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**National College of Art and Design.**

Faculty of Design, Printed Textiles.

**'Tíocfaidh Armani'**

*An investigation into the dress codes of nationalism -  
1916 to the present day.*

by

Brian Mac Alister.

Submitted to  
The Faculty of History of Art and Design  
and Complementary Studies  
in candidacy for  
The Degree of B.Des. (Printed Textiles)  
1999.



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### Acknowledgements.

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## Introduction.

For almost thirty years now, talk of the Northern Irish troubles has been all too familiar to Irish and foreign citizens alike. The strict division between Catholic and Protestant has caused some of the most bitter fighting to mark the international scene in the post world war two period.

Now as the peace process seems to have gathered the attention and momentum needed to succeed, the citizens of Northern Ireland are beginning to experience some movement towards a resolution of the conflict which has both disturbed and destroyed so many lives.

With the continually growing fashion industry in an age where self-imaging has become an almost unavoidable part of day-to-day life, it is of particular interest that little or no attention has been paid by cultural analysts and semioticians alike to what exactly constitutes politically meaningful dress in Northern Ireland.

This thesis aims to amalgamate what is written on the subject of dress and semiotics in Northern Ireland and also provide insight into the development and meaning of the dress code adopted by the Northern Irish paramilitaries. The thesis also aims to chart the progression of the I.R.A.

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dress from 1916 to the present day while examining some of the less familiar faces and 'looks' of Irish Nationalism.

During the research, material directly relating to paramilitary clothing was difficult to find. The majority of the information comes from semiotic theory, sociological and cultural analysis of the role of clothes as well as fashion theory and contemporary newspaper articles and interviews with military archivists.

*Note :*

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## **Chapter 1.**

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The origins of today's I.R.A. can be traced back to the 1800's with the passing of the Act of Union by the British Parliament declaring Ireland to be a part of the British Empire. The passing of the act created a division in Irish nationalism - between those nationalists who would fight for the repeal of the union by exclusively constitutional means and those groups who dedicated themselves to defeating the union by force. Such revolutionary movements were not new to Irish culture, and the I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood) was the latest incarnation of those movements within the republican tradition which had flickered sporadically since Wolfe Tone. Both the I.R.B. and later the Volunteers were republican groups who had dedicated themselves to achieving their ends by engaging in armed struggle with Britain.

By 1913, several small literary and debating societies had emerged in the north of Ireland. These were in fact little more than cover groups for I.R.B. activities and had done little more than introduce new recruits to writings of a nationalist and republican nature. With the emergence of societies such as The Gaelic League, the G.A.A. and the Abbey Theatre along with the poetry of W.B. Yeats, a strong sense of Irish Identity was being forged and with that a body of opinion in favour of initiating an armed uprising against Britain. In this regard it is worth posing the question as to how this sense of Irish Identity affected the clothing and uniforms worn by members of the I.R.B. in the

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crucial years between 1913 and 1916. Did it, for example, have any fundamental effect on the ability of the I.R.B. and the Volunteers to remain secret organisations hidden from the British?

The uniforms of both the Volunteers and James Connolly's Citizen Army emerged only after going through a number of stages. On one hand, the Volunteers, because of their inability to obtain regulation army uniforms, founded their own uniforms resulting in a very mixed style of dress. On the other, the Citizen Army of James Connolly was comprised mainly of members who were already members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. It was smaller in number and consequently were more organised generally and specifically in terms of their uniforms. Attempts were made to standardise the tunic worn and its design was so successful that it remained virtually unaltered. It would become the uniform of the official Irish army, and remains so even to today (Lang 1999).

In the available documented photographs of the Volunteers (figure 1), it can be seen that a number of symbols were worn. It is apparent that their wearing had the dual purpose of both identifying rank and command and also ensuring anonymity and concealment from the British army. The Cork Volunteers lead by Séan MacDiarmada display a mix of civilian and military clothing. From observing the photograph, it can be seen that MacDiarmada himself wears a

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Figure 1.

Cork Volunteers led by Seán MacDiarmada.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War, Eamonn O'Doherty.)





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civilian suit thus enabling him to remain anonymous on the streets of Dublin. Other officers wear white shirts with dark ties accompanied with military-style tunics. In some cases the men remained in civilian clothing and used bandoliers and arm bands to communicate identity. The bandolier was used to carry ammunition but had the advantage of being easily removed and discarded enabling the wearer to disappear into the crowd, unnoticed. Other members of the group wear white ribbons around their hats and although no direct meaning can be found for them, they may have been used to identify rank and command structures within the group.

Because the Volunteers founded their own uniforms, one member of the group *Tadhg Barry* wears a "Glen-garry", or Scottish beret (Lang 1999) and maybe of Scots origin. He also wears what appears to be leggings and a kilt, highlighting the rather mixed and eclectic approach adopted by the Volunteers to the idea of their 'uniform'. This dress of Scots origin has similarities to what was considered to be "National Costume" in Ireland at the time.

Distinctively Irish dress consisted of a "Brat" and "Léine", (figure 2) or a kilt and shirt and, as represented in this photograph, could have been an important element in attempting to create an authentic nationalist identity (Ash & Wilson 1992).

Other instances of the Volunteer uniform can be seen documented closer to 1916. The wearing of civilian clothing



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Figure 2.

Irish Dress - Brat and Léine

(Source: Chic Thrills.)

See *Tadhg Barry*, center row, 3rd. from left figure 1.

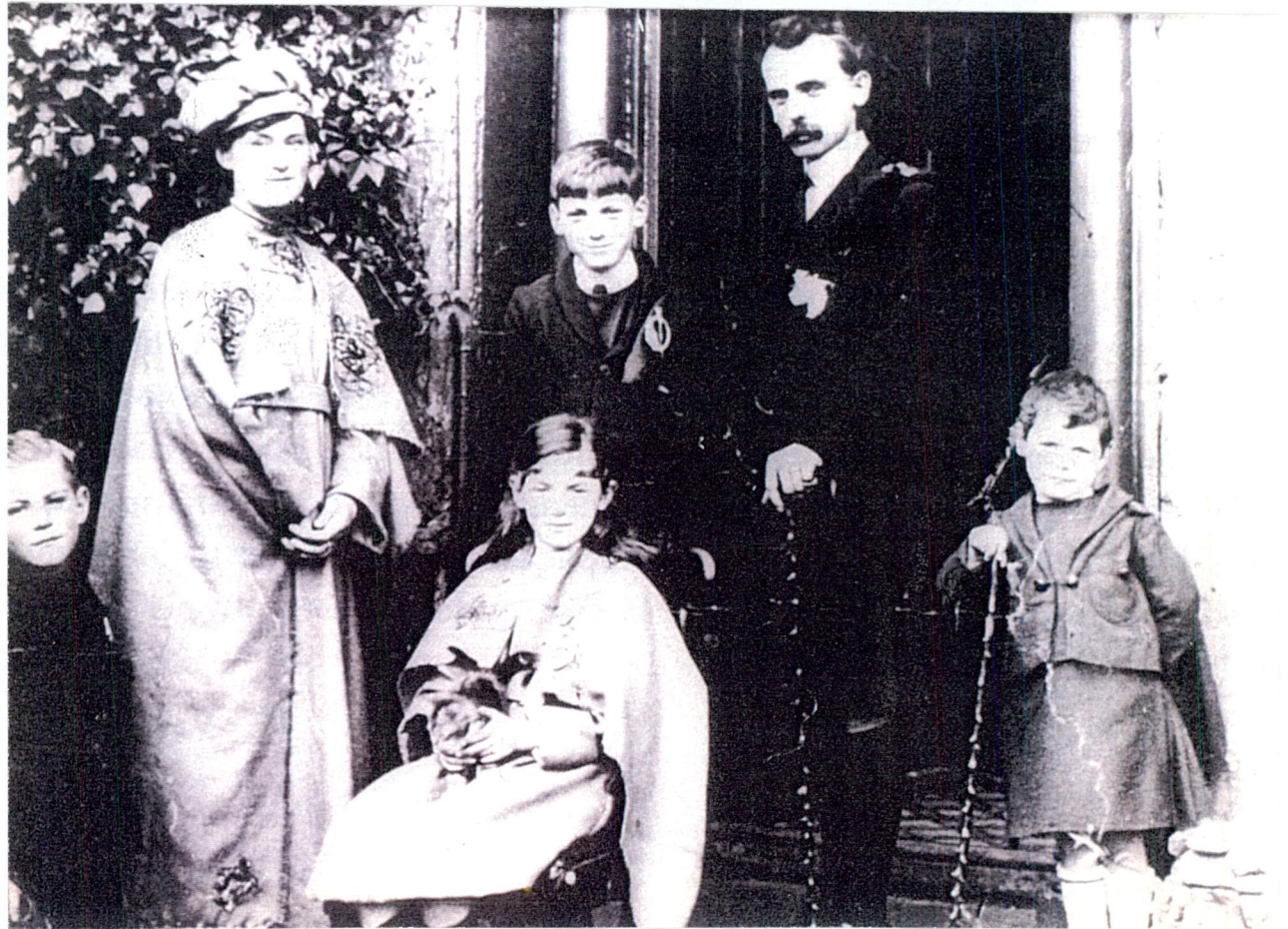




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Irish Dress - Brat and Léine

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was to remain a constant throughout the time that the Volunteers were in existence. In terms of documenting the Volunteer groups, there appears to be some similarity between them and Connolly's Irish Citizen Army. As previously mentioned, the Citizen Army made greater attempts at coordinating the uniforms worn. This is evidenced by the fact that along with the military-style tunic adopted, a "Slouch-hat", resembling that worn by the Australian army at the time, was also worn (Lang 1999).

