factories and housing estates bunch up on gentle slopes, looking like overcrowded teeth in the mouth of the port. One of its most defining and now visited features, its high dividing walls, still display sectarian flags which add to the sense that this is not your average city. Today most of inner city Belfast resembles other European cities yet the complexity of defined barriers and thresholds in the suburban sectors underlines its reputation. Once famed for linen, tobacco processing, rope making and shipbuilding, Belfast’s darker history overtook that era of prosperity. This city has a reputation.

There are a large number of intertwining narratives in any story regarding Belfast. Nothing here happened independently without being linked to another aspect of life. The strand that interests me concerns the impact that living in a complex urban conflict zone had on people’s food and food culture. Although many industrial cities throughout the United Kingdom were blighted by poverty and unemployment, cities in Northern Ireland and especially Belfast had the added complication of war. The most recent prolonged period of conflict from 1969-1998, incorporated many but not all the features of modern day war (Ruane and Todd 1996). With characteristic Irish ambiguity it became known as ‘the Troubles’, a name which underlines a general reluctance (and possible resistance) to declare it as a civil-war or a war of liberation. Unlike World War II (which was everyone’s problem) the Troubles were an ‘internal issue’, one that was greatly intensified due to disastrous spatial and territorial planning (M). Although the conflict took in the entire six counties of Northern Ireland, sometimes spilling into the Republic, mainland Britain and beyond, the vast majority of victims were killed in Belfast, with most of those deaths occurring in West Belfast. Over fifteen years have now passed since the Good Friday Agreement was signed, yet certain sections of society, in particular parts of West and North Belfast, repeatedly regress into the atavistic rituals of defiance and violence. For many younger people this is a violence that has been imposed upon them.

This paper has two interrelated themes. Firstly it sets the scene of life in Belfast during the era and describes the power struggles that shaped its environment. The complex

web of hierarchies and actors, whether legitimate or otherwise, which maintained the social tension for almost thirty years are a testament to the surreal nature of the time. I will put forth the argument that coercive power determined ordinary people's food choices. The second theme demonstrates people's ability (mainly women's) to adapt and overcome the politics of everyday living in Belfast. Communities need a social structure to exist with food as a core element of this. This focus on food security illustrates that although bombings, assassinations and intense street violence were part of day to day living in some flash zones, the vast majority of citizens passively resisted it by living as normal a life as possible. The daily rituals of the household, employment, sport and play, somehow managed to transcend the last great struggle of the old British Empire (B, McD, M).

Much of the information contained here comes from ethnographic fieldwork in the form of walking the streets and talking to people, as well as conducting both informal and organised interviews. For obvious reasons it was not possible to be a participant-observer in a historical conflict. I was reliant on current and former residents of West Belfast, social workers, community workers and some other members of the general public to discuss their experiences with me. I also drew upon history books, articles and archive documentary footage of the conflict to build a framework in which to place this struggle for food. The research took place in the summer of 2013 and formed the basis for a Post-Graduate Master's thesis in the Anthropology of Food.

Interpreting the City

A city is a product of both hegemonic and subordinate cultures, and, at the same time, the site of their production (Agnew et al. 1984, p.1960).

Belfast is a port, the capital of Northern Ireland, the second largest city on the island and is located at the inner most point of a fjord. In Irish, its name is *Béal Feirste*, roughly meaning 'Mouth of the Sandbanks' or 'Mouth of the Fjord' and in more ancient times 'Battle of the Ford' (Getty 1855). There is a feeling that this city is always shifting, adjusting and scraping along, akin to some giant fractured human glacier inching towards the mouth of the sea.

One Saturday afternoon in October 1993, while people were out and about, shopping for food and doing errands, a busy fishmongers' shop collapsed under the weight of bomb (Moloney 2003). As the 1990s progressed, the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.), the largest active paramilitary on the island, once again intensified their bombing campaign in Belfast and the City of London (Ruane and Todd 1996; Bew et al. 1996). Despite this increase in violence there had been a sense of growing political optimism; talk of a ceasefire was circulating and a degree of normalcy had been returning to the streets of West Belfast.

