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„Freedom’s Just Another Word for Nothing Left to
Lose”: Visual Representation of the 1981 Hunger
Strike in Northern Ireland in the Films *Some Mother’s
Son* and *Hunger*

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Declaration of Authenticity

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Tanja Ölschläger

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1 Introduction

Once again we have a hunger strike at the Maze Prison in the quest for what they call political status. There is no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence. We will not compromise on this. There will be no political status. (Margaret Thatcher ¹)

Since the beginning of the 1960s Ireland witnessed one of the longest civil wars of modern times, the Northern Ireland Conflict more commonly known as the 'Troubles'. The short extract above of Margaret Thatcher's speech, held in the parliament buildings at Stormont Belfast on 5 March 1981, then marked the beginning of one of the most appalling periods of the 'Troubles', namely the 1981 hunger strike in Long Kesh prison, Belfast.

People in Northern Ireland have been living with the conflict for over 50 years and had to cope with its repercussions ever since (its beginning). Even though it being a small country with a population of less than two million, it can be argued that in terms of media representation Northern Ireland has been one of the 'biggest' in the world. Prominent reasons for the large interest around the world could be the fact that the 'Troubles' arose at a time when the religious background was of no or little concern to the people of Northern Ireland or, additionally, that this conflict occurred in a country of western Europe, which at that time was one of the steadiest regions on earth.

Even though, in the years subsequent to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement the conflict took a backseat in media representation, a renewed interest in representing the conflict literary or cinematically can be observed in the last thirteen or so years. The lack of media attention at the end of the 20th century does not mean that films or books about the 'Troubles' have not been produced throughout these years, it merely suggests that during that time people, especially filmmakers and writers,

¹ <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104589>: Speech in Belfast on 5 March 1981. 26 September 2011, Paragraph: 6.

did not want to reopen old sores and were therefore extremely careful on how they would present this intricate topic.

Hence, it becomes evident that putting the 'Troubles' on the big screen becomes a balancing act for the screenwriter, the director as well as the producer. At this point it has to be mentioned that numerous directors have, from the beginning of filmmaking on the 'Troubles', "[emphasised] social themes while using Northern Ireland's political troubles as a backdrop to the events" (Crowley, Paragraph: 1). Therefore, it is not surprising that films such as the ground-breaking *Odd Man Out*, *The Crying Game*, *In the Name of the Father* or *Some Mother's Son* play well into that type of depiction. Nevertheless, there is one particular example of filmic representation of the 'Troubles', or more specifically the 1981 hunger strike, that does not employ a social theme as its main plot line, to be precise Steve McQueen's *Hunger* as this film marks a completely new way of interpreting the events that happened inside Long Kesh Prison in Belfast during the hunger strike.

In the context of this thesis, as the title suggests, Terry George's *Some Mother's Son* and Steve McQueen's *Hunger* are the two films that will be looked at in more detail in terms of visual representation of the 'Troubles' or in particular, the hunger strike. Even though both motion pictures deal with the hunger strike, McQueen's film does not include, for example, a mother-son relationship to address the traumatic events of the hunger strike, it rather focuses on the depiction of Bobby Sands' personal agony during his last weeks in Long Kesh with minute detail.

In order to examine the films at hand cinematic techniques such as close-up, long shot, high-angle shot or framing have been used as an aid to establish the meaning of the images presented in the motion pictures. Nevertheless, there will be no separate subsection dealing with cinematography but rather the definitions of the terms mentioned above will be incorporated into the running text as to explicate their meanings. Additionally, a close reading and detailed analysis of the individual characters in key scenes will be incorporated into the analysis.

2 Historical Background

2.1 Northern Ireland Conflict

“The Troubles in Northern Ireland are the tragedy of modern Irish history”
(Hennessey, Introduction)

It has to be mentioned in the beginning that it is quite difficult to pin down the exact date when the ‘Troubles’ started. This thesis, however, will start by giving some details about the Celtic times and will then go over to the year 1921 and give a short outline of the important events that happened from that date onwards and the origins of the conflict. More detail will be given when it comes to the 1960’s as this is the time that many critics and historians who wrote about the troubles have said to be the starting point for what we now know as the ‘Troubles’.

The ‘Troubles’, in Northern Ireland, can be understood as a conflict between two politically and religiously divided groups. On the one hand, there are Unionists, also termed Loyalists, who make up 60 per cent of the population in Northern Ireland and who perceive themselves as being British. They are mostly Protestant and want Northern Ireland to continue to remain part of the United Kingdom. The opposite fraction is the Nationalists, or Republicans who constitute 40 per cent of the population in Northern Ireland and are mainly Catholic. Their view differs in that they perceive themselves as Irish and desire to be part of a united Ireland rather than to remain part of the United Kingdom. Nevertheless the conflict is not primarily a religious one. Even though religious labels such as ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ are used, the conflict does not merely revolve around religious differences. It can be said that Northern Ireland is a place where two nations, the British and the Irish, intersect and therefore the conflict is mainly about unionists wanting to remain a part of the United Kingdom, and nationalists wanting to belong to a united Ireland (Dixon 1-2).

The first subchapter will deal with the origins of the conflict but as this thesis mainly deals with the 'Troubles' in the later years of the twentieth century, in particular the 1981 hunger strike, the discussion of the origins will only be kept brief.

2.1.1 The Origins of the Conflict

Discussions about who had the first claim over the land are as old as mankind and so the debate between nationalists and unionists concerning which group was first in Northern Ireland is nothing new. According to nationalists, their 'Celtic forefathers' (Dixon 2) were the first to inhabit the terrain that is Northern Ireland today. However, the unionists claim that their ancestors, the Cruthin, inhabited the area even before the Celts. So, due to these differing viewpoints a conflict seems to be inevitable (Dixon 2).

Ethnic and political conflict in Ireland can be said to date back to the twelfth century when King Henry II of England invaded Ireland. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that allegiance to the British-imposed by the Irish Parliament and to the King was never strong as the majority of Ireland was ruled by native chiefs of Anglo-Norman nobles and only a small part of Dublin was under royal authority (Anonymous 4). The seventeenth century marks the first important point in time which led to the foundations of the 'Troubles' as British settlers, mostly of Scottish descent, were sent over to Ireland to form the so-called 'Plantation'. Even though Ireland was part of the English and Scottish kingdom at that time, the invasion was never complete due to the fact that most of the country remained under native control. Even more importantly, several of the previous invaders had 'gone native' (Rowthorn, Wayne 17), by marrying local people, by adopting the Gaelic language, traditions and even the Catholic religion. Not only had the settlers become Irish themselves they even started rebelling against the crown, which made Ireland a permanent problem for the English crown. For this reason the 'Plantation' was established which should solve the problem of resistance and remove the imminent threat to English rule. The plan to settle Ireland with English-

speaking Protestants in order for them to serve the British crown would reach its climax during the Puritan interregnum of Oliver Cromwell under whom vast numbers of Gaelic-speaking Catholics were driven off their land and moved to the west of Ireland. Cromwell passed the Act for the settlement of Ireland in 1652, which decreed that land that belonged to Catholics was confiscated and by 1700 about 90 per cent of the land was owned by Protestants. Simultaneously 'Penal Laws' were implemented which were directed at the Catholic religion and which banned the use of the native language and customs. Owing to these restrictions the 'Plantation' was marked by recurring violence in which countless Catholics were killed. In the late 1680s the deposed King, James II of England made a last effort to make Ireland, as well as England, Catholic countries once more. However, the Dutch Protestant Prince William of Orange, became King of England in 1688 during the glorious revolution and defeated James at the Battle of the Boyne and ended Irish Catholicism for the time being. However, the 'Plantation' as well as the defeat of James II failed to produce the desired impact as revolts continued (Rowthorn, Wayne 17-19). Worth mentioning here is the rising of the United Irishmen in 1798 which aimed, as Rowthorn and Wayne put it, "to establish an independent republic of Ireland in which Catholics and Protestants would live in harmony" (19). Nevertheless this rebellion was completely quelled by the British Army and two years later the Irish Parliament was suspended, by the Act of Union in 1800, and Ireland became part the United Kingdom (Rowthorn, Wayne 19-20).

Social problems as well as economic decline marked nineteenth century Ireland under British rule. Nationalist sentiment spread during that time as poverty and hunger took over, mostly for the Catholic working-class, which culminated in the 'Great Famine' of 1845 to 1848 in which over a million people died and two millions emigrated. Most nationalists felt that this was enough and a movement erupted which voted for a self-governing Ireland. However, it has to be mentioned that for some nationalists this was not enough, their aim was to become completely independent from the United Kingdom (Rowthorn, Wayne 20-21). Nevertheless the first Home Rule Bill was introduced by the British Prime

Minister William Gladstone in 1886, which can be seen as the first indication for a probable partition of Northern Ireland from Great Britain (Anonymous 5-6) This introduction, however, was highly controversial as most Protestants feared that if home rule was implemented they would lose their acquired privileges and were scared of retribution. For these reasons a unionist group was established to prevent the realisation of home rule, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which eventually succeeded; after this the implementation of the first Home Rule Bill was abandoned (Rowthorn, Wayne 24). Simultaneously, a Catholic-counterpart to the UVF was formed, the Irish Volunteers. Both paramilitary organisations obtained illegal weapons imported from Germany (Anonymous 6-7).

After a second Home Rule Bill had failed to be accepted by the House of Lords in 1893 the third Home Bill became law in 1914, but its implementation was postponed due to the First World War. As the subsequent years were marked by constant revolts and rebellions the British Prime Minister decided to give in to the threats of the unionists and abandoned his plans to implement Home Rule for Ireland. As an alternative he suggested a treaty in which Ireland would be separated into two distinct countries, the six north-eastern counties should stay within the United Kingdom and the remaining 26 counties should form an independent state (Rowthorn, Wayne 24). Around the same time a guerrilla war between nationalist groups and the British army took place in the south of Ireland as in the beginning all of them were fiercely against the treaty as, according to Rowthorn and Wayne, they felt that

[It] would only give partial independence; it would leave the great bulk of the country with virtually no modern manufacturing industry [as the North was industrial centre]; it would also mean a sizeable minority of Catholics being marooned in a Protestant statelet [sic], in an area where, for decades, Catholics had suffered the most severe discrimination (25)

When a division of the guerrilla militaries felt that the treaty was the best option they had, the nationalists split which resulted in a ferocious civil war, in which the treaty supporters won against the anti-Treaty side.

Eventually the Irish Free State was founded in 1922 which is nowadays the Republic of Ireland (Rawthorn, Wayne 25-26).

2.1.2 The time previous to the 'Troubles'

With the formation of the two new states further civil disorder followed not only in Northern Ireland but also in the newly-established Republic of Ireland and as John Darby states "[t]he new state was created in the midst of the troubles and divisions which were to characterise its history" (9). He furthermore quotes J.C Beckett who points out that

[t]he six north-eastern counties of Ireland were grouped together and given a parliament and government of their own, not because anyone in the area wanted (let alone demanded) such an arrangement, but because the British government thought that this was the only possible way of reconciling the rival aspirations of the two Irish parties (9)

According to the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 each of the two new-formed states should have its own parliament as well as representatives in Westminster and a Council of Ireland was supposed to deal with common issues. Yet, these propositions only came into use in Northern Ireland and even though the formation of the new state was meant to reconcile the two Irish parties it only drove them further apart. As the nationalist community refused to accept the Treaty violence in Northern Ireland increased and in 1922 alone 232 people were killed and about 1,000 wounded as a result. It can be said that the first few years after the signing of the Treaty can be counted among being the most violent ones in the history of Northern Ireland. However, the problems centred upon the rejection of the new state rather than merely around sectarian difference (Darby 10-12). In a nutshell, the new state was an insecure one from its formation onwards as the problems between Protestants and Catholics marked a divided society with on-going and constant discrimination of the latter such as the banning of the tricolour, the Irish flag. As a result of this discrimination Catholic citizens of Northern

Ireland saw themselves “trapped in an illegitimate, British-held part of the Irish state temporarily partitioned” (Tonge 19).

Discrimination expanded into the most significant sectors, which can according to Jonathan Tonge be divided into “elections, employment and housing” (20). He states that regarding electoral practices the most obvious discrimination took place as the ‘system of proportional representation’ which was introduced in the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 was abolished and a new system of ‘first-past-the-post’ was introduced which guaranteed a continuing one-party government. Not only did the government introduce a new voting system, but it also changed the voting eligibility qualifications which were from that time onward based on funding which automatically excluded Catholics as at that time the Protestant community was clearly the wealthier one. Furthermore, with “gerrymandering” another method was introduced to ensure the exclusion of Catholics in politics and to further enhance the dominance of Unionists. Even in predominantly Catholic areas of the country, Unionists would win the election due to manipulating the polls resulting in an almost completely Unionist-run government (Tonge 20-21).

If one looks at employment discrimination, Catholics were hardly found in any position connected to the public sector. According to the Canadian political scientist Edmund Anger, Catholics were disadvantaged in three ways. He firstly suggests that the lower levels of the socio-economic scale were more likely to be occupied by Catholics. Secondly, when it comes to class, Catholics had a propensity to gather in the “lower reaches” which resulted in situations such as a clerk being Catholic while her/his office manager would be Protestant. Thirdly, industries that had a lower standing in the public would more likely employ Catholics whereas industries with a higher standing would more likely employ Protestants (qtd. in Hennessey 67). John Whyte sums this situation up by saying that the effect of these distinctions was “a noteworthy congruence between the class cleavage and the religious cleavage in Northern Ireland” (55-56). As in the first two years after partition, hundreds of people were killed and thousands injured. The Special Powers Act was introduced which postponed normal legal processes and which was designed to be in force

for one year but instead lasted until 1972. The central operators of the Act were the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC) or 'B'-Specials, which were armed militias that created suspicion among Catholics as the forces were predominantly Protestant. Due to the fact that these forces mainly carried out sectarian attacks, few Catholics joined them as they perceived the RUC and the USC a "illegitimate police force[s]" (Tonge 19-20).

In addition to electoral and employment injustice, housing discrimination represented a further significant issue in Northern Ireland. The question of public housing only surfaced in the 1950s as before that point in time there was scarcely any housing to allocate. Change started to materialise after World War II when an extensive public housing drive was initiated. With the building of public housing more complaints about its allocation started to arise, and as a consequence further discrimination (Hennessey 73, Tonge 23). During the two World Wars both Catholics and Protestants were affected by poor housing conditions yet in the post-war period new housing was more likely to be allocated to Protestants, whereas Catholics had to remain in their slum residences. A further point of complaint by Catholics was the fact that the decisions made by councils were haphazardly made and that its primary aim was to preserve a Unionist dominance with the denial of new housing for Catholics in preponderantly Unionist districts. Despite the above mentioned facts it is not clearly evident whether Catholics had been discriminated against or rather to what extent they had been discriminated against even though surveys, which were conducted 50 years later, state that the majority of the people felt that Catholics were in fact victimised and discriminated against. With more and more houses being allocated to Protestants, Catholics could no longer sustain their situation and civil rights groups emerged which demonstrated for an improvement of their circumstances (Tonge 23-35).

2.1.3 Paving the Way towards Escalation

The 1960s were characterised by the emergence of several civil rights groups, as mentioned in the previous chapter, which consisted of left-wing as well as right-wing groups alongside of individual liberals and socialists. Their perception was that the misconduct by the Unionist Party was directed not only against Catholics but also against all non-Unionists, and, consequently had an influence on the working class. Hence, the Belfast Trade Union Congress organised a meeting in which the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP), the Communist Party, republican representatives along with the middle-class Campaign for Social Justice attended to discuss problems such as gerrymandering and police reform. This date can be marked as the first time since the 1930s that a “cross-sectarian, anti-Unionist movement abandoned nationalistic rhetoric and campaigned under the slogan, ‘British rights for British citizens’ (Edwards, McGrattan 17-18). In 1963 the fourth Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O’Neill, was elected and he aimed at a more liberal form of governance, however, he had no intentions to share the power with Nationalists. The main policy of his administration was to grant partial concessions to the Catholic community so as to gain acceptance within it (Tonge 35). Yet the population did not think this enough and so the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was formed in 1967, being inspired by the American Civil rights movement. One year after its founding it waged a campaign which included matters such as squatting Catholic families in new council housing or organising peaceful demonstrations and public marches. The demands this new Civil rights movement proclaimed included the introduction of an independent commission to form new electoral boundaries to ensure just representation, the abolishment of the Special Powers Act, fair housing allocations and laws against discrimination in politics. The first protest march was organised to be held from Coalisland to Dungannon in March 1968 and ran smoothly and peacefully. However, the next event that was promoted by the NICRA was highly opposed by Unionists and resulted in a violent break-up by ‘B’Specials and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. After this event a radical

student organisation formed in 1969, the People's Democracy, which arranged a march from Belfast to Derry and was again violently stopped by police forces (Rowthorn, Wayne 39-40). In August of the same year a march was held in Derry by the Unionist Apprentice Boys, which was followed by attacks on Catholics by the police that accompanied the march. The subsequent two days were characterised by rioting as the police tried to forcefully enter the area of Catholic Bogside. As the police was unable to stop the rioting, British troops were sent to Derry to restore order. This event has entered the history books by the name of "the Battle of the Bogside" (Tonge 39, Patterson 172). Not only did this event become a major point in Northern Ireland history but Paul Bew, a prominent historian, goes even further and states in his book *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789-2004* that

[it] could be argued that the march marks the pivotal point at which the Troubles changed from being primarily about civil rights to being about the more traditional disputes concerning national and religious identities (493)

As sectarian violence then started to reach Belfast and streets were becoming constant arenas for clashes between Nationalists and Unionists, British troops were sent to Belfast to protect the Catholic community. Surprisingly enough the Catholic population welcomed them enthusiastically. John Darby quotes Bernadette Devlin, a socialist republican political activist, who saw this as a sign of resignation "You're giving them tea now. What will you be giving them in six months?" (22).

It was at this time that the IRA seemed to have lost its guiding principles as the numbers of members grew smaller due to a certain level of acceptance of the "constitutional status quo" (Wichert 132) amongst the Catholic population. The IRA then used the founding of NICRA for its own objectives. Even though NICRA did on the one hand not reject members of the IRA from participating in their movement, on the other hand they would not let them play a prominent role in the movement either. Yet this did not matter as the main reason for the participation of the IRA in the NICRA was the fact that they needed the legal ban on Sinn Féin that was

introduced by the Special Powers Act, to be removed. As the police were well aware of the presence of IRA members in civil rights marches, violent responses against these flared up but that only encouraged more and more people to join these demonstrations to protest against police brutality. Yet as the number of members increased the IRA was pushed to the margins of the movement and, eventually, lost its prestige in terms of political actions as well as its standing as the “protectors of the community” (Wichert 133).

Tensions inside the organisation started to rise to the surface as disputes over different approaches and over what kind of strategy should be applied arose, even though their common aim was still to establish an independent Irish Republic. Many members were getting tired of the more liberal social approach and still felt the need for a military campaign. Inevitably what turned out to be the final straw for the more radical members of the IRA was the abandonment of abstentionism². At the Sinn Féin conference in January 1970 the Provisional IRA (PIRA or “Provisionals”) was formed as an alternative organisation to what from that point on became the ‘Official’ IRA (Tonge 42). The rest of the year of 1970 was characterised by severe fighting. Not only did the IRA introduce further bombings but also more and more civilians joined in and fought against the British Army. This constant fighting led to the government’s decision to introduce “internment without trial” on August 9, 1971 (Bew, Gillespie 36). In an attempt to arrest 452 men, the army attempted a series of raids yet was only able to capture 342 people, of whom 237 were detained, whereas the rest were released two days later. Yet again sectarian clashes were the result of these internments and the government’s actions. On January 22, 1972 civil rights marches were held in Armagh and Magilligan, County Derry, to protest against the

² **abstentionism:** “The principle of abstentionism is derived from a Republican view of where a State gets its authority to rule: the people. Elected representatives who participate in the institutions of the State effectively accept the authority of that State and its right to voluntarily rule the people they represent. By withdrawing popular support -- represented on an official level by withdrawing elected representatives -- from the State, it becomes impossible for the State to function. By diverting that popular support to the parallel apparatus of the revolutionary State being formed, the existing State is democratically replaced.”
<http://www.rsfi.ie/election.htm>, 17 October 2011.

government's internment policy. British soldiers tried to prevent these marches. Seven days later on January 30 fourteen unarmed men were shot dead and seventeen wounded by the Parachute Regiment at a peaceful demonstration in Derry with more than ten thousand people attending. This devastating day would become known as "Bloody Sunday" (Bew, Gillespie 36-45). The most important impact of Bloody Sunday was that the IRA gained in strength as countless Catholic adolescents were furious about the events and the constant oppression and joined the rebellion under the Provisional IRA. In order to achieve their goals relentless bomb attacks in Great Britain as well as in Northern Ireland were executed. These repeated acts of terrorism made it impossible for British Troops to withdraw as the fear of civil war grew stronger by the minute. It has to be mentioned though that not only the Nationalist side gained new members, Unionist organisations such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) or the newly formed Ulster Defence Association (UDA) gained countless members as well. No good came from this as from then on the IRA not only did perpetrate terrorist attacks but in retaliation the Unionist side would attack in Catholic areas. The government's reaction was to terminate the existing government and implement direct rule which only amplified Unionist terrorism against Catholics (Hadden 36-39). However, as Rowthorn and Wayne state, direct rule was only meant to be a "temporary agreement" (43) as immediately after introducing it, work started to re-establish a devolved government for Northern Ireland. Firstly, what was described as 'power sharing' was announced, which intended to hand some control over to the Nationalist community and give equal control to Nationalist and Unionists. This agreement started in 1973 with the establishment of a Northern Ireland Assembly, yet it immediately triggered substantial opposition as Unionists felt that this campaign went way too far whereas for Nationalists it did not go far enough. Eventually 'power sharing' came to an end, having lasted only five months, and direct rule was re-established (Rowthorn, Wayne 43-44).