In figure 3 we see a group consisting of members both of Volunteers and of the Citizen Army. It would appear from the photograph that there are three members of the Citizen Army present. They can be differentiated from the others by the fact that they are wearing the tunic and the slouch or Cronge cap (figure 4). They also wear the bandoliers used by the Volunteers for carrying ammunition. In the far left of the photograph, we see that a belt is worn on the outside on the tunic that also bears some insignia. Although not entirely clear, it may have been an Irish Volunteer belt buckle (figure 5), made of brown leather with a cast brass buckle, and although an official pattern was available, most individuals cast their own buckles, thus producing many variations on the basic theme (Hogan, 1987).

The Volunteers appear dressed in civilian clothing with white shirts, black ties and an array of headwear. The central figure in this photograph may have been in a command position for, even though the uniform was not compulsory for



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Figure 3.

Members of the Volunteers and James Connolly's Citizen Army.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War, Eamonn O'Doherty.)





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Members of the Volunteers and James Connolly's Citizen Army.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War, Eamonn

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Figure 4.

Irish Citizen Army, 'Slouch Hat and Insignia'.

(Source: Badges, Medals, Insignia Oglagh na hEireann).

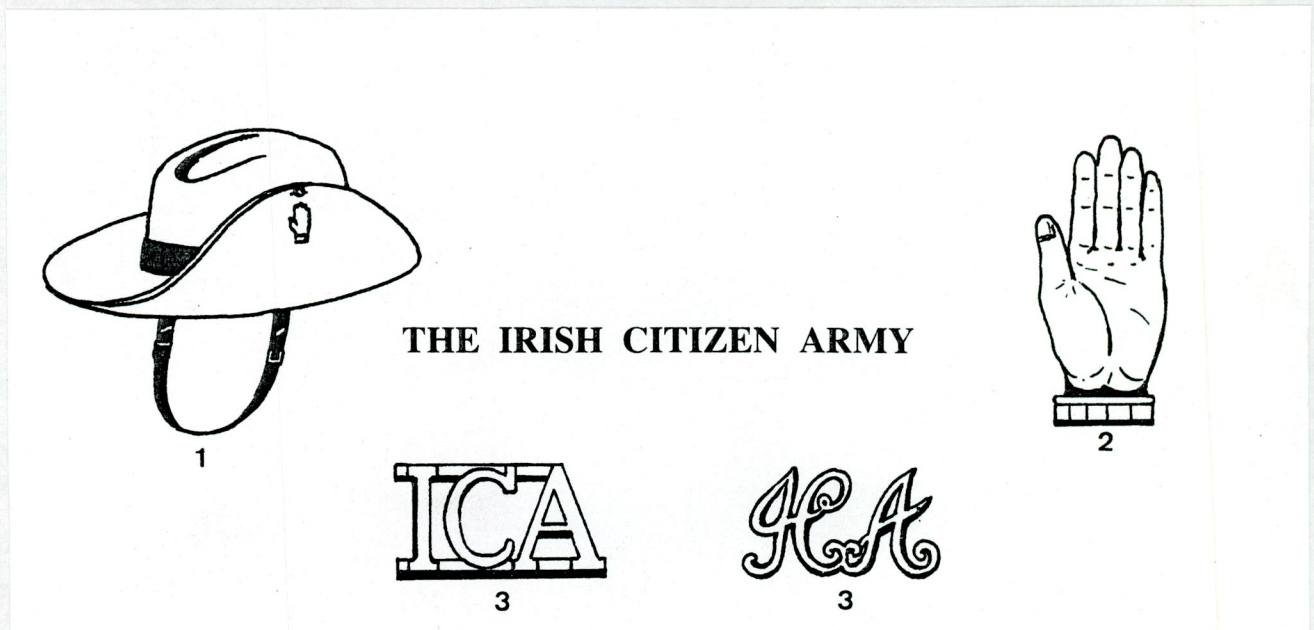




Figure 4.

Irish Citizen Army, 'Shlouch Hat and Insignia'.  
(Source: Badges, Medals, Insignia Collection na hÉireann).





Figure 5.

Irish Volunteer Belt and Buckle.

(Source: Badges, Medals, Insignia Oglagh na hEireann).

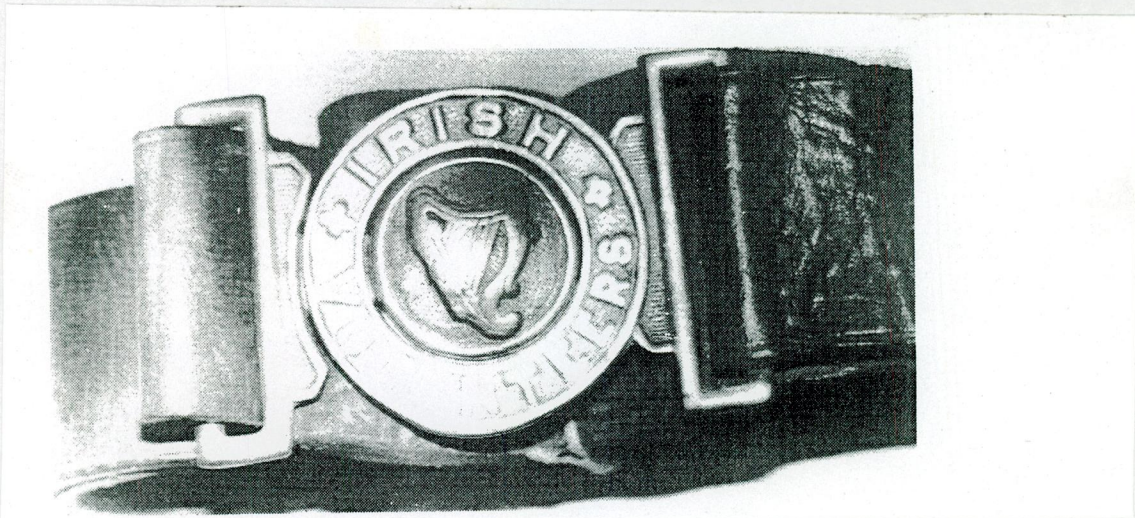




Figure 5.

Irish Volunteer Belt and Buckle.

(Source: Badger, Medals, Insignia, Orlaigh na hEireann).



Volunteers, it was preferable, particularly in the case of officers, who would be distinguished by the wearing of a military-style cap. Although no insignia are apparent, the cap would be worn with a tunic, breeches, dark-green shoulder straps and cuffs with stripes on either the breast or cuff if the tunic were to denote rank. This military-style tunic would have been detailed with shoulder lapels, a belt worn on the outside around the waist, two breast pockets and buttons of dark-green compressed leather. Despite the aspiration to standardise the tunic discrepancies still existed particularly in the case of the buttons where the wearing of buttons or other objects with a sheen was forbidden.

'Volunteers who have already brass buttons may have such buttons oxidised dark green in lieu of getting regulation buttons'

(Hogan, 1987, p.9).

During the occupation of the G.P.O. in Easter week 1916, while some members of the Nationalist force wore uniforms, most were dressed in Sunday suits or work clothing crossed by bandoliers with yellow armbands (figure 6) (Joseph 1986, p.139). Many members of the Volunteer force were working civilians and may have had to attend rallies and training camps wearing ordinary - but obviously - civilian clothing. Because of the open ruling on Volunteer uniforms, members sometimes appeared at rallies in clothing more suited to Sunday walks or social engagements (figure 7). The



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Figure 6.

Volunteers in the G.P.O. on Easter Tuesday 1916.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war.)





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Volunteers in the G.P.O. on Easter Tuesday 1916.

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Figure 7.

Groups of Volunteers return to Dublin.

(Source: Emergency Law in Ireland 1918-1925.)





Figure 7.

Groups of Volunteers return to Dublin.

(Source: Emergency Law in Ireland 1918-1925.)



appearance of clothing such as this begins to undermine any attempts at creating coherent statements of identity and also make it difficult to draw and solid conclusions regarding what exactly constituted the nationalist Volunteer uniform. The Volunteer uniform was constantly subject to change according to the exigencies of finance, need for concealment and occasion. In "An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war" ( O'Doherty 1985) we are presented with an image of Major Seán McBride in what is described as the '*official Volunteer uniform*' (figure 8). He is dressed in a military-style tunic, breeches, puttees and a cap. This, according to Hogan (1987 p.9) was to be the approved design of the Irish Volunteer uniform. Although not evident from the photograph, it may have consisted of green heather tweed with dark-green shoulder straps and cuffs.