Ireland was striving forward slowly pulling itself out of decades of political and economic stagnation. Britain was emerging from another recession with beneficial consequences for Northern Ireland (BBC 1993).

The Shankill, the road where the bomb exploded, descended into a scene of chaos, as women and children, who were simply buying fish, died violently while trying to buy food for their families. This moment in all its terror, was just one poignant and harrowing incident that typified life in Belfast throughout 'the Troubles'. Out of the 3,529 people to die as a result of the conflict (1969-1998), more than 1,600, almost half, of those deaths occurred in Belfast city, with the majority of those taking place in West Belfast (CAIN 1996-2013: Sutton Index of Deaths). Across much of rural Ulster citizens were able to carry on their lives in a somewhat normal fashion with much less intrusive levels of disturbance and violence. The conflict certainly existed throughout the entire province and left scars in many places but historically as a result of heavy damage sustained during WWII bombing raids by the Luftwaffe, Belfast had been carved up and reshaped. This resulted in thousands of families being rehoused inadequately.

Post War surveys stated that, 'one fifth of all dwellings were unfit for human habitation' (Leonard 1992, p.85). Governmental legislation responded by building numerous new housing estates and rushing in tenants that had been temporarily squatting in 'hutments' (1992, p.85). The estates quickly gained a bad reputation which added to the overall difficulties of residents finding employment. From these foundations we find the roots of much of West Belfast's social issues. After the displacement and movement of thousands of families, the situation intensified. Initially most got on with life but as social tensions rose during the 1960's and the civil rights movement gained momentum, many people found themselves clinging to religion and nationality to maintain identity amid claustrophobic living conditions. Localised violence became a constant fact of life and from the mid-1970s was somewhat engineered by the British government as a direct reaction to the intense bombing campaign in the province (Ruane and Todd 1996). In 1972 alone the Provisional I.R.A. carried out approximately 1300 bombings (O'Brien 1995, p.119); an average of 3.6 for each day of the year.

During the worst years at the beginning of the Troubles the extreme danger levels and persistent bombing (BBC 2012 Bloody Friday) forced the hand of the British Government to literally close Belfast city centre every night. There was no real restaurant culture to speak of, there were no supermarkets or shopping centres, tourists dared not come. This pushed the conflict into the suburbs, directly into the areas where people lived. Numerous blockades and checkpoints created enclaves, often hemming in residents. Industrialisation had driven people towards the city and the bombing drove them out of it again. All four respondents said that these interruptions adjusted the psyche of society forcing people to adapt, circumnavigate and invent (M, McD, B, Br).

'Nobody lives in the city centre and that is a very long legacy of the Troubles because they basically put an iron grid around it. You went shopping through a security net, you showed your I.D., there was security on every door checking for explosives in bags. That was just life. You got on with it. And it shut at 5p.m.' (M).

During the first two months of the Troubles, 3,570 families in Belfast were displaced due to fear, attack and intimidation. During the month of August 1971 'internment' saw a further 2,069 families forced to flee and migrate to an already over-populated West Belfast (Leonard 1992, p.86). Internment was introduced by the British Government in 1971. Anyone suspected of being involved in the conflict could be arrested and imprisoned with trial. Thousands were interned, the vast majority being Catholic (Ruane and Todd 1996; Whyte 1990). People who had grown up with hatred for one another were corralled into overcrowded streets and housing estates, divided by 'peace walls' and immersed in the sectarian rhetoric of their respective communities. Whole families were drawn into causes that often cost them dearly.

As a child growing up south of the border, I often visited a fishmongers shop in Sligo town with my mother; it was called *Moby Dick's* and, like the nemesis of Melville's epic novel, it was a larger than life experience for me every time. I marvelled at the boxes of ice covered fish, the chilly air, the distinct smell and the graphic poster on the wall titled *'Fish and Shellfish of the North Atlantic'*. My mother would bargain for a good piece and a good price as I watched the scene. Needless to say, the place never exploded. Less than a three hour drive away that fact could never be taken for granted.