Generally it can be said that until the mid-1970s the conflict in Northern Ireland was primarily political in its roots, and accordingly, demanded a political solution. Therefore it was administered as a war over

the country's political future which can be seen by the granting of 'special category status' for nationalist prisoners. The British government wanted to change the public opinion of 'the troubles' as being solely about politics and released the last 'prisoners of war' at the end of 1975 while at the same time abolishing the 'special category status' for offenders convicted after March 1976. With this action of erasing special status for political prisoners the government provoked opposition which resulted in the 'dirty or no-wash protest' by prisoners. For several years after IRA and Republican prisoners refused to wear prison uniforms and instead only wore blankets. Furthermore they stopped washing themselves and starting to smear their excrements on the prison cell walls. Yet, this was not the end of their protest as in 1980 several prisoners started to refuse to eat and effectively went on the first hunger strike which was called off after a few days without having achieved any of their goals. A few months later a second hunger strike was led by Bobby Sands which ended in the death of ten prisoners including Sands himself (Rowthorn Wayne 44-48). (Further detail will be given in chapters 2.2 as well as 2.3.)

2.1.4 The Aftermath of the Hunger Strike

Even though the result of these deaths was not the desired one, namely to win back the political status of prisoners, a far greater achievement was made. Throughout Northern Ireland, especially in the Catholic areas, as well as in the whole world, the Republican cause gained enormous sympathy. In previous years a strategy was used in which elections had been boycotted by the IRA yet during the hunger strike this way seemed to be abandoned as Bobby Sands and two other detainees were elected as members of parliament. Whilst Sands was elected to represent Fermanagh and South Tyrone in the British parliament, the other two prisoners were elected as representatives for the Irish parliament, Dáil Éireann. Due to this unexpected success in the elections the IRA now permanently rethought their approach and from then on pursued a strategy in which they used armed struggle combined with electoral politics. Sinn Féin, which was the political party associated with the IRA,

continued to nominate candidates for the Northern Ireland Assembly as well as the British general election of 1983 in which they won one seat in Westminster. The just mentioned change in strategy and the subsequent successes in the elections showed that the British government had completely failed to depoliticise the Northern Ireland Conflict. Not only that, according to Rowthorn and Wayne, “it had backfired” (48). From then on the conflict was a political issue in such a manner as it had not been in the previous years (Rowthorn, Wayne 47-48).

James Prior was elected Secretary of State in September 1981 and introduced a policy of “gradual deliberation” (Tonge 124) if politicians in Northern Ireland were willing to compromise. The plan, which was introduced through the Northern Ireland Act 1982, incorporated the following elements: the establishment of a 78-seat Assembly that had its own scrutiny powers as well as selected legislative powers as long as 70 per cent of the members agreed. Elections for this Assembly took place in October 1982 yet only the main Unionist parties took part whereas the Social Democratic and Labour party (SDLP) and Sinn Féin, even though they both won several seats, did not intend to take them. With the absent cooperation of the Nationalist parties, devolution failed, and the Assembly soon lost its cause and was dissolved. The Northern Ireland Act of 1982 was intended to lead the way towards a devolved government in Northern Ireland yet its effect was to show that a purely internal solution would not suffice to solve the problem. In 1983 a new government was selected in the Republic with its new Prime Minister Garrett Fitzgerald who tried to conduct a closer collaboration between the Republic and Northern Ireland and, therefore, introduced the so-called New Ireland Forum. With this forum Fitzgerald wanted to promote a more positive schema for unification. At the meeting of the Forum the main parties of the Republic attended alongside the SDLP from the North, however, Unionist parties boycotted the Forum. The main points that were elaborated were that it criticised the British government for the privileging of Unionist politics in Northern Ireland and it stressed the need that on the island of Ireland two traditions existed which were both equally valid. However, none of the points that were elaborated were likely to be acknowledged by Unionists.

The report of the Forum offered three options for the future of Northern Ireland. The first option was a united Ireland which could only be achieved through consent, the second was a federal or confederate state in which a largely autonomous government was proposed. The third option was joint authority where both Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland should have equal control and responsibility (Tonge 124-126). None of these options was accepted by Margaret Thatcher who bluntly stated

I have made it quite clear – and so did Mr Prior when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland – that a unified Ireland was one solution that is out. A second solution was confederation of two states. That is out. A third solution was joint authority. That is out. That is a derogation from sovereignty. We made that quite clear when the Report was published (Kenny, 82)

Nevertheless, after some months of negotiations an Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed on 15 November 1985 which for the first time in years acknowledged a role for the Republic of Ireland in the affairs of the North. It even stated that if the majority of the public in Northern Ireland supported a united Ireland, the British government would do so as well. In essence the new system symbolised an increased integration into the United Kingdom. However, it has to be mentioned that due to this agreement an additional step towards self-administration was made (Bew, Gillespie 191) and as Jonathan Tonge states that it “provided a forerunner to the peace process which developed in the 1990s” (139).

2.1.5 Northern Ireland on Its Way Towards Lasting Peace

Throughout the first years of the 1990s on-going negotiations took place between the leaderships of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain as well as the United States of America which eventually led to the first ceasefire between Nationalists and Unionists in August 1994. However, it was not long before terrorist attacks commenced again and the ceasefire ended. With bomb threats being common again in Northern Ireland as well as Great Britain another way had to be found. The new British Prime Minister Tony Blair immediately set the peace process in

Northern Ireland as a top priority and had his government organise meetings with all the parties involved in the conflict in 1997. By July 1997 the ceasefire was reinstated by the IRA and overt terrorist attacks stopped. With this reinstatement of the ceasefire, talks between the main parties resumed and eventually the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998 (Edwards and McGrattan 89-95). A point worth mentioning is that the agreement did not only incorporate constitutional issues such as the establishment of a Northern Ireland Assembly of 108 seats or a British-Irish Council in which both British and Irish government representatives could work together. It even, more importantly, covered issues such as human rights, equality, prisoners, policing, security and decommissioning. Furthermore the Good Friday Agreement offered a new way of incorporating formerly unwanted political parties such as Sinn Féin in the political process and with this showed a new strategy of inclusivity (Tonge 182-197). Even though terrorist attacks had largely stopped since the signing of the Agreement there remain paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland which still carried out attacks on a regular basis. The IRA, even though it declared a ceasefire, carried out further attacks after the announcement. On 28 July 2005 though, the IRA released a statement in which the group announced that their “armed campaign” had come to an end and, subsequently, decommissioned its weapons according to a report issued by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD).

Subsequent to elections held in March 2007, Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin and Rev. Ian Paisley of the Democratic Unionists met in order to discuss a future power-sharing government which was implemented two months later. A Northern Irish local government was reinstated whereupon Rev. Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness were appointed as leader and deputy leader respectively. 5 February 2010 then marked a breakthrough in the Northern Irish peace process with the signing of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. This contract states that Great Britain is to hand over control of the police as well as the justice system to the government of Northern Ireland (Imbornoni, Brunner, Rowen, Paragraph 48-50).

2.2 The progress of the Hunger strike (Tradition of Self-Immolation in Ireland)

He has chosen death:
Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
Disgrace upon me; for there is a custom,
An old and foolish custom, that if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
Upon another's threshold till he die,
The common people, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King's.
The King's Threshold, by William B. Yeats
(as qtd. in Beresford 9)

According to George Sweeney, Ireland has a history of using hunger-striking in order to gain economic as well as social compensation or as a method of political confrontation (421). It has to be mentioned that even though Ireland is not the only country to practise this method, it has experienced one of the biggest hunger strikes in the twentieth century with more than 8000 political convicts taking part in October 1923. Amnesty International reports 200 hunger strikes in 52 nations in the world during 1970-84. While one can see that hunger striking as a means of political protest is widely used all over the world, it occupies a particularly essential part of Irish mythology as well as Irish history. Especially for northern Irish Catholic republicans the hunger strike has been a “weapon of last resort” (Sweeney 421) when it comes to frustration in their efforts to resist oppression. Furthermore, it has to be said that for those Catholic republicans the hunger strike is strongly associated with “religio-political martyrdom and the pantheon of Irish heroes” (Sweeney 421).

Hunger striking can be traced back as early as the pre-Christian era in which oral legal codes known as Brehon laws³ were a strong custom. For the people living in those times the only method to establish a claim or right a wrong in the framework of the Brehon laws was self-help. As the method of seizing the property of the offender was not a realistic option

³ derived from the Gaelic *brithem* meaning ‘judge’ (Sweeney 421) or The ancient Irish laws, unwritten, like the common law of England <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Brehon+laws>, 9 March 2011.

one had to find other ways to make their claim heard. Therefore the last resort for them was to 'fast against' their oppressor which meant that the offended had to take up a place near the offenders residence and go on hunger strike which was usually a technique deployed by the powerless against the powerful. As people in ancient times were quite superstitious they did not want anyone to die of starvation in front or near their house as death would bring with it magical consequences and, furthermore, the culprit would have to pay compensation to the complainants family. With the arrival of Christianity, hunger striking and self-sacrifice generally started to occupy a special status in the advancement of Irish-Christian customs and became somewhat conventionalised into a ceremonial starvation beginning at sundown and ending at sunrise. Christianity did not only influence Irish traditions and customs but, also another significant influence was the invasion of the Normans which led to a revival of Gaelic traditions and culture and subsequently to an Ireland whose society promoted a cult of self-sacrifice (Sweeney 421-422).

Emmet Larkin suggests that the period after the Great Famine in the 1840s can be described as a "devotional revolution" (625) by which he means that the Irish became regular mass goers as well as practising Catholics. Therefore religion became a dominant force in Irish society (Larkin 625-626). Furthermore he states that this devotional revolution "provided the Irish with a substitute symbolic language and offered them a new cultural heritage with which they could identify and be identified and through which they could identify with one another" (649).

As has been previously mentioned, Irish society regained a sense of religious rites but it similarly gained a new sense of Nationalism combined with radical Republicanism, which consequently led to the practice of self-sacrifice. Here one has to mention the old Irish folk hero Cú Chulain as due to these 'newfound' beliefs in Gaelic traditions this folk hero gained significant importance as he is considered to have sacrificed his life in order to save his comrades from death. In the first two decades of the twentieth century he was incorporated into the Irish literature canon by writers such as W. B. Yeats in his plays *On Baile's Strand* or *The Death of Cuchulain* or Lady Gregory in her book *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. With the

attention that was given to the theme of self-sacrifice in literature during this time, the hunger strike did not take long to reappear as a mode for political confrontation especially in connection with militant republicanism. Between 1913 and 1923 more than fifty hunger strikes took place in Ireland which involved not only male prisoners, but also female prisoners which is hardly ever explicitly stated. These hunger strikes were initiated in order to protest against the horrendous conditions in prisons as well as the inhumane treatment of the detainees. However, some of them addressed the demands for a political status. Generally though, the protests that were particularly concerned with the conditions in prison did not last very long, yet, the ones that aimed at a political status took much longer. Most of the participants reached an agreement with the authorities whilst others were forcibly fed. During this 10 year period one of the most important events in Irish History took place, the 1916 Easter Rising, which gave way to an even greater identification with radical republicanism. With the execution of the leaders of the Rising they became immortal secular saints and their sacrifice was connected to “the sacrifice of Christ, the ancient martyrs and dead rebels from previous revolts” (Sweeney 425). Yet, these rebels would not remain the only ones who were celebrated as saints or martyrs as in the following years various hunger strikers would follow that tradition such as Thomas Ashe, who died in September 1917 after British authorities tried to forcibly feed him, or, probably one of the most noted hunger strikers, Alderman Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork and Commandant of Cork Number 1 Brigade Irish Volunteers, who died in October 1920. The execution of these rebel leaders and the deaths of the hunger strikers were burnt into the psyche of the Irish people and would be repeated when ten prisoners died while on hunger strike in the Maze Prison in 1981. Due to the immense ‘admiration’ for the men who died, the hunger strike became an exceptional tool in Ireland in order to achieve a certain goal and it became mainly associated with radical republicanism as well as Sinn Féin (Sweeney 423-427).

While debates arose about the hunger strike in general, in the public as well as the religious domain, the hunger strikes continued. In 1919 fifty Sinn Féin members at Mountjoy prison in Dublin demanded prisoner-of-

war treatment and as this demand was not granted they went on hunger strike. This particular hunger strike is important as the British authorities released the prisoners out of fear that further martyrs would emerge from it. With Mac Swiney's death one year later the media attention as well as public sympathy, started to grow which can be seen in the following extract of *The Times* on 2 September 1920 that George Sweeney states:

Despite the Government, the Lord Mayor of Cork has stirred imagination and pity. Argument on the merits of his case has become subordinate to those sentiments which the dramatic spectacle of a man confronting death for the sake of an ideal was certain to evoke among Christian people. Alderman Mac Swiney, a man whose name was unknown outside his own city, will, if he dies, take rank with Fitzgerald, with Emmet, and with Tone in the martyrology of Ireland – his memory infinitely more eloquent and infinitely more subversive of peace than he himself could ever be. (427-428)

This quotation shows that the media did in fact sympathise with the hunger strikers, especially with Terence MacSwiney, and furthermore suggests that he will, in the future, be named alongside important Irishmen such as Fitzgerald or Robert Emmet.

After Terence Mac Swiney's death, his sister Mary was arrested two years later which would prove to be yet another significant incident as she went on hunger strike just as her brother did before her. When her sister Annie was denied access to the prison in order to visit Mary she started to camp outside the prison gates and began a hunger strike alongside her sister which was a ritual that can be traced back to the previously mentioned Brehon laws. However, when Mary's condition worsened the authorities gave in and released her from prison and with this action the government almost completely lost its credibility at a very crucial point in time. Following in the footsteps of the MacSwiney family and so many before them hunger striking as a method of political confrontation continued in 1922 and 1923 by both male and female prisoners. The Civil War period ended with a mass hunger strike which was encouraged by the republican leadership, in which about 8000 prisoners took part and which for some lasted for 41 days before it was called off on November 23, 1923. With this vast number the leadership expected to gain support for their

cause outside of the prison walls, yet, as can be seen it failed to do so and was called off before anything drastic happened (Sweeney 428-430).

Generally, most of the hunger strikes conducted in Ireland did not accomplish their primary goals, yet the long term consequences can be said to be beyond measure. It can be said that after the Civil War the hunger strike had entered the arsenal of radical republicanism which in the end led to the death of ten republican prisoners in the Long Kesh prison in 1981 and furthermore changed the attitude towards Northern Ireland from both the British and the Irish point of view. As has been mentioned above it can be argued that the hunger strike just as the fasting in ancient times was a potent tool for the powerless, in modern times it became a “weapon of political confrontation for the powerless who held aspirations of establishing an Irish Republic” (Sweeney 434). Even though hunger striking is not a particularly Irish phenomenon it can, however, be declared that due to Gaelic traditions and customs it has established into a significant tool in the tradition of Irish Christianity (Sweeney 431-435).

2.3 Bobby Sands (Roibeard Ó Seachnasaigh)

2.3.1 Early Years

Roibeard Ó Seachnasaigh, commonly known as Bobby Sands, was born on March 9, 1954 to Rosaleen and John Sands. Both his parents had a working-class background. However, Rosaleen’s family was Catholic, whereas John grew up in a Protestant community as his mother was a “Reformed Presbyterian” (O’Hearn 2). After they got married in 1951 they moved to a village in the north of Belfast as they thought they could improve their living conditions and subsequently their future. The newlywed couple acquired a house in Abbots Cross, which was an estate built into a picturesque valley surrounded by the Glas-na-Bradán River and pastoral country houses. Even though the environment into which Bobby Sands was born seemed to be idyllic the estate was highly sectarian. The Sands’ home was surrounded by different churches such as the Presbyterian Church, the Congregational Church, the Church of Ireland

and numerous others, yet there was one church that did not seem to have a place, namely the Catholic Church. At that time Rosaleen Sands was able to keep her Catholic religion a secret which was due to the fact that Sands was regarded as a respectable Ulster name, so no one suspected them of being anything other than Protestants (O'Hearn 2-3).

Two years after the Sands' had moved to the estate their first child, Robert Gerard, was born. As new riots by the IRA emerged around that time Rosaleen prayed that her son would never be drawn into the religious violence she was exposed to when she was younger. Due to these incidents tensions between Protestants and Catholics rose again, yet the Sands family could go on living their lives as long as they kept religion out of discussions. During that time Rosaleen gave birth to Marcella in April 1955 and Bernadette in November 1958. The neighbours found out the young mother's religion and started harassing her when her husband was at work. Eventually the family decided to move away to another estate, Rathcoole, not far away from Abbots Cross. Interestingly enough the new estate was named after the Irish "rath cúil" (O'Hearn 4) which means "ring-foot of the secluded place" as a third of the families living there were Catholics (O'Hearn 3-4).

Bobby, a vivacious child, began his education in the Catholic Stella Maris primary school and later on attended Stella Maris secondary school but it was already obvious that his interests lay more in sports than in studying. He joined a religiously mixed soccer club and it did not seem to matter which religion any of the players belonged to as long as they played well. This changed in 1966 when numerous Protestants felt that they were losing their primary status and started to exclude Catholics. Bobby observed that several of his Protestant friends started to withdraw from him but he was not yet aware of the apparent sectarianism that took place. The next couple of years would prove to become even worse in terms of division (O'Hearn 5-8).

2.3.2 From the First Encounters to the Engagement in the IRA

1969 was a significant year for Sands as he was interested in the civil rights marches. For him, the civil rights march by students of Queens University in Belfast was particularly attractive as this was the first time Sands took a real interest in the events (O'Hearn 9) "My sympathy and feelings really became aroused after watching the scenes at Burntollet," he wrote. "That imprinted itself on my mind like a scar, and for the first time I took a real interest in what was going on ... I became angry." (qtd. in O'Hearn 9) Several incidents that followed such as the "Battle of the Bogside"⁴ or the random shooting of nine-year-old Patrick Rooney by RUC had a deep impact on Bobby Sands. It is after those events that he began to associate the police with violence against Catholics and furthermore see the British army as the enemy. In 1969 Bobby finished secondary school and enrolled in Newtownabbey Technical College at the age of fifteen. Besides his studies in College he started working as an apprentice bus builder to earn a bit of money for himself. Even though in the beginning of his working as a bus builder the sectarianism at work was not clearly visible, after some time it nearly became unbearable but Bobby would not give up until one day his boss told him that the company was restructuring and that he therefore could not work there any longer (O'Hearn 10-14).

Sands started working as a barman at the Glenn Inn in 1972 where he met his future wife Geraldine and probably more importantly "D—"who recruited him for an auxiliary unit⁵ of the young IRA men. (O'Hearn 19) After the Sands family had to move out of their home yet again and found a house in Twinbrook, a district in the south of Belfast, Bobby discovered that he had to do more and therefore wanted to get actively involved in the IRA which did not take him long. Eagerly he became active in numerous IRA activities and one of his comrades even said that "He had to have a

⁴ **Bogside:** "was a district of Derry where residents resisted efforts of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) to overcome barricades that had been built in order to protect the area. This became then known as the "Battle of Bogside." <http://www.museumoffreederry.org/history-battle01.html>, 22 January 2001.

