A "WOMAN'S DOOM": CLASS AND GENDERED VIOLENCE DURING THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

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In May 1920, two women both working as barrack servants in the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) Barracks in Newcastle West, Co. Limerick, received anonymous letters in the post. In these they were threatened with a "woman's doom" if they did not withdraw their services and stop working in the barracks (CO 904/148).[1] It is unclear what, exactly, was meant by a "woman's doom", as various types of intimidation and violence, which will be outlined in this essay, were used against female barrack servants. However, the threat was frightening enough that it had the intended outcome of forcing the women out of their jobs. In this essay, I look at the impact the boycott had on RIC wives and families, and more especially on an overlooked, and often marginalized group of people, poor, working-class women who worked as barrack servants. In April 1919 Dáil Éireann secretary Diarmuid O'Hegarty wrote about the impact that a policy of ostracization or boycott would have on the RIC. "The police", he wrote, were to receive "no social recognition from the people" (Hughes 25). Members of the RIC were not to be spoken to, no business was to be conducted with them, they were not to be regarded as friends or included in social or sporting occasions, courtship and marriage with local women was discouraged and those working for them were to be dissuaded from doing so. Furthermore, they were to be treated "as persons, who having been adjudged guilty of treason to their country, are regarded unworthy to enjoy any of the privileges or comforts which arise from cordial relations with the public" (Hughes 25).

Boycott was not a new tactic in Ireland through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century and the use of peaceful mass mobilisation, collective actions against state institutions, boycotts and ostracization were common. From Daniel O'Connell's monster meetings during Catholic Emancipation campaigns of the early nineteenth century, through to the Land League movement of the 1880s, civil disobedience had proved a powerful weapon of the powerless and would continue to be part of republican, trade union, and feminist activism in the first decades of the twentieth century. As W.J. Lowe has indicated, there was widespread support for the boycott during the War of Independence, as it had already been directed against the RIC during the nineteenth-century Land War (79-117). Women were also much involved in the RIC boycott, the women of Cumann na mBan were told to have no social contact with RIC members and to make sure that young women of their locality shunned policemen and avoided

1 The National Archives, London, Dublin Castle Records, CO series, "Work and Administration of the Royal Irish Constabulary (from 1905)". I wish to thank Seán Gannon for drawing my attention to the threats made to barrack servants in Limerick.

"places where police are known to visit, particularly public houses which they frequent" (Lowe 85). Support for boycotts by political and militant women were nothing new. During the Land War rural peasant women were very significant in the Land League campaigns in "their role as protesters against evictions and as participants in the boycott campaign" (TeBrake 73). In many of these boycott campaigns women were at the "centre of food riots, tax riots, religious protests, and political protests; they were essential to collective action" as they would be again in nationalist and republican boycotts (TeBrake 73). For instance, in 1900 the separatist, feminist organization, *Inghinidhe na hÉireann, which had* emerged from a group that organized a boycott of the events marking Queen Victoria's 1900 Irish visit, later called for the boycott of British goods in shops, and began a campaign against recruitment of Irish men into the British army, and discouraged young women from associating with British soldiers (see Markievicz).

After the 1916 Rising, mass civil disobedience and propaganda again became important tools of resistance, and the republican movement, in large part driven by the work of militant women, built a mass movement of resistance to British rule. In particular, the anti-conscription campaigns of 1918 demonstrated the power of mass mobilization, when on 24 April a one-day strike brought most of the country, outside of the North-East, to a standstill. This mass strike effectively killed conscription. A further countrywide campaign by women's organizations, including Cumann na mBan, continued to resist recruitment campaigns with a "Lá na mBan" (Women's Day) protest day on 8 June 1918. As well as impeding recruitment, these campaigns accelerated, as Charles Townsend writes, "the process of levering the police apart from the community" (30). The success of Lá na mBan demonstrated the ability of political women to "organise nationwide events of civil disobedience" (McAuliffe, "Resisting the Menace" 37). The hostile attitudes of political and militant women towards police were pivotal to successful boycotts, and Cumann na mBan organizers worked hard to ensure that the boycott was observed. However, women were caught up in the boycott campaigns "both as instruments of boycott and as its victims" (Townsend 80). Women both as participants and victims are central to the histories of the RIC boycott during the War of Independence and it is women as victims of boycott, particularly poor working-class women and their experiences and traumas, whom I focus on in this essay.