The bombing of Frizzell's fishmongers strikes me as the desecration of *'something sacred'* (M). Political and military installations, under the banner of war, are at least comprehensible targets. The bomb was brought into the shop disguised as a fish delivery. The device was hidden under a layer of fresh cod and ice and a short detonator fuse was activated. The intended targets had been the leaders of the loyalist Ulster Defence Association, UDA, who were scheduled to meet in the flat above the fish shop at that time. The IRA stated it had intended to clear the fish shop of civilians and plant the bomb. The fuse was too short and the bomb exploded prematurely, killing the bomber who was holding the fish crate and nine other people, eight of them civilians. In total ten people died and fifty seven were injured. But, during an open interview on the fish shop bombing Morrow recalled clearly the general feelings associated with that incredible event; *'there is something about the fish shop that was a scandal....in other words people were absolutely appalled that a shop where people were just buying fish would be a target'*. The more I researched the more compelled I felt to investigate how people individually and collectively coped with the very real knowledge that going to their local shop to purchase food could also get them killed.

There are many reasons why cities can become platforms for tension such as over population, unemployment and ghettoisation. Low (1996) views the 'city' as a place where 'cultural and socio-political manifestations of urban lives' (p.384) are brought into focus; the city *itself* is not a concrete reification of the human experience. Bollens (2000) suggests that in some cases the city is not the primary cause of an inter-group or ethnic conflict, but more so becomes a platform for the expression of conflicting sovereignty. With Northern Ireland failing to acquire legitimacy in the eyes of sufficient numbers of its inhabitants Belfast became true of this and fell into what Lee describes as some type of 'tribal religious war' (1989, p. xiii). In non-urban centres there was less pressure for these power struggles to emerge.

The rituals of intense violence had become part of everyday life for people in both communities (IRA vs British Army, 2012). It was here Leonard (1992, p.85) suggests that 'relationships of domination and subordination [were] experienced first-hand.' Amid the pandemonium day to day trials of its citizens were forgotten. Steel (2009, p.ix) says that 'both food and cities are so fundamental to our everyday lives that they are almost too big to see'. As the city was spliced up and sectioned the question of how social space in Belfast was inhabited arose.

Power versus Women

Naturally people inhabit the spaces that food makes (Steel 2009); however external forces both cultural and political can limit the parameters for those spaces. Food and drink are forms of 'highly condensed social fact' (Appadurai cited in Dietler 2006, p. 89) that link the domestic and political economy (Dietler 2006). When these spaces become inhospitable, dangerous or destroyed, the cultural capital associated with them also diminishes and can be replaced by necessity and empiricism. Instinctively humans adapt to suit their needs and in deprived areas of Belfast people regularly avoided public spaces (including food spaces), dealt with staple food shortages (bread and milk) and often needed to draw down the necessary provisions from the community and authorities to make ends meet (B). These challenges brought women into direct conflict with forces of power, both paramilitary and the state, as they emerged at the forefront of an unnoticed revolution to feed their families (O'Keefe 2013). Dietler's political analysis defines food as 'a prime political tool', adding that it 'has a prominent role in social activity concerned with relations of power' (1996, p. 87).

In Northern Ireland all aspects of community life became politicised (Ruane and Todd 1996, p.1).

In the context of gender, Leonard (1992, p.83) extracts the *Collins English Dictionary* definition of politics and pastes it over the politics of living in Belfast. She describes it as the 'aggregate of relationships of men in society'.

Through Leonard's research in West Belfast she found that an 'often utilised dichotomy' (1992, p.83) was the case where men were dominant in sociology and politics with women by and large 'consigned and confined to the private realm of the family' (1992, p. 83). Leonard is critical of these two spheres and although she does not equate it directly to the conflict she clearly recognises the 'public world of men and the private world of women' (1992, p. 83). Ironically women and children could move more freely than men. Innate sexism in Northern Irish society generally perceived women to be less threatening than men. What came of this allowed some women a greater sense of freedom as they could move more freely and were stopped less often. This helped both their domestic and community causes and in some instances was an advantage to paramilitary organisations. Lines of communication were kept open, messages and even weapons could be mobilised and moved in and out of housing estates in baby's buggies and shopping carts whereas gender distortion ties men up with a macho conflict mentality (M).