⁵ **Auxiliary units:** "these groups took over a supporting role in that they moved weapons, carried messages, gathered intelligence or acted as lookouts. Furthermore they were not allowed to shoot or bomb anything" (O'Hearn 19).

hand in everything” (qtd. in O’Hearn 29, O’Hearn 28-29). Due to his active involvement Bobby got into quarrels with his parents about his activities and moved out of the family home into an IRA-owned flat. In the following months leading up to his first arrest he organised his unit of the Provisional IRA and endeavoured military attacks and became popular amongst his comrades due to his fearlessness (O’Hearn 32-33).

2.3.3 First Prison Term

On October 17, 1972 Bobby Sands was arrested for the first time while trying to obtain weapons in Dundalk, a city on the border with the Republic of Ireland in the province of Leinster, and brought to the police station for questioning. While being interrogated Sands signed four statements in which he admitted several offences and in doing so signed away his freedom. He was then taken to the Petty Sessions Court in Dunmurry where he was officially charged. However, he refused to be represented by a lawyer, let alone recognise the court. At the hearing the judge sent Bobby to Long Kesh prison,⁶ where he would spend almost the rest of his young life. (O’Hearn 39-43).

During the first months in prison Bobby got into a routine in that he was eager to learn about news, listened to the radio and every Wednesday morning was taken away to be interrogated. In the early months of 1973 circumstances changed as IRA prisoners of Crumlin Road Jail, in the north of Belfast, demanded to be treated as political prisoners rather than mere criminals. They demanded to wear their own clothes, to be separated from regular criminals and not be involved in prison work. In order to get their demands these prisoners went on hunger strike. Due to these incidents the British secretary of state for Northern Ireland Willie Whitelaw granted them “special category status” and these prisoners were moved to Long Kesh prison whilst Bobby Sands and his companions were transferred to Crumlin Road Jail. While awaiting trial Sands was informed that his girlfriend Geraldine was pregnant and subsequently they decided

⁶ Long Kesh Prison, also known as her Majesty’s Prison Maze, Maze Prison, the Maze, or the H Blocks.

to get married. Geraldine and Bobby got married two days before his trial on the third of March. At the end of his trial Bobby was found guilty on twelve accounts and sentenced to eight years in Long Kesh. Up to this point Bobby was still naïve in terms of political awareness and it was only in prison that he started to inform himself about politics, read political books such as *Passages of the Cuban Revolutionary War* by Che Guevara, which was his favourite, and started learning the Irish language (O'Hearn 46- 58).

In the following months the conditions in prison worsened and in September 1974 prison guards caught two detainees trying to escape after which the British army took over the prison and raided through the cells. Prisoners thereafter warned openly that they would burn down the prison if the British army ever came back. One week passed with no incidents but then tempers started to fray and the order was given by the prisoners' commanding officer to "burn the camp down" (O'Hearn 62) (O'Hearn 59-62). After everything had burnt down the prisoners assembled on the soccer pitch and celebrated their "victory". Even though they knew that it would not take long until the army arrived the spirit was high. The army started their attack, firing gas canisters and rubber bullets for three hours, but the prisoners started to wear them down and after a while the army unexpectedly retreated. The burning of the prison had a key impact on Bobby Sands' life in that he learned that even though material power lay with their enemies the detainees still had their solidarity and a common purpose. (O'Hearn 63-66)

At the end of 1974 a truce between the British government and the IRA was announced and word spread that the British Army was about to withdraw and that the date for this was set for the 31st of December 1974. The IRA leadership claimed that the victory was near and the young followers in prison, as well as Bobby Sands, believed them. Over the subsequent months this assertion proved to be wrong and Sands started to doubt the strategies of the officials. In September 1975 new blocks, the later so-called H-Blocks, were built on the grounds outside of the Long Kesh prison (O'Hearn 75-83).

2.3.4 Failure in Trying to Lead a 'Normal' Life

On March 1, 1976, British Secretary of State Merlyn Rees declared that the special status of prisoners would end and that he would increase "the period of early release for sentenced prisoners from 25 to 50 percent" (O'Hearn 89). Bobby Sands was one of these prisoners and was released from prison on April 13, 1976. At that time Bobby's son Gerard was three years old and his wife Geraldine demanded that he should start to lead a "normal" life with his family, to which he agreed. However, it was impossible for him to keep this promise as he had developed very strong political opinions during his time in Long Kesh (O'Hearn 88-92). Even though his wife asked him not to, immediately after his release he reported back to his local unit and started working and planning new coups. However, he was also concerned with issues in his community and started working on ways to improve the social conditions in Twinbrook. Six months later Bobby Sands was arrested again and was charged with a bomb attack on the *Wholesale Balmoral Furniture Company*, which was followed by a shooting in which two men got shot.⁷ Two British Army MP's appeared on the scene and saw a car nearby in which Bobby Sands and his comrades were sitting. The occupants of that car were arrested and brought to Castlereagh interrogation centre where they were held and brutally interrogated for six days while refusing to answer any questions. On October 19, 1976 the four were brought to their hearing and sent to Crumlin Road Jail (O'Hearn 120-142). As long as Bobby stayed in Crumlin Road life seemed to be relaxed, at least as relaxed as life in prison can be. Due to the fact that the Loyalist prisoners refused to come out of their cells the Republicans could exercise twice a day without disturbance and were able to spend two hours in the canteen in the evening. It was about that time when Bobby started to experience periods of depression which he, up to that point, was able to suppress by writing poems, articles and songs (O'Hearn 145-147). He spent the next eleven months in Crumlin Road and was held on remand awaiting his trial which took place in September 1977. It has to be mentioned here that he spent the first twenty-two days of his

⁷ <http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/bobbysands>, 22 January 2011.

sentence in solitary confinement, or, as it was called at that time, “on the boards” in Crumlin road jail. Yet, the loneliness in those cells was not the only punishment, the worst part was that fifteen of those twenty-two days he had to spend naked in these, as he called them, “filthy ancient concrete tombs” (Sands, Bobby: Republican News 7. January 1978).

2.3.5 Second Prison Term in Long Kesh

At the trial, Bobby and his three comrades were sentenced to spend the next fourteen years in Long Kesh even though there was no evidence that linked any of them to the bombing of the *Wholesale Balmoral Furniture Company*.⁸ This time though, Bobby was moved to the infamous H-Blocks of which he had heard some gruesome stories in the past. When he started his second imprisonment in Long Kesh he was asked by one of the principal officers to put on the prison uniform which he declined by saying that he was not a common prisoner and he would therefore not wear the uniform of an ordinary criminal. He was forced to take off his clothes and stand naked in the room. Even though this would have been embarrassing for anyone, for Bobby this was nothing new as he had experienced this kind of humiliation in Crumlin Jail during the previous three weeks. He was then given two blankets and sent off to the cells and with this he joined the “blanket protest”⁹ of Long Kesh prison (O’Hearn 170). After months of stagnation in the protest Bobby and some of his fellow inmates felt that the protest was not going far enough and decided, in March 1978, to extend the protest into what is nowadays known as the “dirty-” or “no-wash-protest”¹⁰ Every time the wardens would find ways to discipline the prisoners, they would only enhance their protest which got so far in that the cells were covered in maggots which would crawl all over

⁸ <http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/bobbysands>, 23 January 2011.

⁹ **Blanket protest:** “Republican prisoners in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh Prison refused to wear the prison uniform and to undertake ordered prison activities as they saw themselves as prisoners of war and not common criminals” (Edwards, McGrattan 75).

¹⁰ **Dirty- or No-Wash Protest:** detainees started to refuse to shower, use the toilet and in the end to leave their cells. After a while prison officers refused to empty the chamber pots and it was at that point when the “blanket protest” turned into the “dirty protest” as the prisoners started smearing their excrements onto the walls of their cells” (Edwards, McGrattan 76).

the walls, the floor and even the prisoners themselves as Bobby Sands describes (O'Hearn 187-189)

I woke up and my blankets and mattress were a living mass of white maggots. They were in my hair and beard and crawling upon my naked body. They were repulsive, and dare I say it, frightening at first. (O'Hearn 189)

As the conditions became unbearable O'Hearn states that authorities decided to implement wing shifts which were carried out in four sections. The first three turning out to be quite composed as during those the inmates only had to pick up their mattresses, personal property and blankets in order for them to be searched by the wardens, however, the fourth shift was inhumane as each prisoner had to bend over while one officer grabbed his hair and the other would pull his buttocks apart to see if anything was hidden in the anus. He furthermore suggests that throughout this struggle over the 'no-wash' protest, the searches, and the constant decline of space, the worst was yet to come, especially for Bobby Sands, which was signified by the blocking of the prison cell windows which would play a substantial role in Bobby Sands becoming a hunger striker (202-209).

Over the coming months Bobby continued to write articles for the *Republican News* as well as starting to write his book *One Day in My Life* which was an accurate account of life in Long Kesh Prison. Writing was very difficult in his situation as the prisoners were not allowed to own any pen or paper and that is why he kept his finished manuscript up his anus. In this book he describes the humiliations he has to endure yet he also incorporates the little victories that he would gain over the wardens and eventually ends the book full of hope:

It was cold, so very, very cold. I rolled on to my side and placed my little treasured piece of tobacco under the mattress and felt the dampness clinging to my feet. That's another day nearer the victory, I thought, feeling very hungry. I was a skeleton compared to what I used to be but it didn't matter. Nothing really mattered except remaining unbroken. I rolled over once again, the cold biting at me. They have nothing in their entire imperial arsenal to break the spirit of

one single Republican Political Prisoner-of-War who refuses to be broken, I thought, and that was very true. They can not [sic] or never will break our spirit. I rolled over again freezing and the snow came in the window on top of my blankets. 'Tiocfaidh ár lá,* I said to myself. 'Tiocfaidh ár lá.' (Sands, One day in my life 117-118)

In 1979 the United Kingdom general election took place which brought Margaret Thatcher into power and the prisoners realised that the attitude of the British government would become even harder. This was the first time when Bobby Sands and his comrades started discussions about one of the most extreme kinds of protest, namely a hunger strike. (O'Hearn 229-234) Even though the IRA leadership and the Republican movement were against this hunger strike it was put into practice by seven of the H-Block inmates in October 1980. Bobby Sands did not take part in this first hunger strike as he was elected O/C, Officer in Command, of the prisoners whilst the former Brendan Hughes went on hunger strike.¹¹ After some days Hughes ended the hunger strike on his own account without achieving any of their demands Sands immediately after this decided to start a new hunger strike, which he would lead (O'Hearn 300-301).

2.3.6 The last days in Bobby Sands's life

The second and last hunger strike for Bobby Sands began on 1 March 1981, however, at this time the strikers approached the task differently. Bobby Sands decided to be the leader and started his strike two weeks before anybody else would join him so that it was unlikely for two strikers to die at the same time, which for them would lessen the pressure on the British government.¹² For him as well as his fellow 'Blanketmen' the Hunger strike was regarded as a military campaign which was, according to Allen Feldman, "a modality of insurrectionary violence in which they deployed their bodies as weapons" (220).

Twelve days into the protest Bobby started to physically decline and by the time the second prisoner joined in on March 15 he had strikingly weakened. Importantly enough, on the fifth day of the hunger strike, a

¹¹ <http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/bobbysands>, 23 January 2011.

¹² <http://www.irishhungerstrike.com/index.htm>, 23 January 2011.

Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone¹³ died of a heart attack after which Bobby was nominated to run for the open post and on April 10, 1981 Bobby Sands was elected Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (O'Hearn 347-357). His condition, however worsened rapidly. He lost his sight and could hardly move anymore. After being on hunger strike for sixty-five days Bobby Sands MP died on May 5, 1981 in the H-Block prison hospital at Long Kesh prison (O'Hearn 365-370). By this way of dying

Sands established death on the Hunger Strike as a poetic/epic figure, a ritual enactment, a completion of a historical epoch in the Republican movement, and as the unification of the dying hunger striker with the past cultural and political traditions of a separatist and insurrectionary Ireland (Feldman 242).

3 Representing the North

3.1 Murals

Throughout the twentieth century murals have become a symbol of national identity in Northern Ireland. These murals depict the past and present separation between the Republican and Loyalist communities in Northern Ireland, however, in recent years they have developed into impressive pieces of art. The following subchapters will explore the ways in which Loyalists, on the one hand, and Republicans on the other, use wall paintings to express their political and religious beliefs.

3.1.1 Loyalist Murals

According to Bill Rolston, the most common slogan that can be found on Loyalist murals is „Remember 1690“ (15). This date is important in that it commemorates the Battle of the Boyne in which the Protestant King William of Orange defeated the Catholic King James and by that prevented the re-establishment of Catholic power in England. As this date

¹³ **Fermanagh and South Tyrone:** a UK parliament constituency in the South-West of Northern Ireland.

signifies a turning point in Protestant history it is one that is imprinted into the mind of Protestants, especially Irish Protestants. However, it has to be mentioned that the victory at the Battle of the Boyne did not secure liberty for all Protestants, particularly not for the Irish ones. Therefore, an alliance was formed between the various Protestant classes that lived in the Plantations in the North of Ireland, irrespective of the fact that they had major differences in terms of ideology, class interest or politics. Nonetheless, this alliance proved to be an enduring one in the subsequent years of upheaval. When one looks at the current Unionist symbols it can be said that even though the different classes formed an alliance, they did not always use the same symbols (Rolston 15-16). Belinda Loftus suggests that King William as a heroic figure on horseback, at the Battle of the Boyne, can first be seen in a painting by Benjamin West in 1780 and even though it was never displayed in Ireland it still serves as an extremely popular image that appears not only in paintings but also in various other art forms. Nevertheless, King William was not always portrayed as a historical hero (qtd. in Rolston 16). Clarifying this, Rolston states that while King William lived he was portrayed in two main roles that should prevail in the later depictions. On the one hand he was represented as a “timeless, classical emperor” (Loftus 1977, 8) and, on the other hand, he was depicted as a “historical, heroic leader, often mounted on a horseback and leading his troops into battle” (Loftus, King Billy 8). According to her the first depiction, which predominated at first, can be traced back to the Roman emperors whereby the latter is a fairly new one in that it was possibly developed by Dutch painters who at that time accepted any work for which they got paid (Loftus, King Billy 8). The historical hero representation attracted the interest of the Northern Irish nobility more than the classical emperor did and, therefore, appeared on postcards and other ‘merchandising’ articles.

As mentioned before the alliance proved to be a steady one as in the years between 1886 and 1912 they successfully opposed three Home Rule Bills. When it appeared that the third Home Rule Bill would be carried into effect the middle classes alongside the nobility formed their own “government-in-waiting” (Rolston 17) and situated themselves at the top of

the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which was an illegitimately organised Loyalist army. No one, not even members of the British establishment, had the courage to stand against the alliance and with this act contributed to the upcoming partition. With the on-going World War I and the subsequent War of Independence in the West and South of Ireland the implementation of Home Rule was interrupted and in 1921 partition was enforced with a Northern Ireland state emerging. As a result of the partition not only was the unionist alliance legitimised but furthermore any symbol they used for identifying *with* their alliance was as well. Arches, banners, songs, marches and flags were used for identification. With these signs of representation the alliance wanted to clarify one aspect in particular, namely the victory of unionism over nationalism (Rolston 17-18).

The time between the formation of the state and the beginning of World War II proved to be the most successful one for the unionist alliance, as it assured them of sustaining unionist supremacy in that it legalised unionism and allowed the formation of a devolved government. Preparations for the celebrations surrounding 12 July were now almost seen as a “civic duty”, according to Rolston (19) as areas raced against each other regarding the question which had the more impressive look. People now put more and more effort in erecting street arches, improving houses as well as streets, painting curb stones or acquiring all sorts of Orange merchandising such as sashes, bowler hats or banners. Not only did each area try to outdo the other with their decoration but another important part of these celebrations was the painting and repainting of murals (Rolston 9-20).

Importantly though, Rolston mentions that just as the other rituals, the painting of murals was not invented after the establishment of the new state but rather before. However, the tradition of murals is not as old as banners or arches as paint was not readily available in the 17th and 18th centuries (20). In 1908, John McLean painted the first unionist wall mural and being a shipyard worker he was one of the few who had access to vast resources of paint. As a subject he used, as many after him, King William of Orange, however, photographic evidence of early murals like

these is scarce (Rolston 20). Belinda Loftus, however, has demonstrated that the early murals had a broad variety of themes

The ship named Mountjoy was shown breaking the boom maintained by the Jacobites against the Protestant defenders of Derry in 1688; Lord Roberts appeared flanked by two Boer War soldiers; the Ulster Division went over the top at the Battle of the Somme in action-packed detail; the Angel of Mons hovered over the battlefield; the Titanic, built in Belfast's shipyards, went down with all the appeal of a disaster movie; King George V and Queen Mary were depicted at their coronation, their gilt chairs behind them receding [sic] in sharp perspective; the visit of the Prince of Wales to Northern Ireland was celebrated with a mural of him playing the great Lambeg drum, favourite instrument of Orangemen; and Victory was celebrated in 1945 with rising sun and fly past of aeroplanes (Loftus, Loyalist Murals 11-12).

Even though Loftus suggests a considerable number of themes the most prominent one was still that of King William of Orange crossing the Boyne on a white horse, though, the depictions varied in quality (qtd. in Rolston 21). A reason for this variation in quality is the fact that the artists who painted these murals ranged from laymen, such as Bobby Jackson, who only painted because they were committed to the Unionist cause, or else, out of pleasure, on to professionals, such as George Wilgaus. Bobby Jackson is worth mentioning since his paintings in Derry represent another characteristic of Loyalist rituals, namely the continuous repainting and redesigning of existing murals, as he helped his father to paint murals and after his death repainted them (Rolston 24).



Illustration 1: King William of Orange → good quality



Illustration 2: King William of Orange → bad quality

After World War II the country saw a change in its political climate. With the establishment of the welfare state the unionist alliance started to fracture. The alliance started to diverge into a hardliner fraction and a more liberal group, who had differences in opinion over topics such as the declining economy or the birth of a new and educated Catholic community. Even though the numbers of Orange arches started to increase in the following two decades, the practice of painting murals seemed to decline. Even though some practices, such as banner painting, were still popular, others such as mural painting or Lambeg drums, which were distinctly associated with the Orange marches, started to decline. The decline of these wall paintings suggested, for some, “the passing of the golden age” (Rolston 27) of Unionism (Rolston 24-27).

The 1970s brought about a growth of the hardliner group of Loyalists with the formation of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the decline of the importance of the Orange Order. A new kind of Twelfth marches emerged which had nothing in common with the ritualistic marches that the Orange Order held with their banners and horse-drawn carriages. These ‘new’ Loyalist marches were geared towards a more political purpose in which the participants wore masks and combat gear to show their ideology. However, it has to be said that generally the interest in marching became less and less alongside the decline of the building of arches and the painting of walls, which can furthermore be interpreted as a decline in a longstanding unionist culture. Even though mural painting was not as popular as it had used to be, it was now used as a way to reflect the political climate of the time. It was at that time when King Billy’s image declined as a subject for murals and a quest for new symbols began. The new symbols, such as flags, crowns, the Red Hand of Ulster or Orange lilies, were now used alongside King Billy and signified a change in a long tradition of Loyalist mural painting in that these symbols represented “inanimate emblems” (Rolston 31) rather than “historico-mythical representations” (Rolston 31) and which were, from now on, put in the centre of the mural. These symbols, though, had been in use for a long time and were already part of the Loyalist tradition, which posed a problem for the mural painters as they had a hard time finding new symbols for a

disordered Unionism. Another problem was the fact that Loyalist prisoners at that time did not have a huge amount of support on the outside of the prison walls. In contrast to Republicans they were not able to present their fight as one against a colonial power and resort to various images to demonstrate that representation. For Loyalists the definition of an enemy was harder to discover and as a result they murdered Nationalist civilians. With these kinds of actions it seemed an impossible task to find heroic symbols to represent their struggle (Rolston 29-34).