The military side of the War of Independence, that of ambushes, assassinations, and attacks on RIC and military targets, was important, but so too was the collaboration and compliance with republican activities, active or forced, of the civilian population. The development of the counter state, particularly the Dáil courts and republican / Sinn Féin police, depended on the compliance of civilians and their refusal to engage with the policing, military, and judicial arms of the British state. Collaboration organized and unorganized has been recognized as central to the successful functioning of the counter state and its military wing, the IRA, and any defiance or resistance from the civilian population, especially those it considered "spies and informers", who were

suspect in their loyalties to the republican cause, had to be dealt with. Large-scale surveillance of the population was undertaken by the IRA, Cumann na mBan and other republican sympathizers, and violence was often the consequence of that surveillance. Although over 270 civilians were executed as spies or informers between January 1919 and December 1921, non-lethal violence and coercion of suspected civilians was more widespread. As Hughes writes, it is difficult to precisely map these “everyday acts of harm and threats” as they did not “operate in isolation to the less common ambushes and executions but combined to dictate the atmosphere of violence and fear in an individual community” (149). A boycott of the RIC had been ongoing from late 1919, but it was not until 4 June 1920 that General Head Quarters (GHQ) of the IRA issued a communique entitled “Boycott of the RIC” (P7/A/45).[2] It stated that the IRA were to have “no intercourse with the R.I.C. and shall stimulate and support in every way the boycott of this force ordered by the Dáil”, and further outlined that “persons who associate with the R.I.C. shall be subjected to the same boycott” (P7/A/45). Lists of persons associating with the RIC were to be kept by each IRA company, battalion and brigade commander and acted upon. Hughes remarks that as there was no direct suggestion from GHQ on how the boycott might work, it was down to “individual companies of Volunteers to obey the boycott and ensure others did likewise, by whatever means they deemed necessary” (25). This meant that coercion and intimidation was conducted at local community level and varied around the country. However, the records do show that policemen, their families, and associates were on the receiving end of differing levels of violence and intimidation in almost all areas.

From early 1920 the success of the RIC boycott was impacting on the functions of policing throughout the country and reports indicate that there was “a dramatic surge of dissent and intimidation aimed at police in the first six months” of that year (Hughes 26). As well as experiencing the impact of the boycott personally, the wives and children of RIC members were intimidated and ostracized, which impacted adversely on RIC families. In Galway, in August 1920, the RIC County Inspector wrote that RIC wives “are miserable, and their children suffer in schools, and nobody cares” (CO 904/112). As well as their wives, the mothers, and widows of serving or retired members of the force were ostracized, the accommodation of families of serving members was looted and burned, while landlords were encouraged not to rent to police families, and in many places, shops would not deal with the local barracks or with RIC families. For instance, in June 1920, in Knocknagoshel, Co. Kerry, the wives of RIC Constables Murphy and Sullivan, who had shared lodgings since Mrs Murphy had been forced out of her home, were told, by local republicans, to leave their house. Both women complained to the local priest, but he said he “could do nothing, that they were strangers and must go” (Earls Fitzgerald 117). On

2 Richard Mulcahy Papers, “General Orders (New Series)”, No. 6, 4 June 1920, UCD Archives (UCDA: P7/A/45).

the night of 20 June 1920 over thirty men called to Mrs Sullivan's house and ordered her to leave the parish, "by order of the I.R.A." (CO 904/ 148). A week later, the "armed and disguised" men called again, put Mrs Sullivan and her four children out on the road and told her that "she would not be allowed to remain in the parish another night" (CO 904/148). Mrs Sullivan and her children had no option but to leave and move to the safety of the nearby town, Castleisland. On 23 June 1920, in Edenderry, Co. Offaly, "three armed and masked men" called to the home of Mrs Bessie Churchill, wife a Constable serving in Streamstown, Co. Westmeath and ordered her to leave "within the month". Mrs Churchill was a local schoolteacher, and the raid was also an attempt "to drive this woman out of her employment" (CO/762/ 107/9). Other times, efforts were made to burn police families out: for instance, in Bantry, Co. Cork on 25 June 1920, the home of Constable John Cleary was attacked, and an attempt was made to set it on fire. His wife and a visiting lady friend "succeeded in extinguishing the flames" (CO/762/107/9). As the report further reveals, "the object [was] to terrorise and drive the families of police out of the country, and thus attempt to break down the morale of the men" (CO/762/107/9).