The clothing worn by such groups in the post 1916 era changed little until the 1920s. Volunteer groups nationwide continued to wear whatever clothing was available to them although some evidence can be found to suggest that improved standards of uniformity existed among some of the groupings. Flying columns like those in west Limerick (figure 9) appear to have been more successful in their attempts at coordinating and standardising the clothing worn. Although they still appear not to have been able to attain the military-style tunic or hat as favoured by the Citizen Army, for example, the coat appears to be standardised and the bandolier is still in place worn over the left shoulder.

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Figure 8.

Major Seán MacBride (extreme left) in Volunteer uniform.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war)



Figure 8.

Major Sean McBride (extreme left) in Volunteer uniform.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War)





Figure 9.

West Limerick flying column.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war.)





Figure 9.  
West Limerick flying column.  
(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War.)



Headwear is still marked by a randomness of 'what-is-available' including soft peaked caps and what looks like the military-style hat associated with the officers in the Volunteer force before 1916 (see extreme right of the photograph - figure 9). The two men in the front of the group are wearing what appears to be command uniforms consisting of a military-style tunic and hat (on the left) accompanied by breeches and puttees or leggings. This, according to James J. Hogan (1987) is what should be worn in the case of officers commanding Volunteer groups. In the right foreground, we see what appears to be a white waist sash. Although no direct meaning can be attributed to this symbol, it may have denoted some position of command.

Other Volunteer groups like the brigade in east Cork (figure 10) appear to have been less organised than the group from west Limerick. Although it is difficult to find a reason to account for the discrepancies in what would have been, after all, contemporary uniforms, it could be attributed to the varied availability of money and clothing in those communities in the country in which the groups were based at the time. Again, because of the tendency of the Volunteer uniform to change and to appear in various guises in different places, it is difficult to draw any solid inferences as to what it was that enabled members to locate and identify each other. It could be argued, however, that precisely because the base communities in which the groups were enmeshed were relatively so small and



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Figure 10.

East Cork Volunteer Brigade.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war.)





Figure 10.  
East Cork Volunteer Brigade.  
(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War.)





close-knit, that token-symbols on the uniform were worn more to *proclaim* membership of the organisation rather than to *proclaim identity*.

In the post-1916 era, constitutional movements to establish a governing agency for Ireland had been underway for some time. When the first Dáil met in 1919, the I.R.B. along with the Volunteers had to revoke their claims that the president of the I.R.B. was in fact president of the Irish Republic. During this time it is thought that the I.R.B and groups of Volunteers became known for the first time as the I.R.A. and it is now that pictures of the I.R.A. first begin to appear in Irish documented histories. Despite these movements, no further changes in dress appear to have occurred until around 1922 and the years of the civil war.

I.R.A. prisoners (figure 11) appear dressed in civilian clothing. This is what appears to be the first appearance of the Mackintosh or trench coat which was to become, in later years, one of the main symbols of I.R.A. membership. The trench coat itself had cultural connotations at the time. Not only was it an ideal means of concealment but, according to Joseph (1986 p.138), it had been worn by urban guerillas from Dublin to the Mediterranean. The prisoner on the left also wears a peaked cap although no badge or insignia is visible to display rank or group. In this way, the adoption of the trench coat could be seen as a subscription to pre-existing guerilla identity. Other prisoners (figure 12), like those at Bandon Barracks , whose bandoliers may have

also-knit, flat token-symbols on the uniform were worn more to proclaim membership of the organisation rather than to proclaim identity.

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Figure 11.

I.R.A. Prisoners.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war.)





Figure 11.

U.S.A. Prisoners.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the U.S.A. at War.)





Figure 12.

I.R.A. Prisoners at Bandon Barracks.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war.)



Figure 12.

I.R.A. Prisoners at Bandon Barracks.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War.)





been confiscated by the British army, appear to have no military connections whatsoever. Dressed entirely in civilian clothing there are no insignia or agreed symbols to communicate group identity. They seem starkly highlighted against the regimented appearance of the British soldiers and in this small icon, we can see displayed the difference between uniform and non-uniform.

Later photographs of the I.R.A. on patrol (figure 13) have again the same mix of military and civilian dress. They continued to wear civilian suits with white shirts and black ties. From the photograph, it would appear that the soft hat, like that worn by the Volunteers after the 1916 rising, was still in use and in this context seems to be the one unifying element of the group. In the bottom right of the photograph we see again the bandolier worn over civilian suit and coat. One member (second from the left) in the bottom left of the picture can be seen wearing a Homburg hat. This type of hat was a popular item of clothing worn both by members of the public **and** by members of the British ruling class. Such a culturally indeterminate item of dress could be exploited to blur the identity of the wearer and so enhance concealment through its confusion. This cross over of styles, between Irish revolutionary groups and a caste of the British class system raises questions about the solidity of the I.R.A.'s image and how they managed to identify each other in the context of the clothing of the day.

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Figure 13.

The I.R.A. on patrol.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war.)





Figure 13.

The I.R.A. on patrol.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War.)



worth looking at a photograph of the National leaders during the truce. These staged photographs allowed the I.R.A. an opportunity to plan and order their appearance (figure 14). From the photograph it appears that the trench coat became an important part of marking I.R.A. identity during the years of the truce. The members of this group wear trench coats of various shapes and hues and their identity as a group is quite evident. They continued to wear civilian clothing consisting of shirts, jackets and ties and there are a small number of members in the top left hand corner wearing hats. Again there are no symbols or insignia apparent to identify the group as having military significance.

The continual 'mixed and gathered' approach to uniform adopted by Irish Volunteer force before and after 1916 leaves unanswered a great many questions about their identity. Whether or not they could identify each other by means of symbols or clothing unknown to the British or whether the mix of civilian and military clothing aided or hindered their ability to remain a secret organisation. However these factors affected the I.R.A's identity they remained a mixed force in terms of clothing until their re-emergence in 1968.

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Figure 14.

The national leaders of the I.R.A.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war.)



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## **Chapter 2.**

The period of re-emergence: From 1968 to the present day.



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In October 1968, Northern Ireland was to witness a series of events that would change the course of its history for the next thirty years. Members of the Northern Irish civil rights association (NICRA) marching in protest against Catholic discrimination clashed with the R.U.C. causing two days of riots which ended with the general perception that there was 'something rotten' in the state of Northern Ireland. NICRA was perceived by many Protestants not merely as a movement to gain greater civil rights but also - and perhaps more significantly - as a nationalist organisation in pursuit of a united Ireland. When it was discovered that many of the main protagonists behind the NICRA movement had connections with members of the old I.R.A., inter-community relations began to turn sour (Coogan 1995).

On 28th. December 1969 a meeting of the I.R.A. council voted in favour of recognising the parliaments of both Britain and the twenty-six county state. In re-affirmation of its fundamental republican standing, there was a split in the council thus giving birth to a group dedicated to resurrect the armed struggle against Britain. This group was the Provisional I.R.A. (Coogan 1995).

After the decline of the I.R.A. in the late 1920's from active service, they were then prompted back into action by the recent civil rights and British constitutional movements in Northern Ireland. After nearly fifty years of silence what form could a revolutionary movement in Northern Ireland take? and what difference would be apparent between the

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tactics used in 1916 and those to be adopted for use in a society now governed largely by the mass media?

From the I.R.A's earliest appearance in 1968 a number of social conditions affected their appearance. In a society where every aspect of life is politically indicative of one of other of the communities (Jarman 1997) clothing becomes a complex and often ambiguous system of meaning (Eco in Harvey, 1995). Questions as to what constitutes stylized paramilitary clothing and how affordable wear become visual communications of political allegiance, defiance and censorship continually arise.

Some of the prime developments in the modernist culture in the past two centuries have resulted in the aesthetic of individual creativity and of fashion (Gane 1991). Fashion iconography in the second half of this century has continued to grow fuelled by social movements and change and the affinity of fashion with these social movements can aid insight into some of the identity and status claims made by such groups.

The ability of clothes to speak on subjects of ethnicity, status and class is fundamental to the interpretation of social and subcultural groups in Northern Ireland. The creation of subcultural style is a key issue in understanding the position of paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland. In the book "Subculture: the meaning of style" (1987), Hebdige makes the case that to adopt a subculture is to reject hegemony. The style as refusal to

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conform to the dominant ideas about clothing in society creates a situation whereby through the position and actions of a group such as the I.R.A., inanimate objects such as gloves and masks attain meaning through adoption. The 'codes' that define, order and classify groups within a society are also effected producing what Hebdige terms 'semantic disorder' in that there is a confusion of meaning and signification. Track suits, trainers, jeans, gloves and berets no longer retain the meaning they originally had : such as Track suit/athlete etc. but instead are now a part of a 'visual cacophony' in an attempt to objectify and communicate group experience much in the same way the state services wear uniforms such as the police and the fire service. In this way the use of commodities in subcultures separate them from other more dominant cultural forms [tracksuit/athlete = I.R.A.] and their appropriation and re-use of objects creates a new discourse within society.