Initially the corner-shop was the threshold of resistance but there were other pragmatic women utilising their ability to support their families in the face of violence. Civil rights movements were spearheaded by women such as the young Bernadette Devlin while fighting was organised by men. At the age of 21, Devlin became the youngest person, and one of the few Catholics, elected to the Stormont parliament in N.I. (R.T.E. Archives). People marched for democracy and equality (Battle of the Bogside, 2004). Occasionally these gender boundaries were fused and crossed. Famously women would patrol their streets keeping watch and collectively banging steel dustbin lids on the walls and ground as a warning to paramilitary groups and the community that the police or army were approaching (Bell 2013). In the documentary *Battle of the Bogside*, Nell Mc Cafferty describes an incredible scene where her mother and other women were actively involved in a 'kitchen-factory' operation producing petrol bombs: 'The petrol was mixed with flour and sugar and put into the bottle and a wick placed in after. But the wicks weren't sticking and were falling out and the petrol bombs were useless. My mother and the other women in the street, all of whom had worked in shirt factories and had experience of assembly line management, came down and took over the factory of petrol bomb making and the supply started to flow. They were all used to cooking, so the exact amounts of ingredients were put into them, the flour, the sugar, the petrol and they made very good wicks. And when I watched those women make those petrol bombs I knew that the revolution had come.' Seen through the Marxian lens of production this is also a symbol of economy.

Parasecoli states that 'there is nothing trivial about food' (2005, p. 34). He describes the importance of gastronomy as an indicator and relevant strand of cultural heritage and identity. But what happens when there is neither the scope, nor will, nor the arenas for a food culture

to develop? Although poverty is a symptom of many cities and working class communities in the United Kingdom, conflict and large-scale violence are not. Belfast fell outside the normal workings of power relations for the British Government and as a consequence of this a unique set of living circumstances and adaptations developed.

In an interview Bell described how her family ran an illegal 'house shop' from the front room of their home. Items such as milk, tea, sugar, bread, toiletries, cigarettes and confectionary were sold from 5.p.m. until about midnight. Their local shop closed at this time. It was to the benefit of the family and the community. Her father was in prison for much of her childhood and her mother was frequently arrested for being active in the republican movement. She says that, '*food wasn't secure when I was younger...today it is the one thing I make sure I have at all times*'. She was the eldest of five children and therefore took on the responsibility of caring for her siblings. The women on her street also looked in on them and helped when they could. The supplies for the shop were gotten at a cash and carry or wherever they could be sourced. As she grew older her mother turned to alcohol and so at the age of fourteen she began working part-time. This helped with buying food and essentials. Although actual food shortages were not a direct consequence of the perpetual violence that plagued West Belfast (IRA vs British Army) and other interface zones, the *way* in which the food culture was suppressed stemmed from economic poverty and was exacerbated by the pressures of the Troubles (M, B, McD, Br).

The 'house-shop' was not unique to Bell's family or even to their area and when her mother discontinued 'trading', a neighbour took over the running of this vital service moving it to her own house. These food adaptations require movement, compromise, organisational skills and co-ordination and show a strong community spirit in the face of such adversity. During heavy rioting, blackouts or disturbances the local corner shops often closed which heightened the need for the 'house-shops'. Supply runs to the Republic were established. Orders were placed from households of foods and essentials. A van was driven across the border to the south and the items were purchased and delivered. These operations carried considerable risks especially as the driver was male (B). It is relevant, in this context, to view people's *need and ability* to leave their homes to shop for food under such duress, as a form of social resistance.

Food, Resistance and the Corner Shop

Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy (Blake).