As argued by Townsend, boycotting, threatening, and ostracizing the RIC and their families worked "in part because of its enabling logic – that the armed RIC was an army of occupation, rather than a legitimate police force" (31). These threats against police and their families and intimidation of those presumed to be sympathetic to the RIC "constituted, after ambushes, the largest number of incidents that the police encountered, especially in 1920" (Lowe 99). The impact on the RIC was felt in many ways; smaller, rural, more isolated barracks were abandoned and often, subsequently, looted, burnt, and destroyed, leaving large parts of the country without a police presence. As the police entrenched themselves behind the walls of more fortified barracks in large towns, those related to or associated with them, who continued to live unprotected among hostile communities, were targeted more and more often. The threat faced by their families impacted on the morale of the men, as while the men might be safe behind barrack walls, the safety of the families, many living among these hostile communities engaging in the boycott, was a constant worry. For example, on 23 June 1920 Sergeant Hurst, "who had been 36 years in the service", resigned, as the Ballybrack barracks in Co. Dublin, where he had been stationed and in which his wife and children still lived, was burnt down ("RIC Sergeant Resigns" 1). Elsewhere, at 2 a.m. in the morning of 4 July 1920, the vacated RIC barracks in Blessington, Co. Wicklow, in which an RIC Sergeant's wife was still living, was attacked. She was "ordered to leave" and the building was set on fire (CO 904/14).

Many RIC men resigned their positions citing the threats to their families. For instance, the parents of Sergeant Patrick Fallon, who were living in Co. Sligo, were visited at home by "a number of unknown men" in July 1920, and "were ordered to take their son out of the R.I. Constabulary [*sic*]" (CO 904/168). No notice was taken of this visit, so on 28 September 1920, a number of masked and disguised men called again at the home and "dragged the mother and father out of the bed, put them on their knees

and made them take an oath that they would have their son out of the Force in a month” (CO 904/168). This second visit had the desired effect: Sergeant Fallon resigned, “not for his own safety but for the safety of his parents” (CO 904/168). In September 1920, in Co. Meath, Constable John J. Harte resigned from the force as his parents’ home had been raided and his father “threatened with death” if his son did not resign (CO 904/ 168). The impact of intimidation of families on resignations throughout the country was effective although uneven. As Hughes argues, there was a successful campaign “against police families in Cork [and ...] in the ‘quieter’ counties Roscommon and Leitrim [... and] Cavan”, whereas only two men in Ulster resigned citing family intimidation, “pointing to a comparatively safe environment for police and their families there” (29-30).

While raids, home invasion, and threatening family members were effective means, among the most common ways of intimidating those not related to but rather associated with the force were public notices and threatening letters. For example, in Kilglass and Enniscrone, Co. Sligo notices appeared on the local chapel gates on 19 and 20 June 1920, which stated that “any person that does work or associates with the R.I.C. will be sorry” (CO 904/148). In analyses of reports of intimidation from contemporary newspaper accounts, Dublin Castle/RIC records, sources such as the intelligence files in the Collins Papers (Military Archives of Ireland), which are predominantly communications (despatches) between IRA Brigade and Battalion Officers and GHQ including many despatches to Michael Collins, as well as the military pension application files (MSPC) and the Bureau of Military History (BMH), it becomes clear that the use of the threatening letter and the public notice was widespread. On the night of 24 April 1920, a public notice was posted on a pillar box at Garragh Bridge, Glenbeigh, Co. Kerry. People were warned that for their own safety and “in the interests of their country” they should avoid “all communications of a friendly nature with members of the R.I.C […] BEWARE [*their emphasis*] […] those who ignore this will be meted out the punishment of traitors – signed, Soldiers of the Irish Republic” (CO 904/148). This and other notices put out around the country meant that the police, and anyone who associated or worked for them, were considered valid targets. Businesses who supplied the barracks with provisions, pubs in which they socialized, retired members who were friendly with ex-comrades, locals who were deemed too friendly and therefore suspected as spies, and young women who might be seen to be too friendly were among the groups targeted by republicans.