The identification of a distinctive uniform can create the catalyst for a moral panic (Hebdige 1987, p.93) and the I.R.A's ability to present themselves to the world as a whole in a coherent way allows them a power not enjoyed by the resistance fighters of 1916. However, much of this organisation was to appear later as the I.R.A. began to emerge from nationalist Belfast as a competent social force. This re-emergence after nearly fifty years was to create certain ambiguities in terms of their identity. Guesses as to the nature of this new identity began to appear in the



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political cartoons of the time. Many of the cartoonists however 'picked it up where they had left off' (Darby 1983 p.85) referring to the old I.R.A. image of Volunteers storming the G.P.O. in Easter week in mixed clothing and bandoliers, an image which was embedded in the collective memory of most Irish people since the 1900's. This outdated mode of representation was eventually turned to advantage by Mahood (Punch London, cited in Darby 1983, fig.15) who highlighted the discrepancy between the I.R.A. of 1916 and what was perceived to be the same in 1970.

The new I.R.A. image was to be a far cry from the Volunteers of 1916, the trench coat and the Homburg hat were to be forgotten in favour of pin-striped suits and co-ordinating rifles. This confused image of paramilitaries past and present was to draw attention to what was considered clothing's cultural ideal in 1970. The adoption of elements from various post-war clothing styles was much the same as the Volunteers self-funded uniforms in 1916 and also raised some questions about clothing during 'political upheaval and social change' (Herr, 1994. p.237).

The policy of organising and training a secret revolutionary army laid out in the proclamation of the Irish Republic in 1916 was to remain intact as the I.R.A. began to emerge slowly from the woodwork of nationalist Belfast.

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Figure 15

(Source: Mahood in *Punch*, London, reprinted in *Dressed to Kill*.)



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(Source: Manned in Punch, London, reprinted in Dressed to

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concealment it is only when on the verge of success that the group appears in either full uniform or resorts to individual symbols in order to communicate identity. According to Joseph, there are a number of reasons for this situation. Irregular dress like that worn in 1916 is frequently related to the inability of newly raised military units to obtain regulation uniforms. The Volunteers could not afford uniforms so instead resorted to symbols like belt buckles, slouch hats, armbands and later the trench coat. The reappearance of the I.R.A. in 1970 followed the same pattern. During the civil rights riots of 1968 the new generation of nationalist insurgents became the equivalent of the peasant underground of 1916. Check shirts, jeans and sweatshirts constitute the affordable and mainstream wear of the 1970's as did the suits and trench coats in 1916 (figure 16).

It is worth highlighting the contrast in cultural ideals between past and present paramilitaries. The protesters of 1968 demonstrate the new social standards affecting the I.R.A. Youth and casual clothing was now the ideal which contrasted strongly with the image of men and women dressed in trench coats, shirts and ties that reflected the social class and good taste in the 1920's.

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Figure 16.

The 'new generation' of Nationalist Insurgents.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war.)





The 'new generation' of Nationalist Insurgents.  
(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War.)





the eye of the media and may be interpreted as a symbol not unlike the bandoliers in 1916. What the photograph highlights more importantly is the role the media were to play in the creation of the I.R.A's new identity. The wall mural of the Irish tricolour and "1916" in the background connotes, along with the young resistance fighters, a struggle for Irish freedom that has been renewed in the present 1970's Belfast.

In the essay "Terrorist Chic" (1994), Herr talks of the many modern-day considerations affecting paramilitary movements in contemporary Belfast. She argues that a mix of Europeanisation, class rivalry, capitalist-colonialism and hi-tech surveillance has resulted in a paramilitary style of clothing that is 'deeply inscribed with meaning' (p.244). The stylized clothing worn by both male and female members of the I.R.A. reflect many attitudes in terms of ideology, political defiance and censorship. Herr maintains that the ability of the mass media to render parts of nationalist Belfast 'hypervisible' results in a withdrawal behind a mask that has more in common with a selective public uniformity than any individual expression of intent or ideology, that is that the clothing is now affected by the ability of the viewer to see it, on television in the newspapers etc. and is no longer focused on creating and maintaining a coherent identity. This ability, through arrangement of media material and choice of subject is important in the

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observation and interpretation of documented I.R.A. images within the public domain.

Further developments in the I.R.A's clothing began to take place. In figure 17 we see an I.R.A. member wearing civilian clothing and a balaclava. The importance placed on concealing the identity of the wearer appears to be the first consideration in the creation of a paramilitary 'style'. The clothes accompanying, jeans, fur-lined denim jacket and sweatshirt tell us little about the wearer and it is the black balaclava that grounds his identity as a member of the subversive organisation. However, without being surrounded by a group who also wear balaclavas it is difficult to identify him as a member of any paramilitary organisation.

The change in clothing of active I.R.A. members since 1916 has been a stark one. Some of the current 'looks' in paramilitary clothing as presented on television and in the newspapers have tended to leave a 'retinal residue of undifferentiated occlusion' (Herr, 1994, p.248) on the eye of the public observer.

The press and the media coverage of subcultural movements within a society can become the subculture itself in that we, as the public, only have access to imagery and information on subcultural groups through the media's representation. The media, however, have a large part to play in the incorporation of a subculture back into the



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Figure 17.

Further developments in I.R.A. clothing.

(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at war.)





Figure IV.  
Further developments in I.R.A. clothing.  
(Source: An Illustrated History of the I.R.A. at War.)





society (Rolston & Miller 1996). By using the image of a subculture by labelling and identifying a group such as the I.R.A. as a dissident or terrorist organisation, they are no longer a variable force within the society, in that they can be named and presented to the public in the form of a constant image i.e. Men dressed in fatigue-style jackets and balaclavas carrying armalite rifles (figure 18).

This all-too familiar image of men and women in berets and balaclavas has resulted largely in public indifference. This constant paramilitary style has become the I.R.A., however from time to time, the provisional I.R.A. have organised public photoshoots in attempts to bring their image back to the forefront of public attention which also helps to identify and highlight some of the difference in paramilitary styles. One of these 'styles' comes in the form of a republican resistance calendar each year, depicting photographs of I.R.A. members dressed in blue and grey shell suit tops, blue jeans and the latest in Addidas trainers all accompanied by full-face black balaclavas and 'accessorising weapons' .

In "Fashion, Culture and Identity" Davis (1992) presents an analysis of how, through the modification of the codes of semiotic value no direct meaning can be extracted from the wearing of clothes i.e. by removing clothes like jeans and shell suits from the everyday language of clothing and presenting them in the context of the paramilitary style or uniform, their meanings change and are never constant.

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Figure 18.

Defining I.R.A. identity.

(Source: Dressed to Kill.)



PORTRAIT OF A TERRORIST



Figure 18.

Defining T.R.A. Identity.

(Source: Pressed to Kill.)



The clothing worn by the I.R.A. in this context is dependent on the wearers' identity, occasion, place and company. This ambiguity in terms of clothing makes it difficult to establish a recognised 'uniform' but by using signs and symbols that remain unchanged an identity, as that of the I.R.A. begins to emerge. The use of symbols such as balaclavas, gloves and berets firmly ground the group's identity in the minds of the observer.

Public displays of the kind found in the resistance calendar of 1999 would suggest a subscription to the latest high-street fashion - the street clothing of the 1990's all displayed and posed with a means towards foregrounding their identity.

In figure 19 we see a group of active I.R.A. members posed as though preparing for confrontation. From the extreme left the group wears blue shell suit jacket, blue jeans, black Addidas trainers with white stripes and the full-face black balaclava. They all carry weaponry in hands concealed in white surgical gloves. They all, with the exception of the member closest in the foreground, wear black Addidas trainers. He chooses to wear white trainers thus undermining the groups ability to create a coherent identity. Despite the discrepancy in the footwear, the wearing of the balaclavas and the gloves clearly establishes them as a group.

According to Herr (1994), displays such as this one educate viewers in nationalist territories about the



The clothing worn by the I.R.A. in this context is dependent on the wearers' identity, occasion, place and company. This ambiguity in terms of clothing makes it difficult to establish a recognised 'uniform' but by using signs and symbols that remain unchanged an identity, as that of the I.R.A. begins to emerge. The use of symbols such as balacavas, gloves and berets firmly ground the group's identity in the minds of the observer.

Public displays of the kind found in the resistance calendar of 1999 would suggest a subscription to the latest high-street fashion - the street clothing of the 1990's all displayed and posed with a means towards foregrounding their identity.

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Figure 19.

Oglaigh na hEireann.

(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle'- The Republican Resistance Calendar 1999.)