The beginning of the 1980s marked a watershed for the Republicans, not only politically but also in terms of mural paintings. In the first years of the 80s a vast number of Republican murals depicting the hunger strikers were produced. This cannot be said for Loyalists as they could not use dead hunger strikers for propaganda reasons. Loyalist wall paintings then tried to counter these propagandist murals in that they painted walls with extremely hostile slogans such as “The time is now for Sands to die”, “Let Bobby Sands die”, or the most vulgar “Don’t be vague, starve a taig¹⁴” (Rolston 34). In the first few years of the 80s most Loyalist murals now depicted flags such as the Union Jack or the Scottish flag of St. Andrew to show their connection to the mainland. It could now be argued that the tradition of Loyalist mural painting seemed to cease, yet the mid-80s, with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1985 and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the UVF, showed a short revival of this tradition. Mural painters decided to paint volunteers holding weapons alongside flags and other paramilitary emblems. With the depiction of guns on murals the armed struggle was now fully in the heads of the people and on the open (Rolston 34-45).

3.1.2 Republican Murals

Even though Ireland is a country that had to endure various devastating calamities throughout the past centuries it is still a country with a strong sense of cultural identity. Events such as the Great Famine in the 1840s, or the political and economic oppression not only strengthened the Irish

¹⁴ *taig* is a devaluing term for an Irish Catholic.

identity but they even served as examples and as a motivation for a possible resistance. However, this identity cannot be ascribed to every single Irish man or woman. With the Act of Union in 1801 a closer association of Irishness with Catholicism was established and religious images supported the notion of homogeneity between these two. It seemed that past as well as current events were from then on almost always interpreted in a religious way. The portrayal of the 1981 hunger strikers in a Christ-like manner is one example for this assumption. With the partition in 1921 Nationalists became citizens of a state in which they were merely subordinate characters; politically, culturally as well as economically; and in which sectarian separation was to become institutionalised. The post-partition period was characterised by an emergence of Gaelic sports, folk dancing and a revival of support for the Irish language in order to distinguish the Nationalist identity from the unionist one. With these cultural traditions emerging it might seem unexpected that at that time there was hardly any visual form of art present, however, traditional symbols such as the harp or the phoenix did in fact appear in some circumstances. Still, when it comes to representing nationalism in Northern Ireland none of these symbols was used after the establishment of the new state. In contrast to unionists, in the Nationalist community no tradition of painting walls and even less a representation of the traditional symbols was in existence. Probably the most obvious reason for the lack of the depiction of Nationalist symbols was the fact that it was prohibited, by law, to display any sort of Nationalist images, which was furthermore enforced by Unionist state practice (Rolston 69-72).

Not even the emergence of the 'Troubles' at the end of the 1960s could induce a Nationalist mural painting tradition. Even though slogans such as "Join your local unit of the Irish Republican Army, Oglagh na h-Eireann, in the fight for freedom" (Rolston 73) were written on walls, they would not be considered as a traditional mural. Only the beginning of the 1970s, with the introduction of internment for Republican activists in 1971, showed an emergence of a Nationalist visual art form. The detainees started to discover art in prison as a way of escaping the harassments that they had to endure with symbols such as the harp, the phoenix and the

tricolor as the centrepieces of painted handkerchiefs or leather purses. With these works of art, emerging from jail, prisoners were brought back into the mind of the people and the propaganda machine of the movement was stimulated additionally. As the blanket protest started, the artefacts that came out of prison started to decline as prisoners were not allowed to have any material possessions. Nevertheless, illegal letters were smuggled out of prison to tell the world what was happening in jail. Not only were messages delivered to the outside world, rather more importantly, news, songs and stories were communicated within the prison walls to each other. Bobby Sands was one of those who shared his stories and as a result he should become one of the most significant figures connected to the Republican movement and to the hunger strike of 1981 (Rolston 73-75).

With the hunger strike on its way, additional means were found to propagate the Nationalist ideology. Not only were songs composed that communicated the ideology but also slogans started to appear on Nationalist walls. The most common slogan was “Smash H Block”, which referred to the cell blocks shaped like an H in Long Kesh prison in Belfast. A majority of these slogans was produced by young Nationalists who could identify with the, at that time, 27 year-old Bobby Sands. These young Nationalists formed groups which supported the hunger strikers and, therefore, painted walls with various graffiti and references to the five demands of the hunger strikers: no prison uniform, no prison work, free association, political status and full remission (Rolston 76-77). The following image shows the five demands at the bottom right corner



Illustration 3: The Five Demands of the Prisoners on the bottom right corner

With Sands's death in sight the painting of the slogans became more sophisticated and Rolston argues that these slogans became "almost mural-like" (77). He furthermore states that these "quasi-murals" (Rolston 77) started to incorporate some sort of symbolism as several of them showed the H of the H-Blocks, the Fianna flag or the tricolor (Rolston 77-78).

With Bobby Sands's death the murals started to emerge in vast numbers throughout Nationalist areas in Northern Ireland with a majority of over 100 murals painted in Dublin. As the death of Bobby Sands, a hunger striker, has caused this eruption of murals, it is not unanticipated that the most prominent theme in them was the hunger strikers themselves, with Sands being the most recurrent one. However, it has to be mentioned that Sands was not the only hunger striker portrayed on these newly emerging murals. Kieran Doherty who died a few days after Sands after being on hunger strike for 73 days was honoured near his parents' house and all of the hunger strikers who died in 1981 were portrayed in the mural in West-Belfast, illustrated below (Rolston 79-80)



Illustration 4: The Ten dead Hunger Strikers

However, more often than not the murals portrayed any hunger striker or blanketman, rather than using specific hunger strikers such as Sands or Doherty, and they furthermore depicted them in such a way that the viewer would consider them the victim rather than the rebel. An additional characteristic of these murals was the fact that they contained religious symbols. As has been mentioned before the 1981 hunger strikers were shown in a Christ-like manner which was easily accomplished as their self-sacrifice could be compared to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Slogans with biblical reference would underlie these portrayals. However, religion was not the major source for images, it was secular images that were used in most of the murals in order to convey disobedience rather than mere submissive suffering. Additionally, it is important to mention that these murals were geared towards showing the identification with the armed struggle rather than just showing a humanitarian crisis. Therefore, apart from depicting hunger strikers, the second group of murals emerging was a depiction of the armed struggle against their oppressors with an unidentified volunteer as the centrepiece. Often this volunteer was shown with only a flag but it was still obvious that he was ready to engage in a fight. Another symbol of these early murals was the phoenix which

represented the rebirth of the Republican movement. This image added a sense of history to the murals; however, history itself did not obtain great importance in mural painting as Republican “saints” did not appear on murals. History for the painters was everything that led to the armed struggle, with the struggle itself being the centre of attention in the wall paintings (Rolston 80-88).

With the end of the hunger strike one might assume that there was also an end to Republican mural painting but that was not the case, however, the themes of the murals changed. As Sinn Féin gained much support by the public after the hunger strike, murals started to be used for political campaigning. Even though these campaigning murals did not live up to the quality of the previous murals, they still had some remarkable characteristics. Generally, in history, Ireland was often depicted as a woman, either representing Mother Ireland; Caithlin Ni Houlihan; or Sean-Bhan bhocht, the poor old woman, and the murals used these images for the campaigning of Sinn Féin. What all these depictions have in common is the fact that the women on them display a sense of defiance and confidence which subsequently posed as a seamless symbol for the campaign. The reason for the murals becoming political campaigning murals was the fact that many painters joined Sinn Féin after the hunger strike ended. What has to be highlighted in connection with Republican murals is that in contrast to Loyalist murals they do not degrade the opposition but rather they are used to bring across the Nationalist message and improve people’s moral. Another post-hunger strike theme of the murals was resistance. Some murals showed armed volunteers holding guns or even using them. With these depictions the Nationalist movement demonstrated that commitment to their cause has not decreased and sent their final message by using slogans such as “here to stay”, which was a reference to the Provisional IRA (Rolston 89-95).

As mentioned before Republican mural painting was not part of a tradition, like as the Loyalist mural painting tradition was. Before the hunger strike in 1981 only a few Nationalist murals existed and the ones painted after the hunger strike were not intended to last. The lack of a tradition announced a decline in Nationalist mural painting. Additionally,

the decline can be ascribed to the absence of a particular theme for new murals with the hunger strike being the subject of the first wave of murals and the political campaigning of Sinn Féin being the theme of the second wave, new murals would have required another subject matter. Even though it seemed that the Republican murals were on their way to become extinct there were still some painters who managed to keep this way of painting alive in that they continued to create murals that depicted the on-going armed struggle and even went further in connecting their cause to an international one. In contrast to Loyalist murals, which can mainly be said to be ritualistic in the way that they are merely linked to the celebrations of the Twelfth marches, Nationalist murals display current problems and try to connect their struggle to similar ones in other countries (Rolston 103-108).

3.2 Putting the 'Troubles' on the Screen

Putting the 'Troubles' on the screen has been, and probably always will be, a very sensitive and difficult task for filmmakers (McIlroy, *Shooting to Kill* 1). This fact can be ascribed to various reasons, notably the enormous significance of ethnic, political as well as religious divisions in Northern Ireland (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 2). Furthermore, filmmakers and production companies had problems in finding authentic locations during the conflict as insurances would escalate at that time. Nevertheless, probably the biggest difficulty that had to be faced was not to misrepresent the fundamental ideological differences in the community as most of the previous productions dealing with Northern Ireland had a tendency to facilitate a liberal balance that did not exist (McIlroy, *Shooting to Kill* 1).

3.2.1 The Legacy of *Odd Man Out*

Generally, it can be said that films about Northern Ireland and about the 'Troubles' in particular have always challenged their audience with images starting with the bombings or terrorist acts of the 1970s, to the political standstills in the 1980s and 1990s and, finally, to the reconciliation

processes in the 2000s. Through these representations of violence and what comes after it, Northern Irish based films have continuously mirrored the “urban discontinuities and the fractured ways of looking at the city” (Brown 59-60). However, as has been mentioned above, a vast number of films dealing with political or sectarian violence were not produced in Northern Ireland. A great example for this is Carol Reed’s *Odd Man Out* which shows Belfast during the 1940s, yet only very few scenes were shot on location in Belfast, but the rest of the movie was filmed in a studio in England. By using short shots of specific markers associated with a particular city the filmmaker offers visual cues for the viewers to recognise the exact location. In the case of *Odd Man Out* the Belfast Albert Clock was used on various occasions to establish an indication of the city (Brown 60).

Odd Man Out is not only significant in that it serves as an example for a film about Northern Ireland that has not been shot on location but it is even more important in that it is actually the first film that deals with the Northern Ireland Conflict. Moreover, this film could be called a ‘starting point’ as it “artistically ... set[s] the pattern for many cinematic portraits of the ‘troubles’ that followed” (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 191). That is to say that the film promotes an assessment of the ‘Troubles’ that is not based on politics but rather on, what John Hill calls “metaphysics” (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 191) by which he means “the pessimistic workings of fate” (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 191) alongside the tension amongst diverse models of male ‘hero’ as well as the juxtaposition between the private and the public domain. *Odd Man Out* tells the story of a man who, in the beginning of the movie, makes a very bad decision and has to face the irrevocable consequences. Johnny McQueen, a member of the IRA is shot while robbing a mill and has to stray through Belfast at night. Notwithstanding the determination of his comrades to save him he is not able to escape his inevitable fate and in the end dies alongside the woman who had tried to save him throughout the whole film while they both watch the ship, their last chance to escape, sail away into the night. Features such as the lack of on location filming or the conflict between the private sphere of love and home-life and the

public sphere of politics and violence can then be seen in later films that deal with the 'Troubles' (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 191-192).

Odd Man Out was not only ground-breaking in that it was the first film dealing with the conflict but it was also uncommon in that it dealt with Northern Ireland at a time in which the country did not play a role on the international agenda. People around the world were not aware of its problems and were therefore not interested in seeing the country and its history being used as a topic for drama, which is why very few films followed *Odd Man Out*, and those which did, did not gain a lot of attention in the public arena. One might assume now that with the reviving of the 'Troubles' at the end of the 1960s the interest in making films deal with this topic would increase, however, this was not the case as British politicians in addition to television officials were rather concerned about the way in which the increasingly violent conflict was represented on TV. Due to this concern a number of programs and films underwent strict censorship and others were completely banned on the grounds that these productions conveyed a view that was 'anti-British'. Marcel Ophuls's documentary *A Sense of Loss* was one of the films that were banned precisely for this reason. Further films that followed *Odd Man Out* struggled to employ the conflict as a topic as the 'Troubles' also seemed a questionable basis for entertainment (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 192-193). However, what the critics of these films did not think of is the fact that, even though they, on the one hand, encompass violent deaths of innocent people through the British Army as well as the IRA, on the other hand they also demonstrate, according to John Hill "a disinclination to locate their representations of violence within a social and political context that might 'explain' them. As a result, they may be seen to have reinforced – as much as they challenged – dominant perceptions of the conflict as largely 'incomprehensible'" (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 194).

Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* is another important example for a film that incorporates the 'Troubles' into its plot, however, unlike its predecessors it shows a differing view on the politics of Northern Ireland. Even though the main plotline deals with an IRA hit man, Fergus, incapable of escaping his past, just as *Odd Man Out* did, what makes *The*

Crying Game different is the fact that in the course of the film Fergus begins an improbable romantic relationship with the girlfriend of the previously murdered British soldier, who actually is a transvestite. Finding out about who the 'woman' really is Fergus then feels increasingly unsure about his own identity. By putting Fergus and his ability to change in the centre of the plot the director accomplished a new way of looking at the politics in Northern Ireland, in that he advocates a view which produces a "tempering of ... despair" (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 195) which previous films had used. Jim Sheridan then uses the same notion in his feature *In the Name of the Father* as this film admittedly deals with the unlawful imprisonment of the Maguire Seven and Guilford four but the central idea of the film is still concerned with the relationship between a father and his son rather than the violence that occurs around them. Therefore, it can be argued that *In the Name of the Father* promotes a 'new', peaceful way of withstanding the surrounding violence and in that the film advocates a transformation of political viewpoints in Republicanism (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 194-196).

3.2.2 A Cinema of Armistice – Films Previous to the Good Friday Agreement

As has been discussed, films about the Northern Ireland conflict, and the 'Troubles' in particular, have continually provoked strong responses by the public, critics as well as politicians. Yet, circumstances under which films about this topic were made changed after the declaration of the 1994 ceasefire. The most important point in this matter is that the 'Troubles' were far from being over, nevertheless, as the violence decreased a fresh movement in the political landscape of Northern Ireland allowed the creation of films in a different fashion that would not have been possible before. This being said, films that followed the ceasefire put their focus on more optimistic screenplays rather than the 'inevitability of fate' promoted in *Odd man Out* or *The Crying Game* (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 196). Films that can be counted among this "new" category are *The Boxer* or *Nothing Personal* as they specifically postulate paramilitary actions to cease.

Important to mention at this point is also that *Nothing Personal* is not only a film that calls for an end to violence but it is also essential that it emphasises the point of view of Loyalists rather than Republicans as has been done in previous representations of the 'Troubles' on the screen (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 196-197). That is to say in preceding years the reporting of the 'Troubles' focused primarily on IRA violence and its consequences (Schlesinger, *Putting 'Reality' Together: BBC News*, 205-244). Even though the greatest number of killings in Northern Ireland after 1969 can be ascribed to Republican paramilitaries, Loyalist mercenaries were responsible for over one quarter of them and before the ceasefires in 1992 and 1994 even killed more people than their Republican counterparts (Elliott and Flackes, *Northern Ireland: A Political Dictionary 1968-1999*). Despite the fact that this motion picture takes on the previously unusual perspective of Loyalist violence, Jonah Hill rightfully claims that "the film's employment of so many elements associated with the 'troubles' paradigm means that it also conforms to the same pattern of decontextualisation characteristics of earlier films concerned with the IRA" (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 198). Therefore it can be argued that although the film depicts various kinds of Loyalist violence it still does not explicitly state the political motivations that lie behind the movements of the Loyalists (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 198).

The Boxer is another film that can be counted amongst the category of 'cinema of armistice' as it deals with the declaration of a Republican ceasefire. It can furthermore be argued that it is a film that "explicitly seeks to dramatise the necessity of ending the 'armed struggle' and moving towards peaceful reconciliation" (Hill, *Cinema and NI*, 200). This is achieved by showing two different family variations, namely, on the one hand, the more rational IRA leader who is inclined to end the war and ascertain an arrangement with the British administration and, on the other, an uncompromising radical who is unwilling to stop the violence. A further dramatic device used in films about the 'Troubles' is the opposing of the public and the private spheres, often the motif of star crossed-lovers, who come from different backgrounds socially as well as religiously and who become entangled in a conflict over which they have no control (Hill,

Cinema and NI 201). Yet, at the end of *The Boxer* the two lovers are reunited which can also be seen as a changing way of representing the 'Troubles' on screen as in preceding depictions of the 'Troubles' the on-going conflict has hindered the reunion of romantic couples (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 201-202). As Jonah Hill rightfully claims, "the winning-through of romance is here [the Boxer] predicated upon the imminent onset of 'peace'" (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 202).

Yet another kind of film that can be counted among this category is *Resurrection Man*, however, this motion picture has almost nothing in common with the aforementioned films. Here, there is an extreme expression of violence and according to a critic of the Daily Mail the film represents "an outpouring of anti-Unionist hatred" (Tookey 44). Contrary to its precursors, which tried to separate the violence of the public sphere from the private sphere of the family, *Resurrection Man* does not separate these two domains, it rather shows a reality in which guilt and despair have comprehended everything. Therefore it can be argued that the Northern Ireland conflict is presented as being mercilessly dark and that there is no outlook whatsoever on any kind of redemption or as the title suggests 'resurrection' (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 205-208). Hill proposes that *Resurrection Man* "suggests a knowingness about the way in which representations of the 'troubles' had by this time become sedimented into a set of readily identifiable conventions that had lost the power to surprise or shock" (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 208). Hence, this film can be seen as an attempt to create novel conventions of what a drama about the 'Troubles' should look like by using a cheerful song during a particularly violent scene and thereby conveying some sort of bleak humour. Nevertheless, it has to be said that this film, even though it incorporates some sort of humour, can definitely not be counted amongst the film genre of comedies. Comedy, however, is a key approach in the subsequent filmic representations of the 'Troubles' (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 208-210).

3.2.3 A Comedy of Conflict?

Before talking about this category it is vital to remark that while the conflict was still in progress it was problematic to represent it against a comedic background. Nonetheless, with the advent of the armistice representations of the 'Troubles' in a more comic manner came to be viable. Films that represent this category are *Divorcing Jack* and *Cycle of Violence* as they both discuss the circumstances of the 'Troubles' drama as well as its basic roles in terms of black humour. By using the tool of black humour, these films try to demonstrate the irrationality of the conflict. Yet, it is still demanding for these films to completely erase the conventions of the previous 'Troubles' dramas and turn a difficult topic, such as this conflict, into something comical (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 210).

Both films have been adapted from novels by Colin Bateman, a Northern Irish writer, and both have a male journalist as their central character who constantly finds himself in the middle of a conspiracy. In *Cycle of Violence* the main character is sent from Belfast to Crossmaheart in order to recover from his father's death and work for the local paper. Miller discovers that a certain crime has been committed by Catholics and Protestants together and realises that this town is even madder than Belfast. The irony in this film is the fact that he was sent to Crossmaheart to recover and rediscover his sanity only to learn that this town presented him with even more absurdity (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 210-213). Still, the point that Belfast was generally associated with the greatest 'madness' when talking about the Northern Ireland conflict is not only mentioned by the main protagonist but is also a fact as over 40 per cent of the deaths that occurred throughout the conflict happened in the city of Belfast (Morrissey and Smyth 29).

The second film that will be discussed here, *Divorcing Jack*, is mainly set in Belfast, which differentiates it from most films about the 'Troubles' as for various reasons, such as security or financing, most of the previous films had been shot in other locations such as Dublin or Manchester. Therefore it can be argued that Belfast had, up to this point, been an "abstract place of imagination" (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 213) as landmarks

typical for this Northern Irish city had so far been missing and that the city was not seen as an “actual lived-in space” (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 213). By using Belfast as a location *Divorcing Jack* tries to draw attention to this shortcoming and furthermore aims at showing a novel Belfast as a result of the peace process. The irony here can be seen in the film’s conclusion. Again, the main character is a journalist who discovers a secret that might have consequences for the whole peace process in Northern Ireland. He is given a tape in which a politician confesses to be responsible for a bombing. The journalist then hands the tape over to a Republican paramilitary in order to free his wife and a friend from captivity. Subsequently this person then sells the tape to the politician, however, following the film’s absurdity, the tape recorder in which the tape is handed over is actually a bomb and the briefcase that the paramilitary acquires from the politician is a bomb as well. What is so tragic about this conclusion is the fact that the two bombs both exploded on the day on which a new Northern Irish political leadership should have been elected. What is important is that the original novel was celebrated for foreseeing the imminent Northern Irish assembly, yet, the achievements of this very congregation relied on the assurance of former paramilitaries to stop the violence and participate in the political developments. Hence, it can be claimed that the film tries to show that this is an unpromising task as paramilitaries continuously demonstrate that they are unable to abandon the violence (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 213-214).