A sense of the mass surveillance undertaken can be seen in Intelligence files in the Collins Papers.[3] While men and women were under surveillance, the offences most women under surveillance were accused of was forming personal relationships with Crown Forces, “keeping company” with RIC members, Black and Tans, or with the

3 The Collins Papers, Military Archives are searchable online at <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/the-collins-papers/>.

military, and being suspect during those encounters of passing information to the enemy. As Louise Ryan argued, "women were defined through their relationship with the enemy: as spies or as girlfriend", and these relationships marked young women as shameful, as deviant, as immoral, as lacking that "most necessary of makers of Irish femininity, respectability" (84). This possessive and coercive attitude towards women is reflected in several statements by IRA men to the Bureau of Military History (BMH). As James Maloney of the Bruff, Co. Limerick IRA reflected in his BMH witness statement,

> Some young girls created a problem. The British uniform was an attraction for them, as indeed would any uniform. They could be a real danger to the movement and gave a bad example by consorting with the enemy. They were warned repeatedly, and stronger measures had to be resorted to. No Volunteer liked the job, but on occasions these girls' hair had to be cut. (Maloney, BMH WS 1525)

How republicans dealt with these young women varied. Many women and girls received verbal warnings and threats; more received threatening letters, were physically assaulted or in many cases, were attacked and bobbed, i.e., their hair was forcibly cropped off, usually in a late-night violent attack by armed and masked men. With the guilty woman/girl shamed, her sins obvious from her shorn head – as Leo Buckley, I/O of the Cork No. 1 Brigade later said in his BMH Witness Statement, "the appearance of a girl with 'bobbed' hair clearly denoted her way of life" (Buckley, BMH WS 1714) – with her ostracization assured, republican men could uphold and defend the community they claimed to protect and reinforce their moral authority and leadership amongst civilians.

This surveillance and punishment of women associated with them served to further isolate the RIC, making their lives and the job of policing physically, mentally, and emotionally much more onerous. There was, however, one group of women, not related as family or associated as friends or love interests, who were especially targeted to further the aims of intimidation and ostracization as part of the RIC boycott. These were female barracks servants. In late 1920 the British Labour Commission, led by Arthur Henderson, MP, came to investigate the ongoing violence in Ireland. The subsequent report published in 1921 included reports on violence committed by republicans against differing groups of women. In a chapter on the "Victimisation of Policemen's Wives and Barrack Servants", the threats to RIC wives and families, the young women who "kept company" with policemen, and the female barrack servants were noted (*Report of the Labour Commission* 80). In Appendix III, "Material Supplied to or Obtained by the Commission", the victimization of female barrack servants was discussed, and examples provided:

> May 22, 1920
>
> Mrs --- who was barrack servant at the R.I.C. barracks, ---, had to leave her employment through being terrorised by receiving a threatening letter to leave her employment at once.

> May 24, 1920
>
> Mrs --- who is employed as barrack servant, was warned by two masked and armed men who entered her house that it was against the rules of the I.R.A. to work for the R.I.C., and that if she continued her hair would be cut off.
>
> [...]
>
> August 10, 1920
>
> Injured person was made swear an oath that she would cease working for police.
>
> [...]
>
> September 5, 1920
>
> Seven or eight masked men entered the house of injured person, forcibly removed her outside, and cut her hair off. She was a barrack servant and had been previously warned to leave police employment.
>
> September 11, 1920 – 10.30 p.m.
>
> ---- was taken from her lodgings by armed and masked men, gagged, and taken to a field where her hair was cut off, and she was kicked in the body. She was employed as a barrack servant, where her predecessor had left owing to the boycott of the police. (*Report of the Labour Commission* 80-81)

The *Irish Times* gives some more detail on the victim of the assault of 11 September 1920. The unnamed barrack servant was an older woman, “60 years of age” (“Catalogue of Crime” 3), which fits the profile of the typical female barrack servant. She was attacked as she had ignored a warning to leave her job and because she had replaced the previous barrack servant who had quit because of intimidation.