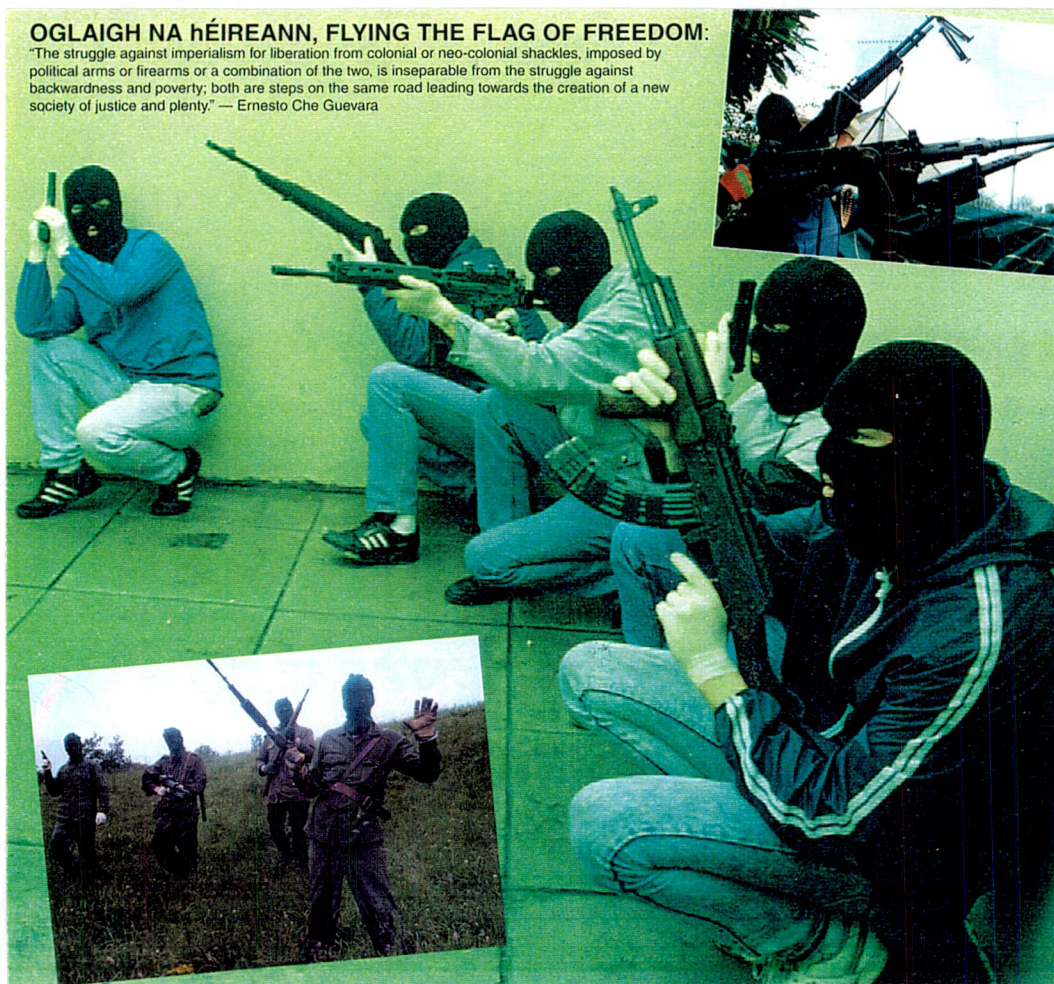


Figure 19.  
Oglaigh na hEireann.  
(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle' - The Republican  
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acceptance of secret organisations that create a 'cultural centeredness' in parts of Belfast that lack dominant ideologies.

In contrast to this, other examples of active I.R.A. clothing appear with men on what appears to be field exercises (figure 20). In this instance, the look is slightly different and more closely resembles a look based on official state military uniforms. The four men in the photograph wear a mix of green and brown, loose fitting army style jackets, dark green combat trousers, a full face green balaclava and two members are wearing white gloves. From the photograph both the uniform and 'accessories' appear to be more co-ordinated than the previous 'urban style'. The member in the foreground waves his hand in an acknowledgement of the photographer and there is a considerable irony in this open display of an organisation that most people would believe to be hidden and secretive.

This foreground member also wears an over-the-shoulder and around-the-waist belt that somewhat resembles the style of the bandoliers worn by the Volunteers in 1916. According to Cheryl Herr (1994, p. 251) this awareness of posed photoshoots would indicate the developing attention given by the I.R.A. to the successful marketing of their paramilitary style. The contrast between these urban and countryside styles suggests that there is an attention devoted to the development of an image that is consistent with occasion and location and also suggests that an organisation like the



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Figure 20.

Oglaigh na hEireann 2.

(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle'- The Republican  
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Resistance Calendar 1999.)  
(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle' - The Republican  
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Figure 20.





I.R.A. would emulate the organised uniform worn by the state's military forces.

Besides these two paramilitary styles an incident in Loughgall eleven years ago highlighted another of the I.R.A.'s looks. Eight I.R.A. members were killed while attacking the Loughgall R.U.C. Barracks. Subsequently, a local farmer testified that he had seen 'boiler-suits' being burned by members of the same group. This suggestion that boiler-suits are in reality the 'action' wear of the I.R.A. casts doubts on their efforts to solidify their public image as portrayed in the resistance calendar and prompts investigation into what maybe a public and private I.R.A. Such an investigation lies outside the scope of this thesis.

In his book "Uniform and Non-Uniform", Joseph (1992) discusses the reasons why subcultural groups such as the I.R.A. sometimes adopt the organised military uniform in place of mixed and gathered clothing. He maintains also that this discarding of civilian clothing in favour of a military style appearance is related to a problem of legitimacy. The dominant image of guerilla forces is that of a government in exile or a non-law abiding organisation and to legitimate their claims to power and organised opposition, they are quick to appropriate and use the uniforms and symbols of the modern state. One of the prime examples being the modern army.

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Aside from organised photoshoots, certain occasions in the I.R.A.'s history have presented themselves, allowing the organisation attention in the public eye and much sought after media coverage.

At the funeral of Bobby Sands on the 5th May 1981 six members of the I.R.A. carried the coffin of the dead hunger striker (figure 21). Because of the 'objective' eye of the media, opportunities such as this allow the I.R.A. to present themselves in a cohesive light, avoiding organised photoshoots and reaching a much larger audience than the yearly calendar. The six men wear what are obviously army issue jackets in green, olive and black camouflage. All wear dark green trousers, black boots balaclava and beret accompanied by a black belt worn above waist level outside the jacket, again, like the belts and buckles worn during 1916.

The significant difference between the uniform worn at this funeral and the 'urban' and 'countryside' styles examined earlier comes about for a number of reasons.

Nathan Joseph interprets the fully uniformed appearance at funerals as 'symbolic actions' (1992, p.159) in that they reinforce the solidarity of the mourning group in the face of loss. The use of the military uniform as a symbol of nationhood and unity draws the civilian spectator into the overall ceremony by public appearances.



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Figure 21.

The funeral of Bobby Sands.

(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle'- The Republican Resistance Calendar 1999.)



**THIRTY YEARS  
OF SELFLESS  
SACRIFICE:**

"There can never be peace in Ireland until the foreign, oppressive British rule is removed, leaving all the Irish people as a unit to control their own affairs and determine their own destinies as a sovereign people, free in mind and body, separate and distinct physically, culturally and economically." — IRA Volunteer Bobby Sands MP. Died 5 May after 66 days on hunger strike



Figure 21.

The funeral of Bobby Sands.

(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle' - The Republican

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The establishing of links between paramilitary groups and the society that surrounds them is an important part of legitimising their presence within that community. In Jarman (1997) he describes the way that parades, like those at funerals, bring to the forefront of public attention people and organisations that are marginalised in dominant political discourse. The parade aims to draw on common practice, such as a funeral to reaffirm the unity of a scattered community and map identity over a wide terrain. The use of paramilitary uniform including the balaclava and beret at these parades results in an absorption within the community of what Herr (1994) terms 'frightening signs'. The funeral legitimises the harsh paramilitary style and makes it more acceptable to the onlooker, thus domesticating and locating it within the realms of the day to day experience. From the photograph the I.R.A. members look little more than masked undertakers and their uniforms are fully organised and presented to create a clear and collective statement.

Another photograph of the same funeral ( Fig.22) depicts a second group of volunteers. Three men in fatigue-style jackets, arm and waist bands accompanied by berets and sun glasses are firing a volley of shots over the coffin of the late Bobby Sands. The wearing of the black armbands resembles those worn by the Volunteers in 1916. However, they are also a traditional form of mourning wear for men.

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Figure 22.

The funeral of Bobby Sands.

(Source: The Irish Times, May 8th. 1981).