The film was released shortly after the Omagh bombing in 1998 and a number of people suggested that it should not be publicised, yet, Robert Cooper, the film’s co-producer and Head of Drama at BBC Northern Ireland, argued that the film’s “black wit” displays a valid approach of coping with “the wounds of a divided society” (qtd. in Hill, *Cinema and NI* 215).

3.2.4 Romance in Times of the ‘Troubles’

Films about the ‘Troubles’ that build upon a plot revolving around a romantic relationship can be said to have existed from the beginning of

films about Northern Ireland, however, in films such as *With or Without You* or *Mad about Mambo* romance becomes the centre of attention while trying to get past the overwhelming pessimism that has prevailed in previous 'Troubles' dramas. The renaissance of the genre of the romantic comedy was first seen in Hollywood and, subsequently, swept over to Great Britain as the prospect of immense commercial success lured film makers to adopt this type of plot line (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 218).

Generally, when talking about romantic comedies the most important factor is to bring the couple together, no matter what, and for that reason it can be argued that optimism is one of the central tools of this genre. Therefore, the romantic comedy, in contrast to the typical 'Troubles' drama in which relationships are most often destroyed by insurmountable differences be they political or religious, adopts a far more optimistic outlook onto a romantic couples' future offering them a chance to get together (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 218-219).

Mad about Mambo is an excellent example for a romantic comedy about the 'Troubles' in which the lovers overcome their social differences. The plot revolves around a young Catholic soccer player who desires to play for a Protestant soccer team. In order to get better he takes classes in Latin dance where he meets a young and wealthy Protestant girl who wants to win a dance contest. Yet, even though one might think of religion as the prevailing divide between the lovers, the more prominent one is class. Still, when the girl sees the way her admirer lives she overcomes her arrogant attitude. In this respect, the director tries to destabilise the traditional social categories. Therefore, it can be argued that the film generally tries to mix-up or unsettle the conventional stereotypes assigned to religion, class or gender. The final scene in *Mad about Mambo* shows the young couple dancing on the football field in front of a crowd, consisting of both Catholics and Protestants. One might think that the crowd, being divided in so many different ways, might not approve of this behaviour, yet in the end the spectators are won over by the dancing. Even though this scene might be an unrealistic one in that the tensions between the members of the audience are erased by the dancing of the young couple, this scene confirms the overall mood of *Mad about Mambo*,

which tries to show a united Belfast, even if only for a brief moment. Due to the reaction of the crowd the young girl, who previously wanted to leave Northern Ireland decides to stay. Deborah Thomas describes this as a very prominent feature of comedies as their “social spaces” are “transformable” in contrast to the spaces in dramas from which “escape to a space elsewhere” becomes essential (14). In a sense, this motion picture can be said to be in contrast to other films about the ‘Troubles’ in that its characters “may break free of their inherited social positions” (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 221) rather than becoming victims of their social environment (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 219-222). *With or Without You* is a comedy of ‘remarriage’ in which a couple separates in the first place to fall back in love in the course of the film. Vincent quits his job as a RUC officer to satisfy his wife Rosie and starts working in his father-in-law’s company. He obviously misses his old job and the arrival of his wife’s former pen-pal from France does not help his discontent. Andrew Eaton, the film’s producer, argues that the film or, rather the relationship between Rosie and Vincent should not be seen as an “allegory about Northern Ireland” (qtd. in Hill, *Cinema and NI* 229), still, it has to be said that some links between the film and its surrounding circumstances have to be acknowledged. The Good Friday Agreement included a report on the Northern Irish police force and its future which subsequently led to the formation of the Independent Commission on Policing. A report was published one year later which suggested a more religiously stable Northern Irish police force. *With our Without You*, even though it had been produced before the report was published, already conveys a sense of the transformation that was taking place in Northern Ireland when it comes to the police force. Hence, the links that have been discussed earlier can here be seen in Vincent’s withdrawal of the RUC as a private and personal decision in connection to the transformation of the society in Northern Ireland in general and, specifically, of its police. Yet another important position is adopted by the French pen-pal as his presence proposes that a new Northern Ireland is heavily dependent on an acceptance of differences be they national, ethnic or religious (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 228-229).

All things considered it is obvious that films about Northern Ireland or more specifically the 'Troubles' are confronted with a number of difficulties. The 'Troubles' have preoccupied the North for over forty years and as a result it is imaginably difficult to produce a film that does not in one way or the other deal with the consequences of the conflict. Then again, the popularity of films concerning this topic keeps within limits both inside of Ireland and even more so outside. Jonah Hill describes this as follows

Thus, while 'troubles' drama may often have settled into conventional patterns, the integration of 'troubles' subject matter into popular cinematic formats has proved problematic. This has remained so despite the announcement of the ceasefires. For while the prospect of 'peace' may have spurred the production of a new cycle of 'upbeat' 'troubles' films aimed at the popular audience, they nonetheless remain haunted by the realities of continuing social division and the absence of any 'quick-fix' solution to the conflict (Hill, *Cinema and NI* 242).

3.3 Commemorative Cinema

Film has the potential to present new perceptions of identity as well as recuperation from past traumas. Films about and from Northern Ireland serve as a platform for recuperation of past sufferings, and subsequently, these films can be counted amongst the category of commemorative cinema (Carlsten 233). According to Jennie Carlsten these are films "which attempt to address moments of national trauma and which explicitly and implicitly raise issues of identity and memory" (233). Bearing this definition of commemorative cinema in mind one can argue that films such as *Hunger* and *Some Mother's Son* belong to this category as both films address the traumatic events of the 1981 hunger strike in Belfast. While *Hunger* follows the personal story of Bobby Sands, *Some Mother's Son* deals with two mothers fighting for their son's lives. Through these "personal narratives" (Carlsten 233) a collective history is brought into question and the way memory and recuperation work, are brought into foreground (Carlsten 233).

Film, however, is not the only medium through which the 1981 hunger strike was, or rather, has been remembered. As mentioned in chapter 3.1., murals were a prominent vehicle to portray and therefore remember the hunger strikes and, more specifically, the hunger strikers themselves. Motion pictures about the hunger strike often deal with individual traumas to clarify the collective trauma of the nation and therefore depict events of an overall national history. With their representation of sufferings of specific people these films additionally fill the gap in historical depictions. However, it has to be mentioned that most of the films dealing with the overall subject of the 'Troubles' tend to present only one side of the story (Carlsten 233-234). Brian McIlroy states that filmmakers as well as critics are often attacked for being biased when dealing with or talking about the conflict as they often use three distinct approaches to deal with this topic. The first approach represents the Irish Republican Army as well as the Irish National Liberation Army, which are in fact paramilitary organisations of the Catholic community. Secondly, filmmakers might choose to depict the British Army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) along with the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) which in summary are the "security forces". The last approach a filmmaker might concern him- or herself with is the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) or the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) which can be seen as the counterpart to the paramilitary organisations of the Catholic community (McIlroy, *Repression of Communities* 79-88). By looking at these three methods separately, it could be argued that films concerned with this topic "underwhelm or repress history and politics" (McIlroy, *Repression of Communities* 79) and in addition "undermine specific communities" (McIlroy, *Repression of Communities* 79). Now this lack of representation poses a problem to viewers, especially Northern Irish Protestant viewers, in that they have the feeling that their viewpoint has not been represented adequately, which subsequently provides a barrier to their healing process. Reconciliation and grievance can take place through the medium of film, yet if films are only concerned with one side then this process is obstructed (Carlsten 234-235). Carlsten furthermore rightly claims that "[r]epresentation gives voice and agency to those victimized (or those who

perceive themselves as victimized), as well as to those seeking to make sense of seemingly unfathomable social disruption” (235). Yet, in Northern Ireland, both the Catholic and the Protestant community compete in claiming their right to victimhood, whilst the important factor here is both parties’ perception of being victims; social studies have found out that traumatised communities, like in Northern Ireland, reveal the same kind of neuroses and psychic structures. Therefore, film can not only function as an aid to the mourning and healing process but also as an obstacle to it. Jay Murray Winter defines mourning as the “set of acts and gestures through which survivors express grief and pass through stages of bereavement” (224). Hence, mourning allows those who survived to process what has happened and get on with living their lives. Consequently, film, through its use of symbols, known narratives and iconic images can help to process a traumatic loss and function as a mourning device (Carlsten 235).

As has been mentioned, different communities with traumatic experiences share the same neuroses and psychic structures. Carlsten quotes Eric Santner, who conducted studies on victims as well as victimisers of post-war Germany, more precisely on their offspring, and claims that the traits that he ascribed to these groups of people can also be ascribed to the alienated communities of Northern Ireland, as they also share the same psychic structures (qtd. in Carlsten 235-236). According to Santner there are four modes of behaviour that these people have in common: firstly, “rigid binary oppositions” (34) that obstruct the process of mourning, secondly, the positioning of family members as victims, thirdly, oppressive organisations, and fourthly, an inclination of descendants to deny, advocate or relativise the deeds of their ancestors (Santner 34-38). Through using these modes of behaviour in commemorative cinema in Northern Ireland, the overcoming of the past as well as memory is obstructed and historical experiences are negated. This is why society has to find a way to commemorate these historical events by “finding history and identity through the elegiac, introspective examination of personal space” (Carlsten 236) which means that people have to be made aware of their traumatic past and have to be presented with ways to come to terms

with it. Film can serve as a medium to deal with past events and experiences, and thus offer itself as a beneficial technique for commemoration (Carlsten 236). This thesis suggests that *Hunger*, as well as *Some Mother's Son*, are two movies of this commemorative genre which themselves serve as works which promote mourning and coping.

Commemoration can generally be said to include rituals, ceremonies as well as physical markers. A current audience is then presented with these markers in order to deal with past traumatic events (Carlsten 237). What has to be kept in mind here is that commemoration is per definition "the action of speaking or writing about memories" (Fentress, Wickham x). The important fact here is that commemoration is an action, and, therefore, a dynamic process, which differentiates it from memorials, as they are static reminders of history. It can be argued then that every time commemorative ceremonies are executed new meanings are attached which correspond to current anxieties. The movies discussed in this thesis are therefore not only depictions of commemorations but rather performances of commemorations themselves (Carlsten 237).

4 "Some Mother's Son"

4.1 Plot Summary

A real interview of Margaret Thatcher marks the starting point for Terry George's film *Some Mother's Son*. The interview was recorded after she was elected as the Prime Minister of Great Britain

I know full well the responsibilities that await me as I enter the door of No. 10 and I'll strive unceasingly to try to fulfil the trust and confidence that the British people have placed in me and the things in which I believe. And I would just like to remember some words of St. Francis of Assisi which I think are really just particularly apt at the moment. 'Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope' ...(*Some Mother's Son*, 00:23-1:03).

This interview is interrupted by George when he switches the perspective to a fishing boat coming into the harbour. Gerard Quigley and Paddy McEneaney, for whom Gerard is working, start unloading their haul as a bomb detonates. At the same time, Farnsworth, a British official, is seen in “a command and control room for the British and Northern Ireland police operations” (*Some Mother’s Son*, The Screenplay, page: 24) talking about the new approach to the Northern Ireland problem.

Yet again, the audience is taken back to the harbour where Gerald is told to attend some sort of meeting. He leaves without explanation and appears again in an IRA safe house where Frank Higgins is introduced. They plan an attack on a British convoy. Subsequently, Gerard arrives at his mothers’ house where he encounters his whole family, his sister Alice, his younger brother Liam and his mother Kathleen, who do not appear to know that he is part of the IRA. Simultaneously, a woman, Annie Higgins, is seen driving cattle down the road whereby she is held up by RUC officers who built a road block. She immediately gets defiant and it becomes obvious that she does not approve of the RUC or their endeavour.

The attack on the British convoy is executed while Kathleen is teaching an Irish dance class. Suddenly the windows burst and the previous order turns into chaos. Consequently, Frank and Gerard are arrested and sentenced to serve twelve years in prison. In court Frank rises and states that:” We are Irish Republican Army prisoners of war, we refuse to participate in this non-jury farce. This British court has no jurisdiction in Ireland. We will not be treated as criminals” (*Some Mother’s Son*, 26:36 – 26:45). They are taken to HMP MAZE or Long Kesh Prison. On arrival they refuse to wear the prison uniform and therefore join the blanket protest that has been going on in prison for some time. Gerard is put into a cell with Bobby Sands, who seems to be the ‘leader’ of the inmates as he gives the orders on various accounts. As some time passes the conditions worsen and the blanket protest turns into the dirty protest whereby the inmates smear their faeces onto the walls and refuse to wash themselves. During Gerard’s and Frank’s time in prison and their hunger strike, their mothers Kathleen and Annie slowly befriend each other, even

though their attitudes could not be further apart, while fighting for their sons' lives.

Bobby Sands is the first one to die in consequence of the hunger strike. As Gerard and Frank are about to follow Sands, their mothers appeal to the government in Westminster to agree to the five demands of the prisoners in order to save their lives. It is then when they learn that they have it in their own hands to keep their sons alive. Farnsworth informs them: "The law clearly states that if your sons should lapse into comas then you have the legal right to take them off the strike" (*Some Mother's Son*, 1:14:36-1:14:44). It is now Kathleen's and Annie's choice to let their sons die or take them off the hunger strike. As the negotiations between the Republican leadership and the British government come to no satisfying conclusion, Kathleen decides to take Gerard off the strike. However, Annie does not get the choice as Frank dies before she can intervene.

4.2 General Remarks and Criticism

Some Mother's Son is a film released in 1996. It is the second collaboration between Terry George and Jim Sheridan alongside *In the Name of the Father*. As has been mentioned above, the film tells the story of the 1981 Hunger strike. Its focus, however, is on two mothers, Kathleen Quigley and Annie Higgins, who fight for their sons' lives as they join in on the hunger strike in Long Kesh Prison. However, what has to be stated specifically here is the fact that this film is a fictionalised representation of the events of 1981. Even though the background story is a true one, the characters of Gerard Quigley and Frank Higgins are fictional.

Primarily, George and Sheridan do not deal with the political landscape of that time but rather with the personal relationship of mother and son. Martin quotes Terry George's statement why he chose to use a female perspective in his article "Get Martyr"

The mother-son relationship in the film is definitely influenced by what I thought my mother had to endure and what all the mothers had to endure in both communities. Mothers are physically asked to clean up after their children and then when they grow up they have to somehow morally clean up after them, support their actions, offer support in prison (qtd. in Barton 79).

Yet, one has to keep in mind that throughout the film the audience is presented with two different mother figures of whom one is an educated teacher with no concern for politics and the other is a fierce supporter of the Republican cause due to her family's history.

A further significant point to be made is that in *Some Mother's Son* the usual depiction of resistance is reversed. As John Flynn rightfully argues

[T]his premise realigns the traditional dramatic axis away from the usual dimensions of male resistance (from brute force to cunning intelligence) and along what is generally perceived as female resistance, i.e., passive, resilient, silent suffering. [...] What has traditionally been a symbolic, non-active figure of silent anguish is here transformed into an active agent of socio-political change.¹⁵

With this statement Flynn argues that in this film it is the male characters who assume the role of the "non-active"¹⁶ representative of the nation.

Talking about the critical receptions, it can be said that the film did not gain great support in Great Britain or elsewhere for that matter as it was denounced as being pro-Republican (Barton 93). Another possible reason for this lack of success and the harsh criticism in Britain might be the fact that the film was released in 1996, hence, during the on-going peace process, which meant that the controversial events of the past were revived. Additionally, it has to be conceded that the film shows "evidence of a pro-Republican bias" (Berardinelli, paragraph: 8). Not only are the British officials portrayed as "faceless villains" (Berardinelli, paragraph: 8) but even Berardinelli goes as far as stating that "Margaret Thatcher's mouthpiece is a caricature of vicious, heartless clichés" (paragraph 8).

¹⁵ <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/29/somemothersson.php>, 7 October 2011, Paragraph: 9.

¹⁶ <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/29/somemothersson.php>, 7 October 2011, Paragraph: 10.

4.3 Analysis

4.3.1 The Mothers

Terry George already stresses the importance of the mother figure in the title of the film, *Some Mother's Son*. Therefore, the analysis of this film will start by dealing with the two prominent mother figures in the motion picture, Kathleen Quigley and Annie Higgins, who, in the course of the film, have to watch their sons gradually die due to being on a hunger strike. Yet, an important point to mention in this respect is that the characters of Kathleen and Annie as well as their sons are fictional and have been invented by Sheridan and George, merely to show the Northern Ireland Conflict through the perspective of a mother-son relationship.

4.3.1.1 Kathleen Quigley

Kathleen Quigley is a widowed single mother of three, Gerard, Alice and Liam. Terry George depicts her as a liberal character, who is not in the slightest way interested in politics or the religious divide in Northern Ireland. However, she is a teacher in a Catholic school for girls.

Even in her first appearance one can see that she is a very kind-hearted and caring mother who loves her children and would do anything for them. She is first seen making breakfast and fooling around with her youngest son Liam about how his breakfast egg should be. In the kitchen scene George uses a medium shot¹⁷ to show the dialogue between mother and son. Both characters can be seen from the waist up which



Illustration 5: Helen Mirren as Kathleen Quigley

¹⁷ **medium shot:** "Contains a figure from the knees/waist up and is normally used for dialogue scenes, or to show some detail of action. Background detail is minimal, probably because location has been established earlier in the scene - the audience already know where they are and now want to focus on dialogue and character interaction [sic]." <http://www.mediaknowall.com/camangles.html>, 10 October 2011.

suggests that George wanted the audience to focus what is being said in the scene and by showing them in one frame¹⁸ a connection between them can be drawn. Gerard, her eldest son, asks her if he can borrow her car to buy shoes whereupon she agrees only if he drives her to school. On the way to school they encounter a heavily secured street, cluttered with military vehicles and armed guards. The camera closes in on the car and here one can see that Kathleen does not seem to be angry or nervous at the sight of the guards but merely annoyed by the nuisance of having to wait in the middle of the street before being able to turn into the school's parking lot. When looking at Gerard, on the other hand, one can see rage and anger in his face. Gerard will be discussed in a separate subsection.

A very significant moment in the film is the scene of Gerard's and Frank's attack on the British convoy. Kathleen is giving traditional Irish dancing lessons at school when suddenly, due to an explosion, the windows of the classroom burst. Here, George uses the classical editing technique of crosscutting.¹⁹ As the definition of this term suggests, he achieves rising suspense by crosscutting the detonation of the bomb with the dancing practice at the Catholic school for girls. The symmetrical order of the dancing lesson instantaneously turns into complete chaos in which Kathleen is trying to keep calm. She helps the girls leave the school and leads them down the road as calmly as possible. When suddenly one of the girls stops in front of a tank, Kathleen is the one resolving the situation. Here again her liberal attitude towards the situation can be seen in her talking in a calm and friendly manner to the RUC officer. In various scenes that follow, Kathleen is always the one trying to solve a conflict between two disputing parties and finding a solution that both can live with.

On Christmas Eve Kathleen finally learns that her son Gerard is a member of the Irish Republican Army and is taken by complete surprise when she is informed that he has been charged with murder. When she

¹⁸ **framing:** "deciding where an image begins and ends. By framing two objects together in the same image a connection between them is implied."

http://www.mediaknowall.com/as_alevel/alevel.php?pageID=image, 10 October 2011.

¹⁹ **cross-cutting:** "is an editing technique most often used in films to establish action occurring at the same time in two different locations. In a cross-cut, the camera will cut away from one action to another action, which can suggest the simultaneity of these two actions but this is not always the case. Suspense may be added by cross-cutting" (Bordwell and Thompson, 244-245).

arrives at the interrogation room of the police her inability to cope with the situation is shown through her body language and mimic when she sees her son. She cannot possibly grasp the situation she finds herself in and tries to understand what is happening. Kathleen, in a firm voice, tells Gerard that a man was shot whereupon he merely indifferently replies: "But he was a soldier" (*Some Mother's Son*, 23:25). With more eagerness Kathleen utters the most significant sentence of the film: "He was somebody's son like you are mine" (*Some Mother's Son*, 23:25). With this statement, George clearly wants to get the message of the film across to the spectators. In his representation of the 'Troubles' he focuses on the relationship between mother and son and, therefore, the personal realm rather than the public one of the conflict.