Whereas considerable attention has been paid to the main aspects of Northern Ireland's war, the '*normalised*' issues surrounding food have not. The Troubles were five years old when the concept of '*food security*' was introduced at

the first World Food Conference in 1974. Since then plenty of definitions regarding what constitutes food security have been put forward by the World Bank, the FAO and the U.N. to name but a few. Most of these pertain to the complexities of global food supply and trade policy. The discourses are politically driven and mainly of a western origin of thought, one that is looking outwards to the developing world. Rarely does food security get emphasised on a local level in the developed world.

Anthropologists and nutritionists have difficulty in determining what amount of food a person has eaten if any at all (Pottier 1999). In the aftermath of a bomb explosion in a Belfast suburb, it was the responsibility of the state to secure and lockdown the area and not to go door to door asking if everyone if there was enough food in the house (IRA Bombers, 2014). Food security can be undermined in a number of ways. The loss of a parent, unemployment and conflict are just three examples. In Northern Ireland it fell under the remit of the social welfare department, and was linked to unemployment, poverty and lack of social funding. Most people in the province had enough to eat, were employed, purchased food, prepared meals and were not on the radar as being anyway out of the ordinary: *'your parents always seemed to have something in the press; there were tinned hams and beans'* (Br).

During interviews locals described examples of precarious living. Bell described how the man who ran the corner-shop where her family bought food was assassinated as he turned the key in the lock one morning, (effectively closing this shop) and how she managed to feed her siblings when both of her parents were in prison. McDonagh and Bell both detailed what happens when your neighbourhood is the front line for a guerrilla war, where the delivery vans that supply communities are hijacked and neighbours must come together to help each other. There is another aspect to this and that is of a deep sense of community. Everyone was in the same boat so to speak. In general food was simple, generic and homely (Br, B). It seems impossible to gauge if the styles of foods prepared and consumed during the temporary squatting process would have differed from their previous diet and whether or not any of these displacement foods would have been carried forward when they were re-housed. The limited number of cars and telephones meant people were always working together to communicate, move and transgress obstacles. They were under siege but they also had their own militias. *'The working class parts of the city had a very different life that was shut down and run by the paramilitaries'* (M).

Importantly food items had no sectarian boundaries (McD). Protestants and Catholics ate the same foods; problems only arose surrounding where the food was being delivered from and who was the driver was. For residents of the barricaded rubble filled streets the corner shop was their main lifeline and food source. McDonagh, whose father ran just such a shop said, *'It was the central focus of the neighbourhood'*.

The I.R.A. split in 1969 and formed the Official I.R.A and the Provisional I.R.A. The Official I.R.A. was a more Marxist left leaning wing who maintained ideologies about workers' rights and breaking the hegemonic forces of Imperialism. P.I.R.A. was a more active, militant splinter group. Ironically for the I.R.A., who postulated themselves as liberators and protectors of the Catholic Nationalist communities, it was necessary to exert their own version of control on the society they sought to liberate. By covering their faces with masks and taking physical and mental control of their communities they quickly ascended to the status of 'the law' amongst their own people. They *'invented an illusionary culture'* (M) of power by what West may allude to as 'masked and dangerous' (2007, p. 49). The research shed light on a number of different aspects of food insecurity. Firstly there were no shortages of food at a national level but there were issues around access to food at a local level. *'Very often the bread service was under threat and the man who delivered eggs'* (McD). Drivers vans were very often stopped and told to turn around by paramilitary groups as they entered streets to deliver supplies. On occasion driver were severely threatened and sometimes murdered for being non-Catholic or non-Protestant. McDonagh recalled the I.R.A. accosting the driver of the bread delivery van outside her father's corner shop. He was told he had no right to be there and that if he persevered with bread deliveries he would be killed. McDonagh's father intervened and in the dialogue said, *'you leave him alone, he is doing a job, he is providing me with the food that I am giving you and the community you say you are protecting'* (McD).