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Again, the firing of shots over the coffin is a traditional military procedure at funerals and reaffirms their position as a group with a legitimate moral position. It also seems possible that at least one of the sunglassed figures in this photograph is a woman. The paramilitary look for women differs slightly from that seen for men and indeed has been dealt with extensively by Herr (1994). She has investigated the distinction between fashion's ambiguous status in Ireland and the clothing worn by female I.R.A. volunteers. She maintains that 'decentering' is the key element in creating the style in Irish fashion and the resistance style worn by active I.R.A. members. She argues that in order for designers like Paul Costelloe, John Rocha and Richard Lewis to be successful in the fashion industry it is necessary for them to relocate themselves to other countries like Britain or America and to effectively 'Eurostyle' themselves. Expanding on this issue she develops the following thesis:

'If they insist on being Irish designers limited distribution, uneven economic backing, low visibility, and rigid consumer expectations all conspire against them, while ersatz folk clothing of the catalogues succumbs ever more fully to a counterhistorical and improbable yuppiefication in the service of the export market.' (Herr, p.242)

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phenomenon and Herr positions the clothing worn by I.R.A. members and supporters in strong contradistinction to the Euro-world of designer fashion and Irish national costume.

The style worn by female I.R.A. volunteers has little to do with linen blouses and is based rather around a political decentering that leave parts of nationalist Belfast lacking in any ideologies about style in clothing or identity.

The republican resistance calendar for 1999 presents a diptych of I.R.A. women. In one instance, a full facial shot of an I.R.A. volunteer : and the other, a group of women preparing petrol bombs in a street in Belfast. We can see the black beret, what appears to be a dark navy military-style jacket and white shirt worn by the volunteer (figure 23). The lower face is covered by green mesh covering while in the mirrored sun glasses above it there is the reflection of the colours of the tri-colour. Her hair is loose around her forehead and firmly establishing her gender seems to be the main intention of the photograph. The impracticality of her loose hair and her sun-glasses would suggest participation in a parade rather than in field manoeuvres or combat.

In a community that is under constant surveillance and scrutiny from the world's media, the wearing of sun-glasses signify the return or the 'bouncing-back' of the media's gaze. That parts of nationalist Belfast can be rendered hypervisible using the most modern surveillance techniques



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Figure 23.

Female I.R.A. volunteer.

(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle'- The Republican Resistance Calendar 1999.)





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Female I.R.A. volunteer.

(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle' - The Republican

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undermines normal social concepts so that clothing becomes a complex and often ambiguous system of meaning.

According to Herr -

'The surveillance equivalent of the cinematic apparatus distribute the [outside] gaze into the entire fabric of the nationalist subculture.' (p.255) [writer's addition].

And this hyperviewing results in a withdrawal behind a mask that creates a visibility so high that it greatly alters the terms of the visual exchange. The result being that the terrorist can be seen but may also return the hostile outside gaze while still remaining invisible (Berger 1972). The group assembling the petrol bombs in the street appear in stark contrast to the lone female volunteer discussed above. The majority of the work is being undertaken by the women in the foreground while the men appear to be talking in the background. It appears almost like a domestic scene and displays the everyday attitude developed by the people of Northern Ireland to the troubles (figure 24). The women in this photograph wear civilian clothing: jumpers, skirts, waterproof coats and jackets, shoes, and even aprons as they prepare bombs to battle with the British. The image of domestic work raises issues about the I.R.A.'s accommodation of women and the role they play inside the movement. Does it offer equal status to both men and women?

Herr elaborates the issue in the following way:

'The I.R.A. remains a largely patriarchal organisation in which women still have to fight for equal status. The I.R.A. woman marks a site of innumerable contradictions.



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Figure 24.

An example of I.R.A. 'domesticity'.

(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle'- The Republican Resistance Calendar 1999.)





Figure 24.

An example of I.R.A. 'domesticity'.

(Source: 'Ireland's Freedom Struggle' - The Republican

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She is constantly divested of power in several fronts while she constantly accrues meaning in an effort to find expressive possibilities within a masculinist role, to inhabit conflicting subworlds of religion, family and politics' (p.264).

This summarization of womens' role within the I.R.A. is highlighted further by the double image presented in the resistance calendar. On the one hand, service and uniform: on the other, the tasks of domesticity.

This 'traditional' woman's role as maker and doer is highlighted still further by the making of the balaclava. In figure 25, we see evidence of 'homemade' balaclavas. They appear to have been constructed from doubled over sweatshirt material and have unfinished eyelets that have been cut by hand. They have, however been styled around the crown of the head and evidence of sewing is visible in the example to the right of the illustration.

Instances of commercially produced balaclavas appear also (figure 26), and it is worth noticing the detailed stitching around the eyes but it may also be a leatherette finish. Whether or not they are *all* manufactured commercially or at home is unknown but the image of women sewing balaclavas throws an interersting slant on the established relationship between sewing and idealised domesticity.

It is worth noting at this point the social conditions that have produced both the look and style of the I.R.A. in 1916 and again during their re-emergence in the 1970's. As



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Figure 25.

'Homemade' balaclava.

(Source: The Irish Times, August 22nd.1998.)





Figure 25.

'Homemade' palaeoclimate.

(Source: The Irish Times, August 22nd, 1998.)



noted before the uniforms of the Volunteers during 1916 dressed at best in uniforms that were modelled on official army uniforms such as those worn by the British army. Today's I.R.A., while still aspiring to wear the fully regimented state uniform on some occasions, have adopted a look whose origins can be traced to the street style of the late twentieth century, an example of which can be seen in (figure 27). This paramilitary street style garb has become politically charged as it is now the recognised image along with the beret and balaclava of active I.R.A. members, so much so that cartoonists, such as Martin Turner (figure 28), can leave us in no doubt as to a caricature's identity simply by including any of the above. It is interesting to note that Turner bases his caricatures on two distinct I.R.A. appearances - the black balaclava and beret, and the half-face covering adopted by the new generation of nationalist insurgents in 1968.

So it is that a solid I.R.A. identity had emerged through media representation, the clothing and self-published material such as the resistance calendar. The image of men in beret and black balaclava has become the I.R.A.

Aside from the armed struggle engaged in by the I.R.A. in the early 1970's, there is another side of Irish Nationalist culture in Northern Ireland that merits examination. These are the parading groups.



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Figure 26.

Commercial balaclava.

(Source: The Irish Times, February 19th. 1991.)





Figure 26.

Commercial balance.

(Source: The Irish Times, February 19th, 1991.)



Figure 27.

Elements of subcultural clothing.

(Source: Street Style.)





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Elements of subcultural clothing.  
(Source: Street Style.)



Figure 28.

I.R.A. caricature.

(Source: Pack up your Troubles.)

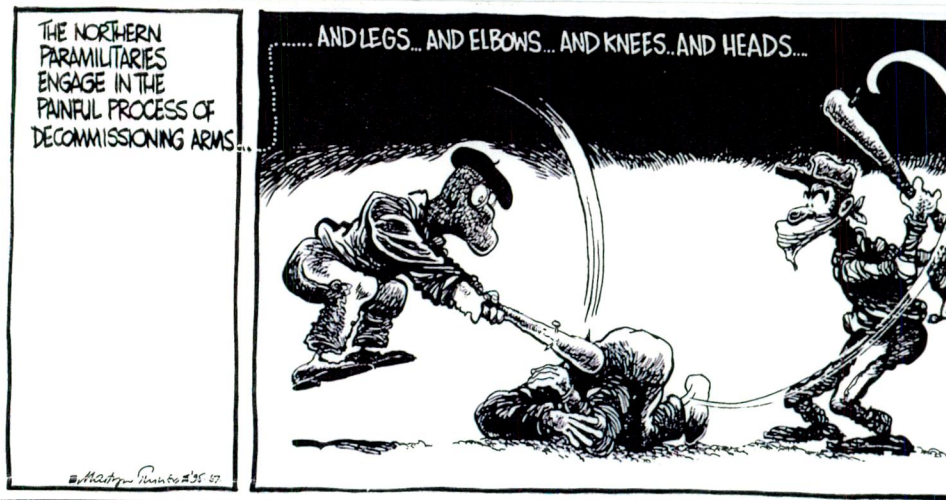




Figure 28.

T.R.A. Caricature.

(Source: Pack up Your Troubles.)



### **Chapter 3.**

The third face of nationalism: parades, symbols, suits.



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Groups such as the Hibernians and the Irish National Foresters have chosen to work within the existing political framework and do not involve themselves in paramilitary activity. Armed members of the I.R.A. have made appearances on occasion, but neither group offer any support to their armed struggle. Instead the groups ground their ideas in 'Nationalist practices and heroes of the past' (Jarman, 1997, p.163) thereby transforming selective details of the Nationalist past into unquestionable history through parade and public performance. He also analyses the differences between Nationalist and Loyalist marching display, arguing that the paramilitary iconography and uniforms used by the Loyalists in their parading displays are no longer included in the Nationalist parades but instead Nationalists have adopted something approaching the style of an American marching band; a celebration of history rather than a statement of political ideology. Republican parades display neither dress code or separation on grounds of gender or age. Participation is inclusive - men, women and children and this inclusiveness appears to be part of the larger re-integration of the signs of resistance and oppression into the broader community. By including all Nationalists the culture of resistance becomes less of a subculture and more oriented towards the community as a whole. Parades, in other words, seek to draw on common practice and reaffirm the unity of a scattered community over a wide terrain.



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 words, seek to draw on common practice and reaffirm the  
 unity of a scattered community over a wide terrain.