During the trial, in which her son is sentenced to serve twelve years in prison, it can be seen that Kathleen is put into an awkward position. Firstly, she cannot understand why her son does not want a lawyer, and secondly, when the judge enters she stands up, however, when she realises that no one else is standing up she is confused on how she should react. In the end she decides to 'respect' the British court by standing up. Terry George in this manner emphasises her apolitical status, at least at the beginning of the film. Towards the end of the motion picture, however, she does not have a choice other than being drawn into the middle of the conflict.

Her first visit in prison ends in her being used as a messenger by her son, who passes a letter to her while kissing her. After the transfer the camera closes in on her face and lingers for a couple of seconds to show the horror she feels about what has just happened. On her way home Kathleen opens the letter, which is a letter from Bobby Sands to the Sinn Féin leader Danny Boyle, and in which he states that the inmates are about to embark on a hunger strike if nothing changes. It is this particular moment in which Kathleen receives the letter that she finds herself in the middle of the conflict. Immediately after leaving the prison she is furious about being used like this and starts screaming at Annie Higgins, who accompanied her on her prison visit. She still does not see herself as part of the cause which can be seen in a scene in the town's pub where

Kathleen states:” The day the bloody Brits go home is all you people can think about, isn’t it?” (*Some Mother’s Son*, 45:31-45:34).

However, throughout the subsequent scenes of the film Kathleen’s character gradually changes as she becomes more aware. She does not only plead for the granting of the five demands at Westminster (*Some Mother’s Son* 1:13:19-1:14:50) but also takes part in the campaign to support and promote the hunger strikers (*Some Mother’s Son*, 1:20:41-1:21:09). Gradually she finds a strong will in herself to get the British government to agree to the demands of the hunger strikers. When comparing her portrayal at the beginning of the film to her depiction at the end, one could argue that her character has gone through a significant change from a politically disinterested woman into a dedicated mother who fights like a lioness for her son’s life which culminates in making the decision to take her son off the hunger strike by having him force-fed.

4.3.1.2 Annie Higgins



Illustration 6:
Fionnula Flanagan as
Annie Higgins

Annie Higgins seems, at least at the beginning of the film, to be the complete opposite of Kathleen Quigley. She is a resolute woman of 50, who is first seen driving the cattle down a blocked road. Even though both women are widowed single-mothers Annie Higgins is an uneducated farmer and a fierce supporter of Republicanism due to her family’s history. Not only was her eldest son shot by the British army (*Some Mother’s Son*, 45:46-45:48) but her youngest son Frank is a leader in one of the IRA divisions, which she is perfectly aware of, in contrast to Kathleen.

Already in her first appearance in the film the audience is presented with her unrepentant and strong-minded personality. The camera follows her as she drives the cattle down the road towards a barricade that is being built by the RUC. With unflagging determination she approaches the roadblock and does not seem to hesitate for one moment when she snaps at the officers: ”Hold it, hold it” You’re frightening the animals, hold it. What

the hell is this? How are we supposed to get to our cattle?" (*Some Mother's Son*, 07:22-07:36). Here George switches between medium shot and close up, on the one hand, to show the surrounding action, and on the other, to show Annie's resolute facial expressions and intrepidity towards the RUC.

Her depiction as a resolute woman can yet again be seen when she arrives at the Catholic school of her daughter Teresa to interrogate the mother orderly on whether she really hit her daughter, whereupon the two women start an argument. The mother orderly threatens Annie to call the police if she enters the school again but Annie responds with a mischievous smile and declares: "Do you think I'm afraid of the police? You touch my child again and that outfit won't save you" (*Some Mother's Son*, 13:04-13:35). Because of the fact that she is not assured that she must have some sort of protection, which means the IRA, as the spectator already knows that her son is a leader of an IRA division.

On Christmas Eve, Annie is seen setting the table nervously for the whole family (*Some Mother's Son*, 16:50-17:22). In this scene the camera follows her every move, enhancing her nervousness as she repeatedly paces up and down the room until her daughter asks her to sit down. She knows that Frank is coming as well but in addition she is also aware of the fact that the RUC knows about his membership in the IRA and that he is in danger of being caught. She sighs in relief on his arrival, which turns into fear when suddenly the RUC raids their home. Her dedication to the cause is seen when she tries to help Frank and Gerard flee the house and hinder the police to get to them. As it becomes apparent that her actions are useless, George closes in on her face to show her desperation and fear for the first time (*Some Mother's Son*, 21:48).

Annie accompanies Kathleen to prison in order to visit their sons. As they leave, Kathleen suddenly screams at her for knowingly putting her in a situation Kathleen never wanted to be in, namely being misused as a messenger for the IRA. When Kathleen stops to read the letter, it is Annie who tries to stop her as she is the one who respects the IRA and their methods. Kathleen, despite Annie's disapproval, starts reading the letter out loud. When Annie learns about the hunger strike that the inmates are about to embark on, a close up is used to show her alarmed facial

expression, by this George tries to draw the attention of the viewer on the image of a mother who suffers vicariously with her child (*Some Mother's Son*, 40:40-42:04).

Whereas Kathleen becomes politically more aware and stern in the course of *Some Mother's Son* the character of Annie, by contrast, becomes 'softer'. Even though she constantly embarks on ways of saving her son with a fierce determination she, with increasing regularity, gives vent to her emotions. However, she is not shown to become emotionally so overpowered that she dares to take her son off the hunger strike. She surrenders to fate when she says: "It's not my choice to make" (*Some Mother's Son*, 1:27:36-1:27:38).

4.3.2 The Inmates

In *Some Mother's Son*, the inmates Gerard Quigley and Frank Higgins are fictional characters invented by Terry George and Jim Sheridan. The only real-life character in this film is Bobby Sands. However, one has to keep in mind that this does not mean that their representation is any less realistic.

4.3.2.1 Gerard Quigley

As can be gathered from the mothers described in the previous sections, Gerard Quigley is the son of the liberal school teacher Kathleen Quigley and, unbeknownst to her, a member of the IRA. He is portrayed as a handsome young man in his mid-twenties, who works on a fishing boat and who, in his leisure time, operates as a volunteer for the IRA. His affiliation to the Irish Republican Army is made obvious at the beginning of the film when he is



Illustration 7: Aidan Gillen as Gerard Quigley

seen entering an IRA safe house in order to take part in a secret meeting convened by the section leader Frank Higgins. On his way into the safe

house the film-director uses the device of internal framing²⁰ to depict Gerard Quigley, and as the definition suggests this tool is used to highlight his character and draw the attention of the spectators towards him rather than his surroundings. Inside the house he is seen sitting down behind two men arguing. However, the viewer does not yet know who these men are. Still, due to the fact that the surrounding men are listening intently to one of them speaking, it may be assumed that he is the leader of the section. Gerard is seen sitting reserved in the background listening just as carefully and seemingly agreeing with the suggestions of their leader by nodding affirmatively (*Some Mother's Son*, 05:14-05:41). However, it has to be mentioned that during these scenes, which take place in public, it can be argued that he still appears to be somewhat nervous, especially when entering the safe.

Following the meeting, he is seen in his home where his family awaits him. Here it can be seen that when he is in the private sphere of his family home, Gerard immediately is more relaxed and able to joke around with his younger sister Alice (*Some Mother's Son*, 05:46-07:05).

His restraint is even more obvious during the significant scene of the attack on the RUC convoy as he is the one nervously keeping watch rather than executing the attack. While watching the surrounding area he constantly looks around if anybody is in their vicinity who could prevent the attack or alert the police. Just as in the Christmas scene described above, the camera paces from one spot to the other to evoke the suspense in the audience by suggesting that something is about to happen (*Some Mother's Son*, 09:36-11:05). Furthermore, when they are captured the camera closes up on Gerard's face, who obviously did not consider the possible consequences of his previous actions (*Some Mother's Son*, 21:29-21:32). In the course of the next scenes Gerard is seen in the prison's visiting room and later in the court room. In both scenes it can be seen that Gerard is defiant at the system and does not intend to acknowledge the British government or its representatives. George

²⁰ **internal framing:** "a character is framed by, for example, a doorway or window; this creates a frame within a frame and tends to emphasize the character, drawing our attention particularly to him or her." <http://spot.pcc.edu/~mdembrow/Frameanalysis.html>, 12 October 2011.

portrays Gerard, particularly in the visiting room scene, as extremely cold and detached when his mother interrogates him on why he committed these crimes. This attitude then continues in prison where he refuses to wear the prison uniform and enters the blanket protest alongside his comrades. Yet again, the director uses framing to draw the spectators' attention towards each individual character (*Some Mother's Son*, 29:27-29:45).

When entering the prison cell the viewer is informed that Gerard Quigley's cell mate is Bobby Sands and probably the most significant point of the depiction of the hunger strikers is made when Gerard states: "You [Bobby] look like Jesus Christ" (*Some Mother's Son*, 31:20). Catholic iconography is often used to describe or portray the Republican hunger strikers and with this statement Gerard even clarifies it for the viewers of *Some Mother's Son*. Obvious reasons for making this statement are that Bobby Sands with his long hair, filthy beard and covered only by a blanket, evokes the prototypical image of Jesus Christ.

Eventually, Gerard joins the dirty protest when the prisoner guards refuse the inmates to slop out. Yet, it has to be mentioned that due to his sharing a cell with Bobby Sands, the leader of the protest, he does not really have a choice. Throughout the film he is not seen to be a character of strong will but rather a tagalong of the more prominent characters of Frank Higgins and Bobby Sands. This notion is enhanced by George showing Gerard repeatedly in the background of Higgins and Sands. However, when it comes to joining the hunger strike he gradually becomes more determined, and is thus increasingly put into focus. After joining the hunger strike, his gradual decline is indicated by his rapid loss of weight. However, the director preferred not to show the bodies of the hunger strikers in full but only covered in blankets and highlighted their frail faces.

In due course, Gerard is on the verge of death, showing his resilience and determination, when his mother decides to take him off the hunger strike and have him force-fed.

4.3.2.2 Frank Higgins



Illustration 8:
David O'Hara as
Frank Higgins

Frank Higgins is the son of Annie Higgins. Their family has a long history of involvement with the Republican cause. Frank Higgins is first introduced to the audience in an IRA safe house, where he seems to chair a meeting. What supports the assumption that he is the leader is the fact that he is placed in the middle of the room, and the camera closes in on him while he speaks. Furthermore, the other men in the room listen intently to what he is saying, especially when he commands an act of retaliation to be carried out against the British even though it has not been approved by the IRA leadership in Dublin (*Some Mother's Son*, 05:26-05:41). On the day of the attack, he is the one carrying the rocket launcher to the car and he is also the one executing the attack, which not only shows his rank inside the division, but also his strong commitment to the cause (*Some Mother's Son*, 09:11-11:03). On comparing Frank to Gerard, it can be said that in a public sphere, as can be seen during the secret IRA meeting, Frank appears more comfortable and sure of himself.

After being sentenced to serve twelve years in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh Prison, the focus shifts to the presentation of Gerard Quigley rather than Frank Higgins. However, there are a few scenes which have to be highlighted. One of them is the scene in which Bobby Sands orders the rest of the inmates to exercise whereupon the camera closes in on the sleeping Frank, who is awakened by the order and states: "Jesus, he takes this prisoner of war stuff very serious." (*Some Mother's Son*, 34:32-34:38). Not only has Frank lost his role as a leader to Bobby Sands but by uttering this "joke" he seems to have lost his determination for the cause. Ruth Barton even suggests that: "[t]he prisoners [in this case Frank Higgins] [...] are portrayed as passive and almost childlike" (83), which is evident from his statement. The scene just mentioned is also one of the last scenes in which Frank Higgins' character is explored. Only when his body is about to give in to the malnutrition the film shifts again to Higgins

to draw the attention of the spectators to the dying body of the hunger strikers.

4.3.2.3 Bobby Sands

Bobby Sands is universally known as the leader of the 1981 hunger strike and therefore had to be incorporated, at some point, into the plot of Terry George's film *Some Mother's Son*. However, George did



Illustration 9: John Lynch as Bobby Sands on the right

not want to make Sands the leading characters in the film, but rather a figure keeping to the sideline of the main plot dealing with the relationship between mother and son. But Sands is realistically portrayed as the leader of the Republican inmates in prison, which is made obvious on various occasions. For instance during morning exercise where he is the one ordering his comrades to " [k]eep up the discipline" (*Some Mother's Son*, 34:48), or when he is seen coming back into his cell after a conversation with one of the British officials (*Some Mother's Son*, 51:41). Once again George uses the cinematic technique of a close-up to enhance the impression of Sands being a significant personality. In addition to the close-ups, Sands is constantly seen in the foreground when appearing in a scene with two people, whereas Gerard Quigley, as has been mentioned, is shown residing in the background. Nevertheless, the most striking indicator suggesting his leading role is the letter given to Kathleen Quigley during the visiting hours, which is addressed to Danny Boyle, the leader of Sinn Féin:

My friend

The Brits have finally forced us to live in our own dirt. The lads' morale is collapsing. If you cannot find a solution then we must push this crisis to its conclusion by going on a hunger strike. I'm not threatening you but stating the cold reality.

Your friend and comrade Bobby Sands (*Some Mother's Son*, 41:41-42:00).

The lines above indicate that Sands is really determined and prepared to die for the Republican cause. He is portrayed as the mastermind of the hunger strike. As the promised improvement of the conditions does not take place, Sands is the first inmate to go on hunger strike and the first one to die. Even when he is barely able to sit up in his bed by himself he still encourages his comrades and tells them: "I won't let you down. Stick with it lads, stick with it lads" (*Some Mother's Son*, 1:06:41-1:07:15). While Gerard helps his cell mate into the wheel chair, a high-angle shot²¹ is used to establish a feeling of insignificance. This does not mean that the role of Bobby Sands becomes less important when he is on a hunger strike, but it merely suggests that George wants to put the spectator's attention towards the slowly deteriorating body of Sands to enhance the impact of showing Sands' physical decline.

4.3.3 Personal Relationships

What influenced Terry George in choosing to put the personal relationship between mother and son in the foreground of his film can be inferred in from the quote in section 4.2. This, however is not the only prominent relationship in the film: the two mothers Kathleen Quigley and Annie Higgins also develop an understanding for each other's perspective and on the political situation, towards the end of the film. However, what really connects them is the common fate of their sons.

4.3.3.1 Mother and Son

As has been mentioned in previous sections, various films about the 'Troubles' emphasise social themes in their plot line and use the conflict merely as a background story. This is also the case in Terry George's

²¹ **high-angle shot:** "a high-angle shot (also called a high shot or a down shot) is made with the camera above the action and typically implies the observer's sense of superiority to the subject being photographed (Barsam 171). High angles make the object photographed seem smaller, and less significant." <http://www.mediaknowall.com/camangles.html>, 20 October 2011.

depiction of the 1981 hunger strike. He chose to highlight the deeply personal relationship between two mothers and their sons while trying to save their sons' lives.

When now talking about the mother-son relationships in the film, it becomes obvious that Terry George stresses the kinship between Kathleen and Gerard Quigley. Important to mention is the fact that they seem to have a very close relationship, even though Kathleen is not told about her son's 'extracurricular activities', which is represented in the kitchen scene (*Some Mother's Son*, 05:55-07:06), and their dance at the Christmas party (*Some Mother's Son*, 15:02-16:10). In the course of these scenes, George focuses his camera on the two protagonists. Kathleen is often seen touching his hand, caressing his face or holding him tight. When Kathleen finally learns of her son's involvement with the IRA and that he has been arrested for murder it can be seen that she is extremely shocked by the news. This response is emphasised in the film by closing in on her startled face (*Some Mother's Son*, 22:40). What might be argued in this respect is that parents, especially mothers, tend to idealise their children, which is no different in this incident. Kathleen would never have dreamt of her son being an IRA volunteer and even less a murderer. On her first visit in prison she clearly feels uncomfortable in this environment and is at a loss for words when she sees her son sitting in a room with two police officers. With a questioning look on her face she tells Gerard: "A man was shot," whereupon he coldly replies: "But he was a soldier." Kathleen is entirely stunned by her son's indifferent behaviour and with more graveness in her voice she utters: "He was somebody's son, like you are mine" (*Some Mother's Son*, 23:12-23:27). With this statement, the importance of the mother-son relationship in this film is made plain as it suggests that it is not in the foreground that someone was murdered but rather that he was somebody's son. During the first part of the film Kathleen cannot and does not want to understand why her son has chosen to lead a life of violence, yet, she gradually obtains an interest and an understanding for the Republican cause. Certainly, this does not mean that she turns into a supporter of the IRA, but as she fights for her son's life she automatically becomes entangled in the fight for the whole cause.

An important factor influencing Kathleen in this respect is of course Annie, who inducts her into the campaign. Ultimately, when Gerard joins the hunger strike Kathleen has to decide whether to respect his wishes to die for the cause, or whether she should ignore them and sign the permission form to have him force-fed. Her signing of the papers suggests that Kathleen has arrived at some understanding for the motives even though, she is not willing to let her son die.

Unlike Kathleen, Annie Higgins is a passionate devotee to the Republican cause and defiant at the British government. She is not only aware of her son's involvement with the IRA, she is also a fierce supporter of the organisation. Throughout the film Annie's conviction of and commitment to the cause and support for her son can be viewed. Not once does George incorporate a scene in which Annie challenges her son's actions. However, what Peter Flynn rightfully suggests is that for Annie "motherhood [...] is most likely secondary, or at worst inconsequential, within the signifying system of armed nationalism."²² By that he does not mean that Annie does not fight for her son's life but to her the essential part is to fight for the whole cause and to pursue it even further. This can be argued to be a reason why Terry George chose to put Kathleen and Gerard's story in the foreground. He wishes to draw the viewer's attention to the mother-son relationship rather than on the armed struggle. In the end, Annie does not have a choice other than to allow her son to die as she is just as convinced of the motives for the hunger strike as Frank was.

4.3.3.2 Between Mothers

To begin with, it has to be mentioned that the film tells the story of two mothers who initially appear to be completely different. However, both women are "united in their common role as a mother"²³, as Peter Flynn suggests. Why these women appear to be so dissimilar can be easily explained. On the one hand, Kathleen Quigley, educated and without any interest in politics, and on the other hand, there is Annie Higgins, a farmer

²² <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/29/somemothersson.php>, 13 October 2011.

²³ <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/29/somemothersson.php>, 13 October 2011.

who is openly supportive of the Republican cause. However, what the viewer learns as the film progresses is that, actually, these women are quite similar in that they both have to fight for their sons' lives.

The divide between Kathleen Quigley and Annie Higgins seems to be enormous at the beginning of the film. Kathleen's indifference towards politics is juxtaposed to the almost fanatically Republican attitude of Annie. However, the difference in opinion towards politics is not the only contradiction that differentiates these two characters. Kathleen is a liberally minded school teacher, who belongs to the Irish middle-class, whereas Annie, a farmer, belongs to the working-class. By choosing these seemingly opposite sides, Terry George obviously tries to illustrate both sides of the story. He enhances the notion of them being completely different by hardly ever showing them in the same frame and if they are, they are still seen as having a certain distance to each other. It can be argued that both women represent two different types of women in the Northern Irish Catholic community. However, the most significant difference between the two women is their response to the self-sacrificial death of their sons, as it is up to each mother to decide whether her son should be force-fed or not. A decision of loyalty and motherly love is contrasted to the politically motivated intransigence of their sons.

Looking at their relationship towards each other, it is made obvious that throughout the film the two women develop some kind of friendship due to their similar fate. Both gain an understanding for each other's perspective on the situation and try to overcome their prejudices. George presents this gradually forming friendship in various scenes of the film. They first meet each other on the day of their son's trial, yet, at that time Kathleen is still seen to be openly dismissive towards Annie and Danny Boyle, who accompanied Annie to court. Kathleen clearly states that neither she nor her son need their help or support (*Some Mother's Son*, 25:52). Their slowly changing attitude towards each other can first be seen in their visit to a bar where they exchange some personal information. By repeatedly showing the two women together in one frame, George suggests a connection, or rather, a slowly forming one, between the two. Their friendship becomes obvious when Kathleen wants to teach Annie

how to drive, the two women laugh together and the viewer slowly gets the feeling that it is not just their sons' fate that holds them together but mutual respect and friendship. As Kathleen then drops Annie off, they are informed that a deal has been made between the inmates and the British officials whereupon both women break out in relieved laughter, start dancing and celebrate all night long (*Some Mother's Son*, 54:01-55:36).