While these are just a few examples of the victimization suffered by female barracks servants, most of the usual violent methods of intimidation used against other groups of women were also used in the case of these women: threatening letters, intimidation, physical assault, and forcible hair cropping. Targeted in these cases, however, were a particularly marginalized group of women. Many were widows living on small pensions or poor working-class married women, and this was sometimes the only income in the family: a low-paid, but steady and secure income. According to Brian Griffin, young, unmarried women were not welcome as workers or residents in RIC barracks, even if related to police, and children, especially “daughters, had to move out of barracks when they reached the age of fourteen-and-a-half years” (173). This was a way of protecting the reputations of the young girls, particularly against what an inspector-general described as “the ruin in which some of them have been involved, by constantly living in a confined barracks, with none but single men as their companions” (qtd. in Griffin 173). There was need for women in the barracks as in addition to domestic duties, a woman could provide an important service as a “lady searcher”. When a woman prisoner needed to be searched, it had to be done by “the wife of a constable, or should she decline, the barrack servant in her presence, but not in the presence of the men” (*The Royal Irish Constabulary Manual*). In addition, to avoid any hint of scandal with female servants working in close quarters in the all-male environment of the barracks, RIC regulations “stipulated that [they] had either to

be old women or married" (Griffin 173). Many of these women were unwilling to leave such secure employment, suffering the loss of income and poverty which that might entail, so coercion and intimidation was used to encourage those resisting the boycott to leave their job. The problem of what to do with barrack servants gave concern to the leadership in local brigades. In late June 1920, a letter in the Collins Papers from the Dingle, Co. Kerry company of the IRA to GHQ in Dublin sought clarification on several issues relating to the RIC boycott, including asking if it should be extended to the "one or two women who cook and wash for them – are they to be made to give up their jobs" (A/0494). The answer was a terse "yes".

As it was domestic labour, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and uniforms, and general care work, the work of a barrack servant could not be considered essential in a military or policing sense. RIC wives were "expected to be invisible to the barracks" (Malcolm 182) and RIC personnel were expected to be models of respectable behaviour in communities in which they lived and served. The wife and family of the Constable or Sergeant also had to be models of proper behaviour, therefore any association with unmarried RIC men was closely monitored. Wives were not expected to cater for, or work in association with, the men in the barracks, so it is in this domestic space where the barrack servant was a necessity. She often lived nearby and was an important figure especially for younger, unmarried Constables who lived in the barracks. As outlined by Elizabeth Malcolm, she began her day when "she lit the fires in the morning, made the tea, filled the lamps, scrubbed the tables […] before an inspection she had to clean the barracks thoroughly" (181). As characterized, in the *RIC Magazine* in February 1912, by RIC Sergeant Thomas Dolan, the barrack servant he knew was "a tall, raw boned woman of considerable strength of character". It was she, Dolan wrote, who could guide a raw recruit in his dealings with his superiors or alternatively "could work a baneful influence on his career by going upstairs to the sergeant's wife" (qtd. in Malcolm 181). While Dolan's article exhibits considerable hostility towards barrack servants, seeing her as "incompetent or a tyrant, and frequently a combination of both" and "an atrocious cook", there is no doubt that the work of the female barrack servant was central to the smooth functioning of an RIC barracks (Malcolm 181-83). The men spent the larger part of their day out of the barracks, so it was the barrack servant who saw to the provision of food, heat, clean clothes, and the cleaning of their sleeping quarters; if she was not there, they had to undertake this work themselves. Therefore, in terms of an RIC boycott aimed at disrupting the smooth functioning of the local barracks, the female barrack servant became an important, and, most critically, living as she did among the local community, an accessible target.

While some women may have left their employment with the RIC as soon at the boycott began, many did not and had to be encouraged to do so – in many parts of the country, republicans would not be found wanting in the many and varied methods of encouragement, intimidation, and outright violence used to force female barrack servants from their jobs. Bridget O'Toole was a barrack servant at the Rearcross, Co.

Tipperary RIC barracks in 1920. She was married to Edward O’Toole, an agricultural labourer, and was about forty years old (1911 Census).[4] Dependent on the low wages of an agricultural labourer, the O’Toole family were poor, so Bridget’s wages would have been important. In April 1920, a letter addressed to her husband, and signed, by “the Firing Party”, referenced Bridget (CO 904/148). It warned that “unless you withdraw the services of your wife from the local peelers within three days after receiving this notice you shall undergo the extreme penalty at the hands of the Irish Republican Army i.e. DEATH” (CO 904/148). It also included a terrifying reference to a recently killed Constable: “Remember Finn’s eyes were missing, so mind yours.” (CO 904/148) Constable William Finn was one of two policemen ambushed and killed while cycling from Rearcross to the Petty Sessions in the nearby town of Newport on 9 April 1920. Both policemen suffered traumatic injuries, and graphic evidence from the inquiry indicates that Constable Finn’s head was badly disfigured by gunshot. Stationed at Rearcross barracks, he would have been known to Mrs O’Toole, and no doubt she would have known the nature and extent of his injuries. That the IRA were threatening her husband with similar harm had the desired impact and she left her job.