Power in Belfast was organised at a local level and violence as a product of that power became stronger in working class communities because somehow it had, *'this veneer of political quazi-legitimacy around it'* (M). Here power operated in a 'sub-hegemonic' way; people gave legitimacy to an independently sourced violence. The power of 'the paramilitary' in Northern Ireland is a double edged sword. Even when activity was lulled tension was maintained by the abundance of propaganda and armed street patrols. The infamous H-Block Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s strengthened the resolve of the IRA whilst serving as a constant reminder to the population of the struggle for liberation suffused with the lack of life giving food. Professor Barbara Adam states that we 'tend to eradicate complexity to a point where reality becomes conceptually manageable' (1990, p.4). She purports that the problem with this unconscious act, is that the simplified facts are then often used as the basis to explain the original scenario and thus diluting or misconstruing the essence of the concept. This she says is an everyday 'strategy' for coping with life (1990, p.4).

The state was failing to protect citizens and paramilitary groups became a new thread in what Michel Foucault describes as the 'web of power' (Rabinow, 1986, p.58). Foucault's sentiment of where we find power in society we also find resistance to that power rings loud here (1986). After a standoff the bread was delivered. This was only one of

numerous occasions where the family had to resist paramilitary forces. On two other separate occasions McDonagh's mother and sister stood firm against the I.R.A. who then threatened to fire-bomb the shop. McDonagh's father ordered to pay protection money but refused feeling that if he paid once he would always have to pay (McD).

The extraction of supplies and application of pressure by one's own protectors is not unique to Belfast; it is part of the discourse of war and corruption. As a young teenager Bell recalled witnessing on two separate occasions meat and milk delivery vans being hijacked. The drivers were ordered to leave at gunpoint. The food was distributed amongst the community (B). This could be viewed as a type of remittances by paramilitaries to their communities. Conflictingly McDonagh recalled how paramilitaries had removed supplies from food donation boxes that her father had sent to the parish hall where victims of a catastrophic residential bomb (the huge device had exploded prematurely while being carried from a house to a car) were being given temporary shelter. McDonagh recalled how her bedroom windows had broken that night such was the severity of the blast some streets away (McD). Oberschall and Seidman (2005, p. 374) contend that when soldiers or civilians are fearful or hungry that they 'respond with strategies for security and for survival.'

Incidents such as Bloody Friday, an afternoon in July 1972, when the provisional I.R.A. detonated between 18 and 22 car bombs in the city (CAIN), challenged the logistics of going out to get food. This cacophony of mayhem unfolded in just one hour with devastating consequences, not just for the victims and their families, but for the psyche of the city also (BBC 2012 Bloody Friday). The bombs were exploding in such rapid succession that the bombers were barely able to escape their own devices. McDonagh described her memories as a young adult on that afternoon. *'People screamed in the streets... they were so badly affected by that, they were really shattered. There was one lady I recall who was running up and down our street just screaming because all her family were not at home as the bombs were exploding'* (McD). Having repeatedly watched the documentary made by Ulster Television about that day, I questioned how people, mainly women, coped with getting food in an environment such as this. Where would you go? How far would you travel from your home? When and where would the retaliation for this come from? *'You cannot separate the experience of life in Belfast between 1970 and 2000 from the Troubles, you simply cannot, even for middle class people'* (M). All too commonly as a result of the conflict being played out in residential areas social spaces in both communities were affected. *'Attacks on places where people ate and drank were attacks on something sacred and that is hotels, restaurants, shops and bars...these were sociable places. It was symbolic of the Troubles going mad'* (M).

Politically Homeless

Women's general lack of engagement in paid employment as well as their need to cope with poverty had the effect of

bringing them together and engaging in collective action (Leonard, 1992). Ackelsberg and Diamond (cited in Leonard, 1992) suggest that women in deprived communities often are leaders and that their rootedness in 'networks based on kinship and friendship' (1992, p. 88) aids their ability to work effectively. Their individual fears for their safety and that of their families led women in West Belfast to form support networks for each other. When asked about a threatening situation in a housing estate, Bell recalled that all the mothers, *'would be out in their little groups either banging bins lids or gossiping'* (B). These sorts of communal gatherings and actions are forms of resistance and have the added importance of bolstering their collectiveness. As homes were frequently raided by police or the army, women supported each other in the knowledge that they too could suffer a similar fate. Routinely members of households, including women, were arrested, dragged out and interned. As distressing as it was they knew that the support network of women around them would care for their children by bringing them food and ensuring their safety (B). After bombings of shops or similar events, mothers were careful, often forbidding their children to go shopping or warning them to avoid certain places if there were rumours of an imminent attack there. Interestingly Bell also noted that after a period this would relax again or it would just become normal.