After various setbacks, their sons' imminent sacrificial deaths are about to happen and the decision resides with the mothers whether to let them live or die for the cause. Ultimately, though, it can be seen in their different decisions that even though they have gradually formed a bond due to being in the same situation, the two women still exhibit one significant difference of opinion, namely the decision about their son's fate. Ruth Barton correctly states that due to "Kathleen's growing politicisation and commensurate loss of faith in democratic institutions, ultimately, she must abandon politics for humanism" (84). Therefore she signs the authorisation form to have her son force-fed. Annie, by contrast, "is trapped in an atavistic republican mode of thinking that leaves her, in her own words, with no alternatives: "It's not my choice to make. Jesus Christ, do you think if it was my choice, I'd let him die?" (Barton 80).

5 “Hunger”

5.1 Plot Summary

A running water tap with cold and clear water flowing down the sink while someone is rinsing his bloody and swollen knuckles. A couple of seconds later the same man walks down the stairs into the living room where his wife has served his breakfast. He scrupulously wipes off the bread crumbs from his napkin after having finished his breakfast. The man walks outside and checks if a bomb has been placed under his car. When he turns the ignition key and drives down the British housing estate his wife sighs in relief.

With this scene, Steve McQueen starts off his stark and relentless film about Bobby Sands’s life and death during his prison term in Long Kesh. It is a story about the 1981 Hunger strike in Northern Ireland and shows the excruciating spiral of violence, conviction and despair that existed between the detainees and guards of Long Kesh during the Northern Ireland Conflict.

After turning the ignition key, the man drives to work and the viewer learns the reason for his bloody and bruised knuckles. This man is a guard in Long Kesh Prison in which a great number of IRA members were imprisoned during the 1970s and 1980s and were treated with inhumane methods to break their spirit and their belief. Some of the inmates even starved themselves to death in order to put pressure on the British government to acknowledge their status as political prisoners. Bobby Sands was the most prominent of the hunger strikers and the first one to die. He is thus the central character in *Hunger*. Yet, in the first third of the film the story follows a young IRA member, Davey Gillen, who is sentenced to serve time in Long Kesh prison in Belfast. On arriving, he is seen to share a cell with a fellow IRA volunteer Gerry Campbell. The viewer is presented with scenes of constant violence exerted by the guards of Long Kesh towards the inmates and conversely, as can be seen in the first scenes of the motion picture, the guards’ constant fear of assassination by Republicans during their after-hours. After being treated

in this inhumane manner for too long and not being accepted as political prisoners by the British government, some of the inmates start what is now known as the Dirty Protest the IRA members amongst the detainees refuse to wash themselves and to wear the prison uniforms issued to them. They are then seen smearing their excrements on the cell walls and urinating in the prison hallway. Subsequently, it is even harder for them to communicate with the outside world as there are no places left to hide sneaked-in transistor radios or even letters from families. The viewer can see how little radios are handed over during the visiting hours and inserted into their rectums in order to smuggle them into their cells so as to afterwards pick them out of their own faeces. As the situation seems to get out of control the beatings get worse and forced washings with besoms become the order of the day.

As a result, Bobby Sands is determined to start a hunger strike in order to get the political status that the IRA members want. Due to his decision, the situation in Long Kesh prison gets vast media attention from all around the world. However, not everybody agrees with his decision. Not even the leading characters in the IRA are convinced that this method will work. In the most important scene of the film, which is almost seventeen minutes long, a priest, father Dominic Moran, visits Bobby Sands in prison and the two discuss the morality and ethics of the hunger strike.

The following part of the film exclusively dedicates itself to Bobby Sands' body and his slowly starving himself to death. The director shows with almost excruciating accuracy how Sands' body continues to emaciate over the course of 66 days, by especially focussing on the body itself and its slow and tedious decay. The last scenes show the death of Bobby Sands and his dead body finally taken from Long Kesh prison.

5.2 General Remarks and Criticism

As has been mentioned above, *Hunger* is a film directed by Steve McQueen and co-written by Enda Walsh. It deals with the 1981 Hunger Strike in Long Kesh Prison in Belfast and, specifically, with the death of the

IRA member and inmate Bobby Sands. The film, dealing with the Northern Ireland Conflict, has provoked a vast amount of critical response. Critics like David Cox of *The Guardian* even describe the film as a “hagiography of Provo hunger striker Bobby Sands” (Cox paragraph 1), and Chris Tookey criticises the film as “worship at the shrine of terrorism” (paragraph 1). Generally, though, it can be argued that the majority of critical responses was positive, and artistically it won the award of the *Camera d’Or* at the Cannes film festival. It is important to mention, however, that the criticism was not directed at the topic of the film and its political implications, but rather on the director’s achievement in relentlessly showing the conviction and despair of both the inmates and the guards in Long Kesh prison. McQueen, asked about the Northern Ireland Conflict, emphasises that he is a neutral observer when it comes to issues concerned with it and that what brought him to this particular subject was

...the notion of what an individual is capable of doing just in order to be heard” [...] ‘I remember, as a kid, seeing Bobby Sands’s image on the news every night and this number underneath, which, I later found out, corresponded to the number of days he had gone without food. That somehow stayed with me. People say, “Oh, it’s a political film”, but, for me, it’s essentially about what we, as humans, are capable of, morally, physically, psychologically. What we will inflict and what we can endure. (O’Hagan paragraph 22)

Therefore, it can be argued that Steve McQueen’s primary interest was to show what humans are able to do to one another. He not only wanted to show what can happen in a problematic situation such as inside of prison but also what can take place when prisoners are not granted some of the most basic human rights. With this motion picture, he tries to illustrate with as much visual detail as possible what it must have been like to live and eventually die under these circumstances.

As mentioned in chapter 3.3., *Hunger* deals with the past and particularly with memories connected to the past. In connection to this argument Eugene McNamee rightfully states that film, and especially films that deal with the Northern Ireland Conflict, “encounters memory where it lives” and “as a process, literally, of imagination (the creation of images)

the film is able to span the territory between the recollection of images as memory and the creation of images of 'imagined worlds'."(283). In his opinion, film permits the audience to observe historical events which do not have witnesses. In other words, film has the quality to combine memory and imagination (McNamee 283).

Steve McQueen's breakthrough happened in 1999 when he was awarded the Turner prize for contemporary art. *Deadpan*, a four-and-a-half-minute black and white silent film stood at the centre of his award-winning work. The film shows a man, acted by McQueen himself, staring at the camera while a building collapses around him, yet, leaving him unharmed which allows the audience to completely focus on the image that is created. Another prominent work is *Bear* in which the protagonist is wrestling with another man, while both men being naked. What is significant about his work is the fact that most of his films, no matter how long or short they are, are silent. With his work McQueen mostly tries to divert the attention of the audience towards situations which are uncommon and, by not using sound to put the situation into context, he attempts to reinforce the "visual intensity of the sequences" (McNamee 284). In addition, his approach to filming often achieves the effect that his audience feels captivated, yet at the same time disturbed but never frightened (McNamee 284).

Hunger is not only a portrayal of someone who is dying for his beliefs but it rather shows the artist's ability to visualise an extremely difficult and controversial topic with striking sensibility, on the one hand, and harsh reality on the other.

5.3 Analysis

5.3.1 The Guards

In the subsequent sections two guards, Raymond Lohan and Stephen Graves, and their representation in the motion picture *Hunger* will be analysed. It has to be mentioned that Stephen Graves is not actually a prison guard at Long Kesh Prison but a riot prison officer, however, he is

still important in that with this character Steve McQueen tries to emphasise the juxtaposition of the private and public spheres which is so typical of films about this difficult topic.

5.3.1.1 Raymond Lohan

The character of Raymond Lohan is the first one that the viewer encounters when watching *Hunger*. He is the one plunging his bloody knuckles into water at the beginning of the film. Yet, at that time it is not clear who he is, what it is he is doing and why his knuckles are bloody.



Illustration 10: Stuart Graham as Raymond Lohan

With the camera focussing on his hands and not showing the face of the protagonist, the director tries to draw the attention of the viewer towards the bloody and bruised hands and wants the spectator to make up their own speculations on why these hands are bruised.

The next significant point to make when talking about Raymond Lohan is the fact that he seems to be meticulously precise in everything he does, which can be seen when the camera shows him putting on his clothes which lie neatly folded on the bench before his bed. In addition, what might even be described as obsessive-compulsive-disorder, can furthermore be detected in the way the breakfast table is set and in the way he removes the bread crumbs from his napkin. Everything in these first scenes shows him to be an incredibly diligent character, which might indicate that he tries to achieve some sort of regularity and 'normality' in his life, which is characterised by "repeated damage and inculcated isolation and paranoia"²⁴ as a result of his working environment. When he leaves his house the viewer can see yet again how important his routine is to him. He looks down the street, first left then right, and through his facial expression it is possible to see that he is extremely tense and nervous. His next move is to check his car for bombs, with which the audience now might get a better understanding of who he might be or in what situation

²⁴ <http://www.ferdyonfilms.com/?p=441>, 27 September 2011, Paragraph: 3.

he is in as not every 'normal' human being checks under their car and looks for possible bombs. What is important to note so far is that every single thing he is seen performing during these scenes is done, so it seems, with a certain calmness, there are no hasty moves or any noise whatsoever. Therefore, it can be argued that from the first scene on Steve McQueen tries to draw the viewer's attention to the images presented and to focus on the way he operates the camera rather than incorporating any sounds that might distract from them.

As Lohan gets out of his car at the end of his journey, and walks down a corridor, the audience finally learns what it is he is doing. But, one still does not know where and in which prison he is employed. After having changed into his uniform he is seen sitting together with his colleagues and making jokes and the whole group bursts into laughter. However, the next scene shows him standing in front of a mirror. This scene, however, seems to be different from the scene at the very beginning as he now seems to be close to tears and has to try hard to pull himself together. Consequently, it can be argued that the director is now trying to imply or show that there are various sides to this character. On the one hand, he seems to be a person that in a private realm has his daily routines, which he pedantically abides with a seemingly interminable tranquillity, and on the other hand, he acts like a laid-back individual who does not take anything too seriously. This argument is enhanced when Lohan is seen cutting one of the prisoner's hair and beard violently and rubbing him down with a scrubbing brush as a result of the 'Dirty Protest'. Throughout the 'torturing' his facial expressions convey his disapproval and yet the more he seems to morally feel that what he is doing is wrong the worse his actions get. One reason for that could be the fact that he is actually trying to build up a wall around him and that he is attempting to reject what he is doing in that moment. However, what seems to be the more likely motive for his actions is that he knows that he is doing the wrong thing and that he actually wants to punish himself but instead projects all his anger onto the prisoner.

An additional scene that has to be mentioned in terms of Lohan's depiction as a guard is his standing in front of a wall smoking. Snow is

falling. He is looking into the sky with a vacant expression and once more the camera zooms in on his bruised and bloody knuckles. Just as his washing his bloody hands, his standing at the wall with the snow falling also appears several times during the film. By repeating these particular scenes, it can be said that the director does not only put an emphasis on these images but he also wants to draw the attention of the viewer towards a torn personality both inside and out and his crumbling facade.

5.3.1.2 Stephen Graves, Riot Prison Officer

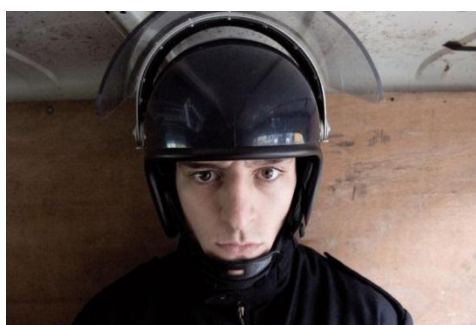


Illustration 11: Ben Peel as Stephen Graves, Riot Prison Officer

Stephen Graves appears in the first third of the film. When the camera lingers on him for the first time, he seems to be sitting in a truck. However, the viewer does not know where the truck is going and as one can only see his face it is not clear what it is he is doing. However, when he looks around it can be seen that he is sitting alongside colleagues as they are all wearing the same gear which indicates that they are some sort of police officers ready to engage into some kind of 'fighting'. As the truck arrives all of the men get out and now the viewer is made fully aware of where they are and why they are dressed in combat gear. The destination of the truck was Long Kesh prison and the officers are dressed in riot gear because they want to catch the attention of the prisoners by hitting their shields with riot bats in order to intimidate them.

There is one riot prison officer that is singled out by the camera, Stephen Graves. In his first appearance sitting in the back of a truck it can already be seen that he is extremely nervous, as he does not know what is about to happen. His facial expression shows that he is enormously frightened due to the fact that he is constantly looking left and right and trying to get a similar response from his colleagues. There is even one very short moment when they are about to get out of the vehicle where he seems to be hesitating whether he should get out of the truck at all. But

immediately knows that he does not have a choice and leaves together with the other officers.

Inside the prison they all take their shields and line up in two rows. Yet again the camera stops at Steven Graves and one can see that it is not a situation that he wants to be in and that he has doubts about what he is going to do, or rather has to do next. Throughout the whole time the riot prison officers are sitting in the truck or standing in the two rows the camera constantly lingers on Graves showing him unsure and nervous. This cannot only be seen in his facial expressions in his constantly looking left and right to get some reassurance by his colleagues. However, he only gets an eager smile by them, which shows that he seems to be the only one to care or even think critically about what is going to happen next. As the whole group now starts hitting their shields with their riot bats, Graves suddenly starts screaming which again shows the viewer how incredibly hard it must be for this young officer to do something which he knows is not right, although he knows he does not have a choice.

Some of the riot officers line up in an avenue where every single inmate has to walk through. However, while they are 'walking' through, the officers beat them brutally with their bats. As the prisoners arrive at the other end of the avenue their mouths and rectum are violently searched and as one of the inmates fights back Stephen Graves starts beating him, seemingly and suddenly without any remorse at all. It looks as if he works himself up into a murderous frenzy. He beats and kicks this prisoner over and over again. What might be suggested now is that all this rage emerging from him, is actually directed at himself as he is trying to comprehend what is happening at this very moment. In the scenes before, Graves is shown as being very insecure, nervous and fearful of what is going to happen, yet in this scene he completely loses this anxiety and releases all these mixed feelings into this ruthless beating.

The subsequent scene then closes up on Graves while he is standing in the corner of a very sterile room, numb and crying. This picture is a stark contrast to the beating in the previous scene. While before he was letting out all of his anger beating and kicking the prisoner he is now completely letting go of the stress he has lived through during the beating.

Though, he can only do so in an entirely empty room where no one can see him. The director now uses a technique which is very significant for the depiction of Stephen Graves: Graves is first shown standing in the room alone and immediately after that McQueen uses a “split screen”²⁵ in which the viewer can see Graves on the right side crying alone and on the left side his colleagues are shown hitting their shields just as at the beginning of the riot scene. With this cinematic technique one can clearly see, again the juxtaposition of the public and the private spheres which is typical for movies about the Northern Ireland Conflict. While being in a public environment, i.e. with his colleagues, Graves cannot show his innermost feelings; however, when he is standing in a room all alone he is finally able to acknowledge to himself that what he has done to the prisoners has not actually been morally right.

5.3.2 The Inmates

Even though there are a large number of inmates that do their time in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh Prison, *Hunger* puts a focus on only three of them. The following subchapters will discuss the inmates, Davey Gillen and Gerry Campbell, who come to share a cell with each other. Most importantly this section will also show how the most prominent hunger striker Bobby Sands is portrayed in Steve McQueen’s representation of the 1981 Hunger strike in Long Kesh Prison.

²⁵ **split screen:** “a method of showing different scenes or pieces of information at the same time on a film, television, or computer screen.” <http://www.idoceonline.com/Film-topic/split-screen>, 20. October 2011.

5.3.2.1 Davey Gillen and Gerry Campbell

As has been mentioned above, Davey Gillen and Gerry Campbell are two inmates of Long Kesh Prison who share a cell. Important, is the fact that Gillen is a fresh and new prisoner arriving at



Illustration 12: Brian Milligan as Davey Gillen on the right and Liam McMahon as Gerry Campbell in the background

Long Kesh at the beginning of the film. Campbell on the other hand, must have been in Long Kesh for

some time already as he is portrayed as having long, dirty hair and a greasy beard and it is apparent that he has not washed himself for quite some time, which additionally confirms that he is part of the Dirty Wash Protest that is going on in Long Kesh.

Steve McQueen puts the focus on Davey Gillen, who, on arriving in prison, refuses to wear the prison uniform: “I will not wear the uniform of a criminal. I demand to wear my own clothes”²⁶, whereupon a prison guard writes down “Non-conforming prisoner”²⁷, which suggests that Davey Gillen intends to enter the Dirty Protest that the inmates of Long Kesh had started. After refusing to accept the treatment given to him he is exposed to a humiliating moment in which he has to undress in front of various guards. The camera closes-up on Gillen throughout the whole scene and in doing so McQueen enhances the sense of humiliation and uncertainty experienced by the prisoners. In addition, what is striking is that the scene is protracted as long as possible to illustrate the degradation that every prisoner, who joins the Dirty Protest, has to go through.

After being handed a blanket he is led through the prison hallway to his cell. It can be seen that he has been badly beaten as the camera’s perspective changes to a high-angle from where the viewer can see an open and bleeding head wound. By using this type of shot McQueen provokes a feeling of uneasiness and vulnerability. This use of the camera

²⁶ Shooting Script Hunger. 2007, 9.

²⁷ Shooting Script Hunger. 2007, 9.

tries to make the moment even more dramatic than it already is. As he enters the cell, Gillen and the spectator are thrown into a world of faeces and maggots in which he finally meets his cell mate Gerry Campbell, sitting crouched in the corner of the claustrophobic cubicle. As Roderick Heath states, Campbell indeed looks like a “cavemen”²⁸ [sic]: he has not only long hair and a filthy beard, but he is also cowering in a cell in which the walls are full of faeces with some sort of drawings in them. Another aspect on the depiction of Campbell is that his face closely resembles that of Jesus Christ. When one looks at traditional representations of Jesus Christ he is portrayed as having long hair and a beard just like Gerry Campbell. As has been mentioned in previous chapters, a number of Irish, mostly Republican, ‘media’, such as film or murals, use Catholic iconography like the image of Jesus Christ to emphasise the importance of their belief. *Hunger* is not different in that it portrays Campbell as a Christ-like figure, but also stylises Bobby Sands as the most typical representative of a Christ-like martyr.

When returning to Davey Gillen, he slowly adapts to the routine of prison life, which means recurrent beatings and living in revolting and inhumane conditions. In his confined cell he is seen trying to get a breath of fresh air when standing at the broken window, which is actually a steel grid, playing with a fly. Here again, McQueen protracts the scene into a seemingly endless sequence, illustrating loneliness and constriction experienced by the inmates. Eugene McNamee suggests that this scene is the “zenith of [the] thematic illustration of the conditions in which these men find themselves (or have created for themselves as a refusal of the condition of normalised humanity as it exists for the prison regime)” (McNamee 289). McNamee indicates here that, as a result of the constant isolation and solitude, a fly seems to be the adequate company for Gillen and that he is playing with the fly not to harm it but rather to sympathise with it (McNamee 289).

Another notable aspect in *Hunger*, portrayed by both Gillen and Campbell and later on Bobby Sands, is how they use their bodies to rebel

²⁸ <http://www.ferdyonfilms.com/?p=441>, 27 September 2011.

against the prisoner regime. As they have nothing else left apart from their own bodies, they can use to show some sort of defiance. What has to be kept in mind here is the very fact that almost each scene in the film expresses some sort of rebellion against the inmates' environment. Yet one scene stands out in particular because of its comical potential: the scene in the visiting room. The reason why it is so significant is that it can be seen that nearly every prisoner in this room exchanges letters or some sort of device with their visitors which all come from "enclosed body parts" (McNamee 289) such as mouths, vaginas or anuses. The sheer variety of goods that is exchanged is astonishing. Gerry Campbell, for example, receives a radio that his girlfriend hid in her vagina which he then tucks up his anus to hide it from the guards and later withdraws it in his cell. Campbell's exchange is probably one of the most prominent examples for the disobedient bodies of the inmates in that it shows their vast variety of possibilities to defeat the prison regime (McNamee 289).