This threatening letter, while more detailed than most, contains similar warnings which many female barrack servants received throughout the country in 1920 and into 1921. They were threatened with ostracization, exile, assault, and death. On the same night as Edward O’Toole and his wife were threatened, another barrack servant, Mrs Crowley, who worked at Kilcommon RIC barracks, also in Co. Tipperary, was “warned to cease working for the police” (CO 904/148). On 1 May 1920, in Broadford, Co. Clare, shots were fired into the house of Michael O’Keefe “whose wife is a barrack servant to the RIC” (“Life in Sinn Fein Ireland” 5). On 23 May 1920, the home of Winnie Molloy, a barrack servant in the Tobercurry District, in Co. Mayo, was raided by a number of masked men. They beat her, fired shots outside the house and made her swear she “would not work for the police again” (CO 904/14). In August 1920, Jane Doyle, a barrack servant to Baltinglass RIC in Co. Wicklow, received a letter. In it she was threatened with death if she did not leave the town; “the motive is to deprive the police of a servant” (CO 904/148). In September 1920, Mrs Maria Valentine, who was working as a barrack servant at Gorey, Co. Wexford, was threatened: “We request you to leave the RIC Barrack at once or you will be doomed by order of the IRA Soldiers.” (qtd. in Hennigan 291) She had been in the job only two weeks.

Not all women who were threatened by republicans could or would leave their job. On 24 May 1920, two masked and armed men entered the house of Bridget Rourke, a barrack servant in Adare, Co. Limerick. She was ordered to leave her job, which she refused to do, “informing the raiders that she was the sole means of earning a livelihood and had six children to support” (CO 904/148). Mrs Rourke was not the only one who refused. In July 1920, Mary Bonner, barrack servant in Dungloe, Co.

4 According to the census, the O’Tooles lived in Shanballyedmond (Abington, Co. Tipperary).

Donegal, received a threatening letter, but refused to leave her employment (CO 904/148). In June 1920 in Templemore, Co. Tipperary, barrack servant Mary Mathews and her family were threatened but she refused to leave her job (CO 904/148). In Middleton in Co. Cork, Mary Grogan was warned that her "house would be burned to the ground" if she did not cease working for the police, but she refused (CO 904/148). In cases where women were reluctant to leave their jobs, there was often an escalation in violence following on the threatening letters. One of the ways in which republicans punished young women who were keeping company with police or the military were assaults marked by forcible hair cropping. The RIC and Black and Tans also used this gendered violence as a punishment for women associated with the republican cause, including members of Cumann na mBan. While the use of this tactic was widespread, those who were forcibly hair cropped by republicans for company keeping with the RIC, or those hair cropped by the Crown Forces for suspected republican associations or activities, generally were younger, unmarried women. In these cases, hair cropping, as Gemma Clarke argues, targeted hair, a part of women's body long associated with "eroticism and sexuality", and shamed and defeminized the woman (Clarke 86). Hair cropping, shearing, or bobbing (all these terms were used contemporaneously) was a deliberate violation of a victim's femininity, usually within or adjacent to what was considered the safe space of the home (McAuliffe, "The Homefront as Battlefront" 164-82). Whilst the cutting itself was painful, the aftermath could be worse as the shaved woman became a symbol of betrayal of her community, her family and her nation, and a warning to others, since by the "visible marking out of the target […] shearing is a tactic of exclusion and punishment" (Clarke 87).

Hair cropping becomes a weapon with which not only to control the behaviours of women, but also to mark some behaviours out, publicly, as shameful. For republicans, the continued existence of women working in RIC barracks, defying the boycott, was shameful and so those women, if they could not be threatened out of their job, had to be beaten and shamed out of their job. In late 1919, the home of Mrs Mary Scanlon, who worked in Kildysart, Co. Clare RIC barracks and lived in the town, was "entered forcibly by a party of disguised men, who caught her, cut her hair, tarred and otherwise maltreated her" ("Women Tarred" 4). This attack not only impacted on Mrs Scanlon, but also had negative consequences for Margaret Kelly, a maternity nurse in Kildysart, who had attended Mrs Scanlon after she had been seriously injured in the brutal assault. As a result of attending the injured barrack servant, Nurse Kelly was also "rigorously boycotted", and "every paying patient who employed her received threatening letters, and those patients who had insisted on having her had their houses fired into" ("Boycotted Nurse" 4). This is evidence that once a barrack servant was marked out as potentially treacherous by republicans, even dealing with them could bring serious repercussions.