By contrast Loyalist/Unionist parades tend toward sectarianism on grounds both of age and gender. (Jarman, 1997, pp.193-4).

On Monday, October 19th. 1998 the Irish Times published a photograph of a flag bearer standing to attention during a Sinn Féin rally in Dublin (figure 29). He is wearing black mirrored sun-glasses and beret to which has been attached various symbols and badges associated with Nationalist history. In the sun-glasses we see reflected his outstretched arm clad in black with a white-gloved hand holding a tricolour. This clothing would suggest that the parade may be more paramilitary oriented in contrast to the 'family' events mentioned earlier.

This photograph provides a rich source in terms of semiotic interpretation. It seems to draw together the issues which have informed this thesis and as such is worthy of a detailed examination. The most prominent of the signs among all the symbols on the beret is pin of Bobby Sands. Sands, the hunger striker who died in the H-Blocks prison in 1981, has become an idealised hero in the Nationalist community. According to Jarman (p.154), his life and death represents the embodied virtues of the Nationalist community. Many of these symbols, as in the case of Sands, are forms of remembrance. However, some also represent the continued oppression as viewed by the Nationalist community. The pike, on the far left, was viewed by the British as a military instrument at the time of the plantation under



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Figure 29.

Flag bearer.

(Source: Irish Times, October 19th. 1998)

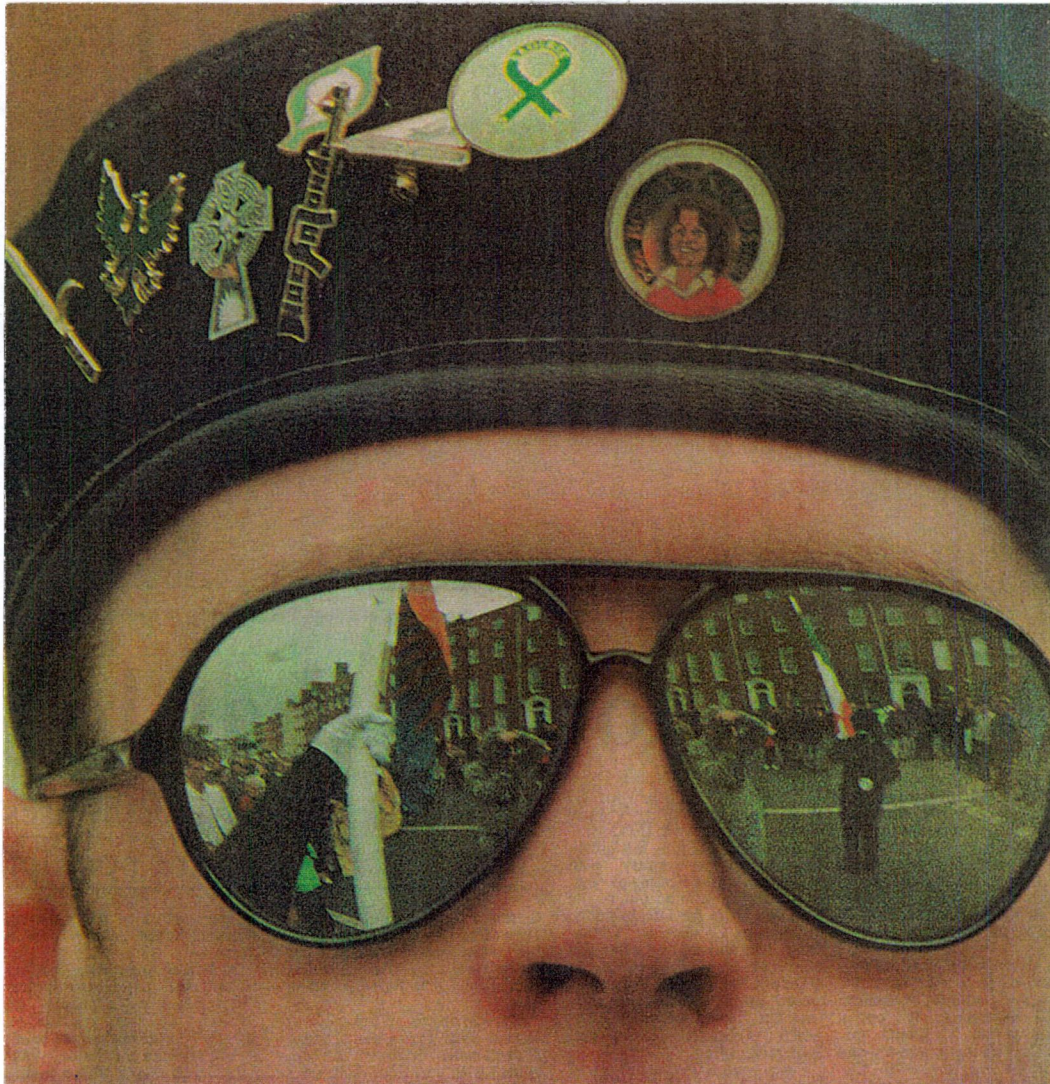
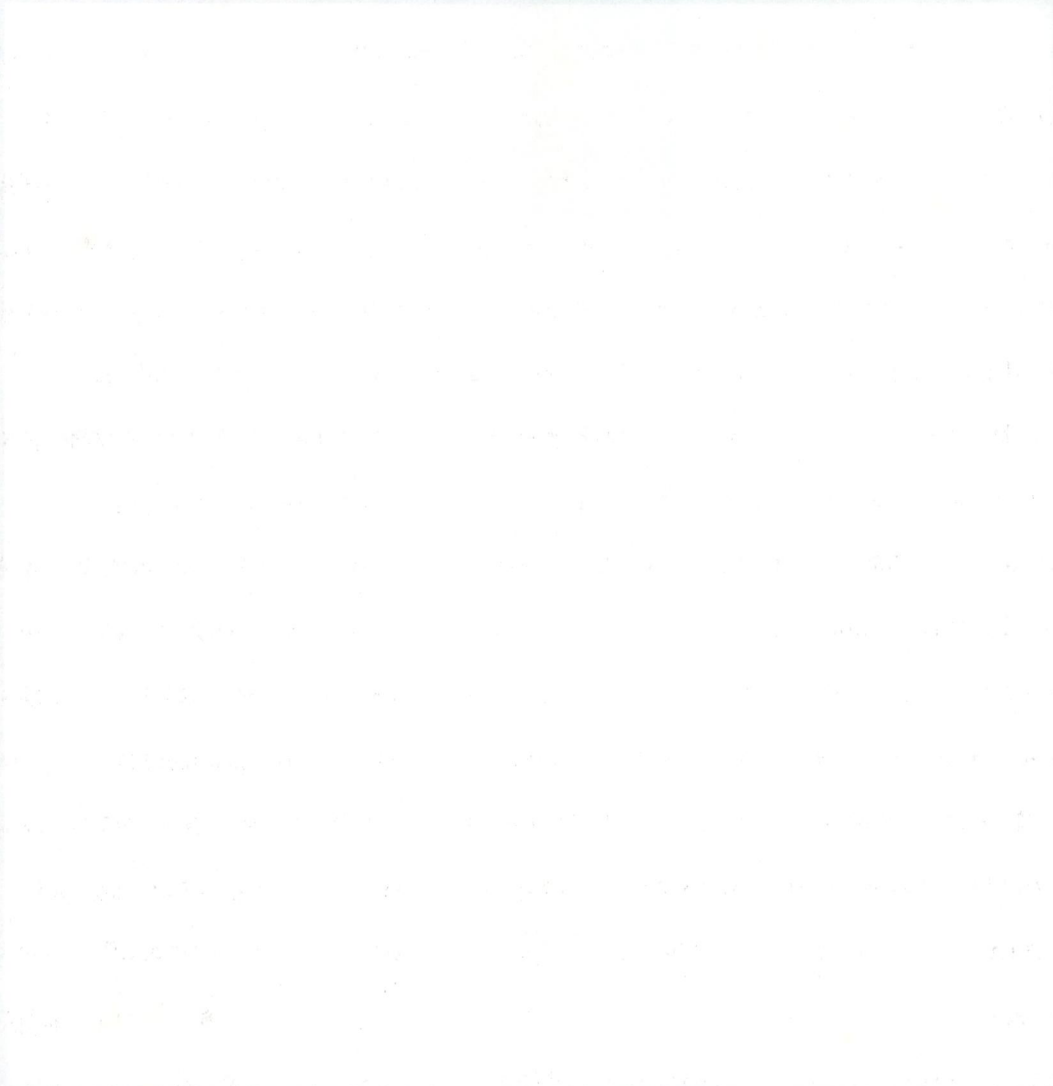




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Flag bearer.