Davey Gillen and Gerry Campbell are next seen lying in their cell, some time must have passed as their hair and beards have grown even longer. Yet, the scenes that follow this short, calm moment are horrific as well as unexpected. The next morning Campbell tells Gillen to "Bi reidh anois (Get ready now)"²⁹ and suddenly the door opens. The spectator does not see Campbell or Gillen dragged out onto the hallway but another prisoner who has not been in the picture so far. He is beaten in order to submit to the subsequent washing and cutting of his hair. The prisoner struggles vehemently which only makes it worse as his head is now held down by two guards in order for them to cut his hair. Due to his fighting, he leaves the bathroom not able to walk and having to be carried back to his cell by two guards. Not knowing who the prisoner is, the audience is introduced to the most important character of the film, Bobby Sands.

²⁹ Shooting Script Hunger. 2007, 18.

5.3.2.2 Bobby Sands

Even though *Hunger* is a film about the last six months of Bobby Sands' life, he first appears 25 minutes into the film with the scene described in the lines above. Only when it comes to the 17-minute one-shot scene or long take³⁰ which marks the beginning of the second



Illustration 13: Michael Fassbender as Bobby Sands

part of the film does he become the focus of the plot. However, what is vital to notice is that he has been present all along. With the above scene it can already be understood that he is a significant character in the Dirty Protest. As McQueen shows Sands as the first one of the inmates to be washed, it can be argued that he is also presented as one of the most important figures in that protest.

In a visiting room scene where Sands is visited by his parents, the viewer is able to see the character Bobby Sands for the first time while simultaneously being aware that he is in fact Bobby Sands. He is sitting at the table staring expressionlessly ahead, his face scarred and bruised from the brutal beatings, his hair cut in a patchy way. His mother, sitting opposite him, asks "Are you alright, Bobby?"³¹, in a very calm and focussed voice. He only replies in a very short manner "I'm grand ma."³² When his father is asking him if he is getting treatment for his wounds he again replies very briefly and immediately tries to draw their attention to another subject by asking about the "young fella"³³, who might be assumed to be his brother. By this short dialogue between Sands and his parents the spectator gets the first impression of Sands' character. He is trying, what probably every prisoner does, to tell his loved ones not to

³⁰ **long take:** "a long take can run anywhere from one to ten minutes [...] but specially fitted cameras can accommodate longer rolls of film that permit takes of anywhere from fourteen to twenty-two minutes. One of the most elegant techniques of cinematography long take has the double potential of preserving both real space and real time" (Barsam 187).

³¹ Shooting Script *Hunger*. 2007, 21.

³² Shooting Script *Hunger*. 2007, 21.

³³ Shooting Script *Hunger*. 2007, 21.

worry, that he is taken care of and that he will get through whatever may come. As a voice can be heard in the background that only five minutes remain, Sands looks to his left to signal to another table to make an exchange of some sort. Here again it can be seen that McQueen draws the spectator's attention to the fact that Sands is the pivotal part of the protest or its leader. Just two scenes later, this assumption is corroborated as after mass Bobby is trying to rally his fellow inmates by occasionally taking one prisoner at a time by their arm and whispering in their ear. What he is trying to do is to tell them to pick up their courage as most of them are just simply broken by the conditions in prison and cannot resist for very much longer. Even when a young prisoner comes up to Bobby in tears he thoroughly takes this young man by his shoulders and embraces him. Yet again his role as a leader and as an incredibly strong personality is confirmed.

At night, in his cell, Bobby reads the letters that have been given to him during mass whereupon his mood changes. Something in one particular letter seems to have angered him. He burns the letters and watches the embers crackle as they disperse in silence. These moments alone in his cell, which occur throughout the film, can be seen as a stark contrast to the loud and chaotic beatings outside of his cell in the prison hallway or bathroom. Just like with Raymond Lohan, McQueen tries to contrast the private and public spheres with Bobby Sands. Even though a claustrophobic cell in a prison cannot possibly be compared to a home like Raymond Lohan's, it is the only place in which Sands is able to experience some sort of privacy. Out in the hallway, visiting room or elsewhere inside the prison walls his life does not belong to him, he has to submit to the prison regime. What the spectators learn in the subsequent scene reveals what made Sands agitated; are the words "It's time this stopped. Negotiate..."³⁴ which in his eyes would be a betrayal of their cause and everything they have been fighting for so far.

When five prisoners, including Sands, Gillen and Campbell, are led out of their cells to receive 'their' clothing, an extremely tense Sands

³⁴ Shooting Script Hunger. 2007, 24.

realises gradually that the clothes they are given are supposed to be another way of humiliating the prisoners. What they are given is not the clothes they expected, each prisoner gets extremely bright-coloured trousers, shirts and shoes not only to show who is in charge but also to let them live through another humiliation. The reaction to this is the smashing of their prison cells, which again is led by Sands and again they use the only 'tool' they have as a weapon, their body. With pure will power and the strength they still have left in their bodies they smash everything that the cell contains to pieces.

One of the most defining scenes about Bobby Sands, and probably the whole film, is the previously mentioned 17-minute one-shot scene in the visiting room of Long Kesh which furthermore marks the beginning of the second part of the film and makes up for the near silence of the first part. Father Thomas visits Bobby Sands whose bruises have gone down a little and who is wearing only trousers and shoes. Their conversation starts by exchanging some cordialities on which books of the bible the inmates regularly smoke, how Bobby's health is doing and general chit chat. One can feel that they must have known each other for quite a while as they seem to be quite intimate with each other, which is probably a reason for their subsequent debate about the ethics of suicide. Two people who do not know each other would probably not discuss such a sensitive topic in the way these two do. The fascinating point now is that McQueen shot this scene in one 17-minute shot without any cuts by which he tried to completely focus the viewer's attention on the dialogue. It is interesting here that the rest of the film can almost be described as a silent movie but in this particular scene it is only about the words.

The last part of the film and, consequently, Bobby Sands' deterioration starts with Margaret Thatcher's voice in the background

And faced now with the failure of their discredited cause, the men of violence have chosen in recent months to play what may well be their last card. They have turned their violence against themselves through the prison hunger strike to death. They seek to work on the most basic of human emotions ... pity ... as a means of creating

tension and stoking the fires of bitterness and hatred (Margaret Thatcher)³⁵

Simultaneously McQueen shows a dandelion pappus floating to the ground in Sands' cell, which can be identified as metaphorical symbol for his imminent death of starvation. Simultaneously, Bobby's parents are seen sitting in a room with the chief medical officer who informs them about their son's condition throughout which Mrs. Sands remains focused and calm, the same way she was portrayed when visiting Bobby at the beginning of the film. When the camera then heads back to the room of the leading hunger striker the dandelion pappus comes back into view, yet, it does not float to the ground, as a draft, from beneath the door, pushes it back up into the air indicating that Sands' time on this earth is not yet over. However, in this scene Sands is already portrayed with dark, clouded eyes and a gaunt face suggesting he is well into the hunger strike already suffering major health implications. However, the pastel blue room, with its green seat and bedside locker, in the hospital wing in which Bobby stays during his strike represents a sharp contrast to the dark, filthy and eventually demolished H-Block cells.

His body is now seen slowly deteriorating. It almost seems like he is losing weight every second throughout the part of the film. William, an orderly who is taking care of Bobby, is watching him unbutton his pyjama. Meanwhile the wet bed sheets come into view, which have been stained by what is beneath Bobby's shirt. As he removes his shirt the gruesome bed sores he has acquired due to his lack of strength and confinement to his bed come into view. He is taken to the chief medical officer's office where his state of health is examined. Subsequently William and a younger orderly take Bobby to the bathroom where he is lowered gently into a bathtub. What becomes alarmingly apparent, as he is seen lying in the water naked, is his drastic weight loss. The spectator can see and feel his excruciating pain as his spine rubs against the hard surface of the bathtub.

³⁵ Shooting Script Hunger. 2007, 62.

Over the next twenty minutes his slowly approaching death can be seen in every image that McQueen uses. As has been mentioned above, hunger strikers have often been portrayed as Christ-like figures, which is not different in this film. However, it is important to notice that the character of Bobby Sands is the most important representative of this type of depiction. Not only is he seen, in his first appearance, having long hair, a beard and only a blanket around his waist but towards the end of his life it becomes even more obvious that there is in fact a connection to the suffering of Jesus Christ. Just by looking at his deteriorating body and the way McQueen shows Sands lying in his bed this link cannot be rejected. In the last scenes, and, therefore, days of Bobby Sands' life, the same images are constantly repeated in order to draw the viewer's attention purely on the images themselves. William and the younger orderly are seen taking care of Bobby with a dignity that has been missing in previous scenes and Bobby is seen daydreaming about his younger self over and over again. McQueen portrays Sands' fast approaching death with every possible tool he has. Not only is the last part of the film almost completely strapped of talk or sounds but he furthermore uses long and steady camera perspectives, especially on Sands' slowly deteriorating body, to enhance the viewer's awareness of being part of a human tragedy.

5.3.3 Personal Relationships

Intimate personal relationships are hard to achieve in a hostile environment such as Long Kesh Prison. However, Steve McQueen tries to give some account of how the inmates build a relationship with each other and with the prison guards.

5.3.3.1 Between guards and inmates

With Davey Gillen arriving in prison, the viewer, for the first time, is able to see how guards in Long Kesh Prison interact with newly-arriving inmates and vice versa. On the one hand, one can see a guard writing

slowly into a journal “Non-conforming prisoner”³⁶ and, consequently, watching the new prisoner undress himself in front of him and his two colleagues. In this scene one can already detect an obvious hostility between the guards and the new inmate. However, one has to keep in mind that this hostility does not only emanate from the guards but also from the prisoner, in this case Davey Gillen. By stating that “[he] will not wear the uniform of a prisoner”³⁷ Gillen is, in some way, challenging the warden to react in the way he does.

McQueen does not euphemise the ensuing circle of violence in his depiction of prison life. Yet, he is able to portray the context of the film as “a remarkable context of human ingenuity in the face of extremities of human experience” (McNamee 290). In *Hunger*, prisoners who have been charged guilty of terrorist offenses refuse to adapt to the stamp that has been affixed to them, namely the one of being a criminal, and as a result adopt “a condition of a kind of animality” (290), as Eugene McNamee describes it. What he means by this is that, firstly, they refuse to participate in prison labour and, as a result are not allowed to leave their cells for exercise, secondly, they refuse to dress like ‘normal’ prisoners and, therefore, only wear blankets around their waists, and thirdly, they refuse to use toilets or bathrooms, use their cell walls to dispose of their faeces or build channels, leading out of their cell into the prison hallway, to dispose of their urine. Only in one incident do the prisoners acquiesce to the prison regime when they agree to wear clothes so that they are granted a short contact to the outside world. What this signifies in terms of relationships between the inmates and the guards is quite obvious. Without a doubt this behaviour must result in conflict as the guards, not knowing how else to respond to that behaviour, react with brutal violence towards the inmates. The interesting point in this case is that the guards respond with this type of systematic violence purely because the prisoners have managed to impose violence on the guards in that they have taken over control of the guard’s working environment by smearing the walls with faeces and urinating into the hallway. Therefore, not only do the inmates

³⁶ Shooting Script *Hunger*. 2007, 9.

³⁷ Shooting Script *Hunger*. 2007, 9.

have to live in these inhumane conditions but what is significant is that the guards have to work in these circumstances as well (McNamee 290). McQueen himself states that for him the film is “about what we, as humans, are capable of, morally, physically, psychologically. What we will inflict and what we can endure.”³⁸

By using cinematic techniques in the way McQueen does he accomplishes a feeling of claustrophobia and by that conveys the darkness and anxiety of the prison environment. Additionally, in scenes in which guards and inmates appear together he hardly ever uses dialogue, to convey a certain meaning, by which he wants the audience to completely focus on the images shown. As McNamee claims, “periods of silence [are] punctuated by resonantly loud episodes; a clanging prison door, prisoners’ screams, warders’ raucous laughter.” (290) By contrasting silence and loud noises McQueen enhances the periods of quiet to put the spectators focus on ordinary tasks such as smoking a cigarette or putting on a shirt (McNamee 290).

Not once throughout the first part of the film does the spectator feel that there is or can be any sort of respect or human kindness between prison workers and inmates. However, in the third and last part of the film, which portrays the last six months of Bobby Sands’ life, McQueen uses the character of William to show that, even in times and surroundings like this, humanity is possible, indifferent of which religion or group you belong to. William, despite the fact that he is a Loyalist guard, demonstrates respect towards Bobby when he does not help Bobby unbutton his pyjama shirt. William grants Sands the dignity of taking off his own clothes. A scene like that would have seemed impossible after the shocking first part of the film. Yet, McQueen manages to compassionately show both sides of the medal.

5.3.3.2 Between inmates

Yet again, when discussing the relationships that evolve between inmates, Davey Gillen and Gerry Campbell are the two examples that

³⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/oct/12/2>, 30 September 2009, Paragraph: 22.

have to be highlighted. Based on the fact that they are cell mates, their affiliation can be described best. What is an obvious point here is that as cell mates confined solely to their cell it is inevitable for them to relate to each other as they both share similar experiences. Not only did they both go through a trial which ended in a sentence in Long Kesh Prison but they both had to go through the humiliating experience of having to strip off their clothes in front of the prison guards. McQueen shows their life in a claustrophobic cell in great detail. When Gillen enters the cell for the first time, the camera moves through the small cubicle, showing every filthy bit of it and stopping at a cowering Christ-like looking Campbell. It seems like they immediately strike up a friendship by telling each other about the time they both have to serve for their 'crimes'. What is obvious is that they inevitably have no choice but to build a relationship with each other's cell mate as they are hardly ever allowed to have contact with anyone outside their own cell. However, what can be seen throughout the film is that they still find ways to come into contact with other inmates, be it in mass or during visiting hours, where they exchange small letters with visitors or with each other. A very good example for communication between the inmates of different cells is the scene after mass where they all stand together in the visiting room talking to each other. This is also the only scene where relationships between other inmates than Gillen and Campbell can be seen. Even some sort of hierarchy is discernible in the way Bobby Sands is comforting the younger prisoners who are clearly broken by the daily prison routine. He is portrayed as a strong leader who takes care of the younger inmates and encourages them to keep their belief in place.

6 Conclusion

My heart is very sore because I know that I have broken my poor mother's heart, and my home is struck with unbearable anxiety. But I have considered all the arguments and tried every means to avoid what has become the unavoidable: it has been forced upon me and my comrades by four-and-a-half years of stark inhumanity. I am a political prisoner. I am a political prisoner because I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, oppressive, unwanted regime that refuses to withdraw from our land (Bobby Sands, Paragraph 4-5)³⁹

Bobby Sands wrote this statement into his prison diary on his first day of the 1981 hunger strike on 1 March 1981. It cannot only be argued that the lines above correspond with Margaret Thatcher's quote, given in the introduction, but it even more so can be seen as a reference to the films discussed in this thesis, *Some Mother's Son* and *Hunger*.

It is an extremely hard task to write on a topic like the 1981 hunger strike, or more generally the 'Troubles', justice in terms of representation, be it literary or, as is the case in this thesis, cinematically. Various directors, screenwriters and producers have embarked on the journey to represent this complex topic on screen, yet, what was, and will always continue to be the most important task when producing a film about Northern Ireland is not to influence the audience in such a way as to generate sympathy for only one side of the divided community.

In this respect, the directors of *Some Mother's Son* and *Hunger*, Terry George and Steve McQueen respectively, have decided to represent the same topic, namely the 1981 hunger strike, but both chose to highlight different aspects of this disturbing event in Northern Irish history. As discussed in the analysis of both films, *Some Mother's Son* emphasises the personal relationship between a mother and her son whereas *Hunger* almost exclusively concentrates on the "body as a weapon" theme by purely focussing on images that show the naked, beaten and dying bodies of the hunger strikers, in particular Bobby Sands. The political context of the conflict was faded into the background in both motion pictures and the

³⁹ <http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/writings/prison-diary>, 17 October 2011.

personal suffering of the hunger strikers and their families was foregrounded. It is not surprising then that the viewer automatically sympathises with the characters in both films, be they a mother, a prison guard or an IRA volunteer. Yet, the essential point is that neither Terry George nor Steve McQueen guides the viewer into empathising with one particular side but rather leaves it up to them to decide with whom to identify.

In terms of visual representation both films show the hunger strike in ways which are valid in their own right. However, *Some Mother's Son* is more concerned with what is happening outside of prison, hence, how people, especially close relatives like mothers, react when their sons have chosen to sacrifice their lives by slowly starving themselves to death. Terry George is more concerned with showing the consequences of the strike through the dialogues between the protagonists rather than pure images, which can evidently be seen throughout the motion picture, yet, the most significant declaration is Kathleen Quigley's statement when she sees her son in prison for the first time and voices that the man Gerard has killed: "He was somebody's son, like you are mine!" (*Some Mother's Son*, 23:25). *Hunger*, by contrast, almost completely focuses on the disturbing and horrifying daily prison routine of inmates as well as guards inside Long Kesh Prison whereby McQueen goes to great lengths to draw the viewer's attention onto the images presented, be they a bruised and bloody hand or a dandelion pappus floating slowly to the ground.

The central issue of this thesis is the claim that everyone has a story to tell, yet, everyone tells the same story differently which can be seen in the two motion pictures discussed. Still, what is noteworthy is the fact that Terry George puts the narrative into the foreground whereas McQueen chose to let the images dominate. What everyone has to decide for themselves now is which representation of the hunger strike is the superior one or whether this can be distinguished at all. Yet, what *can* be argued, is that the films at hand both show the arduous topic of the hunger strike with "a fascination with humanity, with human capacity and human response." (McNamee, 293).

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9 Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Seit Anfang der 1960er Jahre ist Nordirland Schauplatz einer der am längsten andauernden Bürgerkriege der modernen Geschichte, dem Nordirlandkonflikt auch bekannt als die 'Troubles'. Aufgrund dessen, dass die Britische Regierung sich weigerte den Republikanischen Gefangenen in den Gefängnissen den Status von politischen Gefangenen zuzukennen kam es 1981 zu einem der erschreckendsten Ereignisse dieses Konfliktes, dem Hungerstreik im Long Kesh Gefängnis in Belfast.

Obwohl Nordirland ein sehr kleines, scheinbar unbedeutendes Land, ist, wurde der Konflikt in der ganzen Welt mit Entsetzen betrachtet. Die mediale Aufmerksamkeit war nicht nur in Europa sehr groß, sondern auch im Rest der Welt, speziell in Amerika. Nicht nur Zeitungen und Magazine beschäftigten sich mit dieser Materie, auch Schriftsteller, Drehbuchautoren und Regisseure nahmen sich diesem schwierigen Thema an. Die zuletzt genannten mussten und müssen besonders darauf achten, den Konflikt in einer Weise darzustellen, die niemanden verletzt oder alte Wunden wieder aufreißen lässt. Um dies zu vermeiden versuchten viele Regisseure soziale Themen hervorzuheben und die politischen Unruhen als Hintergrundhandlung zu untersuchen.

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich daher mit der filmischen Darstellung des 1981 stattfindenden Hungerstreiks. Terry George's *Some Mother's Son* und Steve McQueen's *Hunger* sind die Filme, die in dieser Arbeit behandelt werden, da beide sich mit diesem Thema befassen. Das grundlegende Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es darzustellen, wie diese beiden Filme den Konflikt und im speziellen den Hungerstreik visuell darstellen. Daher basiert die Analyse der Filme vorwiegend auf einer genauen und detaillierten Interpretation der gezeigten Charaktere. Weiters werden cinematographische Techniken wie close-ups, crosscutting, framing, etc. zur Hilfe gezogen um die dargestellten Bilder noch ausführlicher betrachten und analysieren zu können.

Wenn man sich nun die beiden Filme ansieht, kann man erkennen, dass Terry George seinen Fokus nicht nur auf die Bilder legt die durch den Film übermittelt werden sollen, sondern es werden die persönlichen Beziehungen durch die Dialoge der Protagonisten hervorgehoben. Demgegenüber steht Steve McQueen's Film, der sich fast komplett auf die gezeigten Bilder konzentriert. Man kann erkennen, dass McQueen sehr bemüht ist, dem Zuschauer, durch Bilder, den Hungerstreik, auf schonungslose Weise näherzubringen. Was jedoch beide Filme verbindet, ist die Tatsache, dass sie den Hungerstreik mit einer gewissen Faszination für Menschlichkeit darstellen.

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Sprachen

Deutsch	Muttersprache
Englisch	sehr gut in Wort und Schrift
Französisch	Maturaniveau