In other events in September 1920, Ellen Gillen, a barrack servant in Ballyshannon RIC barracks in Co. Donegal, was attacked (CO 904/149). She had been living in a

boarding house near the barracks and was therefore an accessible target. The house was raided late at night by armed and masked men, who took her out of the house to the big meadow nearby and made her “swear she would not go back to the police, then they cut off her hair with a [*sic*] scissors” (“Compensation Claims” 6). One of them said “she was a traitor to her country and her religion and [then] she was kicked” by the men (“Compensation Claims” 6). Gillen returned to her room battered and bruised, her hair roughly cropped and with a bleeding lip. She then had to leave her lodging as it was no longer safe for her or, indeed, for her landlord, as he and his home would have also been a target for violence for renting to someone working for the RIC. She lived in the barracks for nine weeks, after which she left as the work and the threat of further violence was too much for her. At the Quarter Sessions in January 1921, she was granted £40 for nervousness and the fact that she now had difficulty finding employment. As an ex-barrack servant, few would have been inclined to offer her work. An RIC Sergeant who gave witness on the attack on Gillen said that he believed that it was engineered locally as “the boycott of the police was being rigorously enforced at the time” (“Compensation Claims” 6). Other barrack servants suffered similar violence. Kate Kelly was attacked by six or seven masked men in her home. They cut her hair “close to her scalp” and she was “confined to bed suffering from shock” (“Women’s Hair Cut Off” 3; “Servant’s Hair Cut” 3). The RIC records for August to December 1920 evidence threats to a number of barrack servants. These included Mary Brogan, Co. Donegal, who was threatened with having her hair cropped if she didn’t leave her job, as was Esther Tims in Co. Longford (CO 904/149). In Co. Mayo, Bridget O’Malley was similarly threatened if she did not stop working for the police, as was an unnamed barrack servant in Killenaule, Co. Tipperary, while Mary Coffey, barrack servant at Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath, was also threatened with violence (CO 904/149).

These are just a few of the very many attacks on barrack servants, most of which did have the desired effect, with the women leaving their place of employment, often placing themselves and their families in deeper poverty and want. While the intimidation of women out of jobs in RIC barracks is not usually considered in the histories of boycott against the police, it is important to note this very specific and gendered targeting of women workers. The working of an RIC barracks was dependent on supplies from local businesses, and on the domestic work of female barrack servants. Without the barrack servant, the domestic work had to be undertaken by the men themselves, taking them from the work of policing, and without the barrack servant, a barracks that was already under pressure was a more unpleasant place in which to live and work. For the barrack servants themselves, giving up their job could be a real hardship as it often was their only income if they were widows or single women with children. For instance, Joanna Hanafin of Castlegregory, Co. Kerry, gave up her job as a barrack servant because of the boycott, and by 1922 was looking for help from Dáil Éireann because she was “penniless, unable to find work, and living in a cabin that was falling down around her” (Hughes 34). For many barrack servants there

was often no other work to be had or as the evidence has shown, no employers who would take them on. As her pension application demonstrates, Amelia Wilmot, a barrack servant in Listowel, Co. Kerry, despite working with the IRA and supplying them with intelligence, experienced poverty and never held steady employment again after she was dismissed from her post in September 1921 (MAI, MSP34REF32473). Female barrack servants, living in their local communities, endured threats, physical violence, and gendered assaults as part of the process of undermining the work of the RIC. These working-class women were shamed and coerced out of their jobs, yet many would never be employed again as the legacy of their association with the RIC made them unemployable. For most, poverty and ostracization continued even after they left their jobs. The attacks on this specific group of women are part of the histories of deliberate, targeted, gendered assaults which were a central component of violence during the Irish War of Independence, and fit within the broader narratives of female victimization, coercion, and shaming during this revolutionary period. The legacy impacts are part of the trauma, silence, shame, and poverty endured by many working-class women on into the Irish Free State.

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