(Source: Irish Times, October 19th, 1998)



King James the first in 1790. It is now used to commemorate Wolfe Tone's death in 1798 during the uprising of the United Irishmen against the proposed passing of the Act of Union and as such can be viewed as a symbol of the continued armed struggle against the hegemonic oppression of the British. To the right of the pike there is what appears to be a phoenix. Apart from the obvious mythological significance of the bird's resurrection from its own ashes, the symbol could also be associated with the Phoenix literary and debating society established by O'Donovan Rossa in the nineteenth century as a guise for Irish Republican Brotherhood activity. It may also represent the support that continues for the I.R.A. to this day, from the United States of America. The Celtic cross, symbolic of Irish history and Christian culture generally, here could be highlighting the desire for the dawning sun of freedom or re-birth: a plea for the re-birth of Irish Nationalism. The armalite in black and gold detail is a contemporary version of the pike and can be viewed as another symbol of the continued armed struggle undertaken by the I.R.A. Above the armalite is a spade - a green spade - bearing what appears to be a white lily. The lily, a commemorative symbol of the Easter Rising in 1916, had become a traditional symbol for Nationalist supporters. In 1970, after the split in the I.R.A. army council, the Marxist I.R.A. who favour participation in the political process became known as the 'stickies' because their Easter lilies, worn on their coat lapels, have a self-



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adhesive backing while those of the provisionals continue to be fixed with the traditional pin (Bew and Gillespie 1993 p.25). To the right of the lily there is a circular pin bearing a green ribbon and the word 'SAOIRSE'- the Irish for 'freedom', and the pin could be interpreted as a statement of the I.R.A.'s ability to exploit the many layered meanings of their symbols to represent their position both on the national question and on the position of political prisoners in particular.

This sartorial display of ideology and belief through the use of symbols and badges came into effect in 1971 when the wearing of military-style uniforms by subversive organisations was banned by the Stormont government. The wearing of the green ribbon continues to be a tradition within the Nationalist community and this can be seen quite clearly in the case of Gerry Adams.

Section 31 of the broadcasting act banned the interviewing of members of paramilitary organisations live on television and radio. With the repeal of the act in the mid 1990's, political and Nationalist views similar to those associated with the I.R.A. were now being expressed by Gerry Adams the leader of Sinn Féin. In order for Adams to enter the sphere of political discourse, it was essential for him to be styled in the conventional manner of mainstream politicians. He had, therefore, to adopt the dark suit.

However, the awareness of a vocabulary of clothing that is suitable for situation and occasion had resulted in a



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media perception that Adams and the I.R.A. have become 'fashion conscious', and indeed their wearing of 'fashionable clothing' has been noticed by media critics on more than one occasion. An article from the "Irish Times" of November 11th. 1998 reports on the styles worn at a republican Sinn Féin meeting in Drogheda where farmer Eamonn Larkin was asked did he get his Armani jeans from the provos? Another young Dublin activist was spotted wearing an 'an Italian designer shirt' (Breen, 1998), and indeed Adams himself has been questioned about his wearing of what is perceived to be an Armani suit. The Irish Times of December 19th. 1998 published an article by Renagh Holohan, headed 'Northern Style' which reported that Adams had been questioned on his *Tíocfaidh Armani* style. He responded by showing the reporter the label on the his suit and asking:

'Is Mr. Armani still alive? If he is he owes me money for all the publicity I've given him.'

This game of disclosure between the media and Adams can be seen as an acknowledgement of his recently acquired media appearance. This smartening-up of the Nationalist political appearance enables Adams to compete in the world of the statesman and it is interesting to note how he manages to find expressive possibilities in his dress while still conforming to the 'political uniform' so to speak. In figure 30, we see Adams in a suit of indeterminate design. He is wearing the green ribbon of Saoirse on his left lapel



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Figure 30.

The statesman Adams.

(Source: Irish Times, January 27th. 1999).

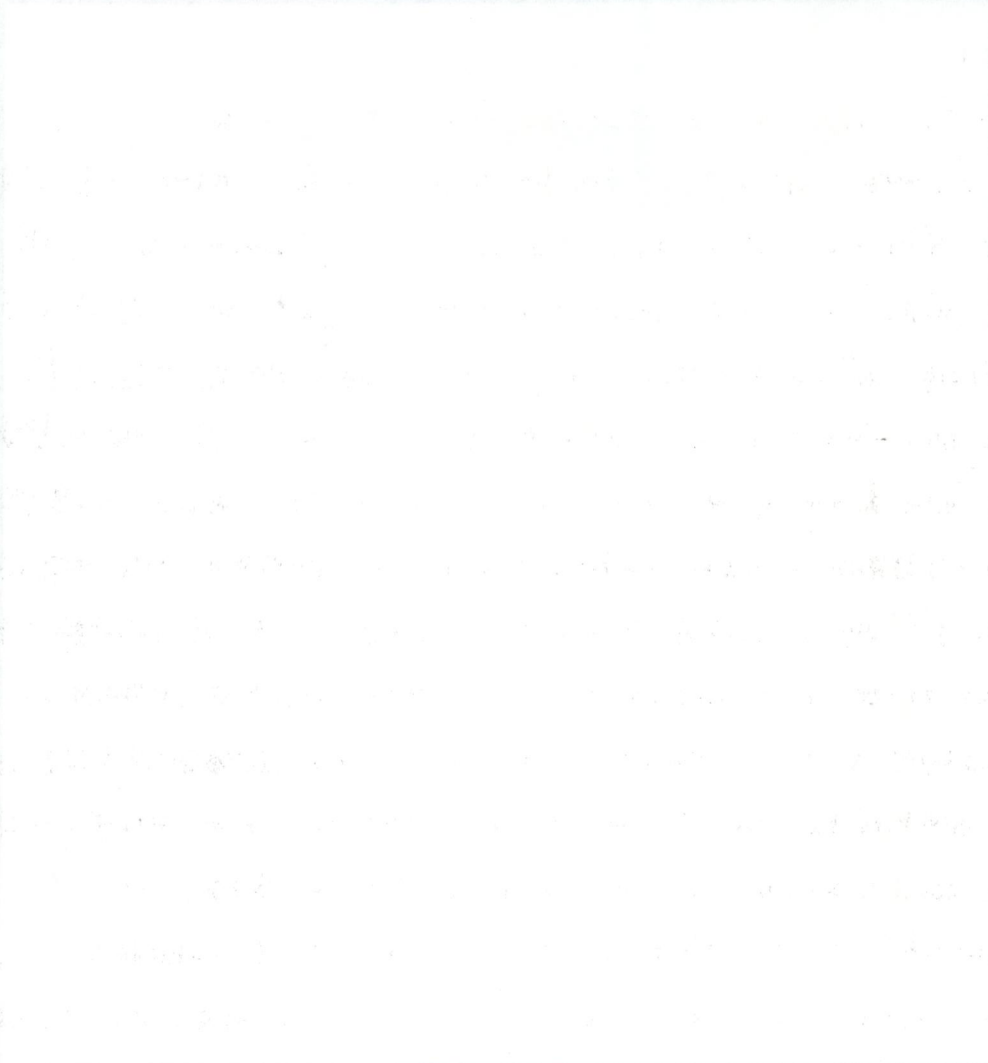




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representing the campaign for the release of political prisoners. The ribbon remains in place as a constant reminder of his agenda on the issue of I.R.A. prisoners and despite what he may say in political discourse or to media reporters the ribbon emits a consistent and coherent message.

This ability of clothes to provide a second voice to the wearer (Harvey, 1995) is highlighted further by former president Mary Robinson's wearing of a green ribbon at her inaugural speech in December 1990 (figure 31). This ribbon although fundamentally the same in appearance provides a reminder, unlike that worn by Gerry Adams, of the Irish army on peace-keeping missions in the Lebanon. Signs such as the green ribbon assume meaning from the culture that surrounds them (O'Toole, 1998) and the duality of the meanings that arise from the wearing of the ribbon further serves to highlight the problematic of non-verbal communication and the ambiguity that clothing and symbols carry with them. They are constantly subject to interpretation, reconstruction and evaluation according to situations and surroundings and can only provide us with cues and clues as to their meaning. In the absence of a surrounding material culture their meanings remain obscure (Barthes, 1993).



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Figure 31.

The wearing of the green.

(Source: Mary Robinson, a President in Progress.)





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**Conclusion.**



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This thesis has examined the multiple factors affecting the clothing worn by the I.R.A. since 1916. From their appearances during that Easter week the conditions affecting their dress and status claims have changed radically.

In chapter 1 the research indicates that the I.R.A.'s dress was affected mainly by financial constraints and their need to remain a secret organisation. The mixed and gathered approach adopted in the creation of the uniform has left many questions unanswered as to what exactly constituted nationalist dress in the years 1916 to 1922.

From the period of re-emergence in 1968, examined in chapter 2, questions as to what constituted politically meaningful dress in contemporary Belfast were addressed. The influence of post-war subcultural clothing and the gaze of the media has resulted in a style that has become deeply inscribed with meaning. The tension between concealment and display provided the framework within which the clothing of this era was analysed.

In the final chapter, some of the less familiar signs and symbols of Nationalism were examined. The ironic relationship between the media and post-terrorist politicians, and the conclusion from this analysis best lies in acknowledging that without the surrounding culture in Ireland the signs of Nationalism would remain obscure.



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