Historically women's place in Northern Irish society during the Troubles is viewed as passive and community based. The general narrative associates men with employment, politics, revolution, conflict, terrorism or violence. This may be true to a great extent but we know that these lines were at times blurred. I suggest that in the face of social disorganisation and loss of control by the state, women in working class Belfast were engaged in revolution albeit in a quiet often unseen way. At a primal level this encompassed the instinctual need to protect and feed their families; this was often carried out under duress. At a less obvious level many women, though not actively involved in fighting, aided and sheltered members of paramilitary groups. By offering 'safe-houses' where volunteers could get food, clothing and rest or simply by being mothers, sisters or wives to activists, women's ability to mobilise, co-ordinate and successfully plan came to the fore. Whether this is viewed as a source of remittances or acts of support for the military cause is difficult to assess. The simple fact is that everyone has to eat and sleep, whether they are active or passive in war. While the paramilitary groups protected the community, the community also protected the paramilitaries. This protection allowed them to operate within their 'safe-zones' in their role as defenders and move in and out of these areas as disguised as regular citizens also.

Conclusion

This paper set out to highlight the much ignored concept of food security in Belfast during its prolonged era of

conflict. The concept of food security is rarely discussed in relation to developed countries and was not recognised until five years into the so called Troubles. Patel (2013) says that while, 'academics and pundits have disputed the intricacies of what is considered a revolution', in its broadest sense, revolutions bear change at a community level. The very fact that difficulties exist in defining a revolution shows how diverse the process can be, from its beginning, during and after it has ceased to be. Belfast was changing even before the Troubles arrived. There was a shifting geographical change (Br). WWII had greatly altered the city's layout. This was followed by the Civil Rights Movement, rising social tensions and the presence of the British Army throughout the province. The army's presence until 2007 still remains the longest military deployment in its history, made all the more complicated by the often overlooked fact that it took place within its own sovereign territory. One can hardly envision in excess of 20,000 soldiers being deployed on active military duty to Scotland or Wales nor engaging in gun battles in the streets of Manchester, Glasgow or Coventry.

To ignore the level of coercive power imbedded in daily life and its ramifications for food, culture and on women's lives is at best unfortunate. It undermines and trivialises the solidifying nature that women instinctually possess. I suggested that the collectiveness of women in West Belfast was revolutionary in its nature; this we can interpret as credible in the ways they resisted power at a community level and created spaces to identify with when the conflict had removed their normative food spaces. With much of the social interruption taking place in residential areas this altered how food was sourced and in turn affected the psyche of society. Men created most of the cracks in this fragile environment but collectively women sought to hold it together. Power discourses are malleable and where there is power there is always resistance. Women in Belfast were at the forefront of this resistance in order to feed their families. Much of this paper deals with challenging issues but life continued and people persevered.

This final vignette unveils a very real humanistic element where people even in times of strife and hatred can 'break bread' and find some common ground. These positive moments not only gave life some semblance of normalcy but also offered hope: during the interviews some wonderful moments did emerge; one of my favourites was Mc Donagh's 'Friday night fish 'n' chips' story. She fondly recalled that on Friday evenings, she and the youngsters in her area would congregate and queue at a fish 'n' chip shop. It was located just inside a staunchly Protestant area; Mc Donagh is a Catholic. She recalled how it 'was a lovely clean place' (McD) and that everything inside was white, as neutral as it gets. Colour is deeply symbolic in Northern Ireland. Green is the Catholic colour and orange represents Protestantism. The national flag of the Republic of Ireland contains both of these colours with the neutral white separating them. At the chip shop, but *only* on Friday

nights, everyone was neutral. Nobody asked who you were or where you were from. You could order your food and sit around outside eating it. There was little or no tension. Everybody just wanted that relaxed feeling, even if it was only transient.

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