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The devil's own patriot games: the Troubles and the action movie

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This chapter analyses the representation of the Troubles in the mainstream Hollywood action thriller of the 1990s. It focuses on two films, *Patriot Games* (Noyce, 1992) and *The Devil's Own* (Pakula, 1997), which elicited very different audience and media responses. *Patriot Games* initiated the highly successful series of films featuring CIA agent Jack Ryan, initially played by Harrison Ford, later by Ben Affleck. *The Devil's Own* recouped only $42.9 million of its $95 million budget at the US box office and was attacked by the British tabloid media as an apologia for the IRA. Between them the two films sketch the parameters within which the Troubles function in the Hollywood action thriller. *Patriot Games* established many of these parameters for the '90s. *The Devil's Own* exceeded them too early, having gone into production in the aftermath of the first IRA ceasefire in 1994, but released after the breakdown of that ceasefire and some months before its renewal in July 1997.

The purpose of this chapter is to locate the films within three interlocking contexts. The first is that of the development of the Hollywood action movie in the '90s. I will briefly sketch out the major critical debates in this area, focusing in particular on the analysis of male relationships of antagonism and friendship within the films and the reasons for the centrality of these relationships. I will draw on the paradigms established in the work of Cynthia Fuchs and Yvonne Tasker at the time, particularly on their analysis of the mediation of racial and social conflict in action films. The centrality of the family and kinship structures in action films dealing with Irish situations and characters will be analysed in the context of the genre's development and its treatment of masculine roles during the later '90s.

The second context of this discussion is provided by the 'Troubles' themselves and the political developments in the '90s. These problematised the 'myth of atavism' traced, for example, by Martin McLoone (65–9) through Hollywood representations of Ireland during this period. Here it is important to consider changing US policy and attitudes not only to Ireland itself, but also to the broader international scene. The third context is the study of ethnicity and neighbourhood in contemporary Hollywood, drawing on Diane Negra's insights into the role of ethnicity in stardom, but

also applying models developed in recent work by Paula Massood and Vivian Sobchack, which use Bakhtin's theory of the narrative chronotope to analyse the construction of social, cultural, and geographical places in contemporary Hollywood film. One purpose of this discussion is to analyse the representation of Northern Ireland in the Hollywood action thriller in light of this recent work on the construction of a sense of place in film, and to integrate this analysis with the understanding of stardom, characterization, and the relationships between characters foregrounded in critical accounts of the action film. Massood and Sobchack are concerned with the narrative construction of very specific American places and genres. The contemporary action thriller raises the possibility that Hollywood's mapping of the relationship between its self and others' troubles is indicative of a global complex of chronotopes that constitutes a cultural map of a world view. While this map is projected onto US-Irish relations in the films under discussion here, it is motivated by a much broader set of international relations. In this final regard, the fundamental argument of this essay is that much more is at stake for Hollywood in 'Representing the Troubles' than the representation of Ireland itself. It proposes that Ireland serves a specific function in the re-imagining of the boundaries between heroes and villains in '90s' US popular culture and asks why Ireland is (still) able to perform this mythologizing task.

The action movie

Systematic analysis of the action movie over the last two decades is heavily indebted to the analysis of masculinity and the male body on screen that Steve Neale originated in his 1983 essay, 'Masculinity as Spectacle'. Neale's work took Laura Mulvey's analysis of the woman as object of the gaze and of the masculine structure of film spectatorship ('Visual Pleasure', 'Afterthoughts') as his starting point. His groundbreaking essay then developed the premise that the male body as object of the gaze stages a crisis within a structure of spectatorship predicated on the gendering of the gaze as masculine, the object of the gaze as feminine. Heavily Lacanian in its psychoanalytic underpinnings, Neale's argument set the discussion of spectacle firmly within the realm of the Imaginary, crucially marking narcissistic identification as a key component in the relationship between the male spectator and the action hero. The hero represents the Ego Ideal: in other words, in the relationship between the ego and its images, the male spectator finds in the male star the image he wishes to find in the mirror.

There is, however, a less obvious, but equally strong, counter current. For the ego will never reach its ideal and the male-to-male gaze is as voyeuristic in Neale's formu-

lation as the male to female in Mulvey's. Both the classical Hollywood genres and the new action movies mediate the erotic gaze at the male object through spectacles of suffering, especially in scenes of combat. This applies to both male and female spectators. The fight scene in the much-analysed *Lethal Weapon* (Donner, 1987) is a typical case in point. Mel Gibson's character, Riggs, appears to stop in the middle of a knockdown fight to remove his shirt, thus presenting a more effective display of his musculature – and some relief from the tedium of the protracted fight scene, presumably, for Gibson's many female fans. As Neale acknowledged, if the male body as spectacle provokes a crisis of cinematic representation, it is a safely contained crisis. Suffering, torture and violence are visited upon these highly-paid and much worked-out male bodies to screen their status as objects of another's gaze. Hence a sado-masochistic dynamic is set up between hero and audience, and also within the relationships between men on screen. (Here Neale is close to the formulation of the interdependence of the homosocial and homosexual also outlined in the '80s by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.)

When a 1993 collection reproduced Neale's article as its springboard for a broader analysis of masculinity in cinema, the psychoanalytical critique of masculinity in cinema was modified by historical and social analysis. The interesting question, after all, was why the action movie was such a dominant trend in the cinema of the '80s that Yvonne Tasker could describe it as cinema of 'musculinity' (132). The post-Vietnam crisis of masculinity and of US self-confidence, combined with the emergence of the new right were important factors (Tasker, 91–108), but internal racial conflict was equally important. As Cynthia Fuchs so persuasively argued, action movies in the '80s consistently invoked a paradigm of male camaraderie, modelled on military camaraderie, which erased both the threat of the homoerotic and of racial conflict in the image of 'buddies' (194–212). 'The Buddy Politic' traces the displacement of sometimes nearly blatant homoeroticism in narrative emphasis on interracial partnership. Buddy action thrillers also displaced persistent paranoia about black male sexuality and miscegenation through an image of racial harmony without interracial sex. The imperative 'Look, black and white together', forestalled the question, 'Why are those men holding hands?' It is in this internal US context that the function of Irish characters and situations in the action thriller needs to be understood.

Racial tension was not the only imperative for change. Changing gender roles also generated significant mutations in the action genre in the '90s. Not the least of these was the advent of the female action hero, notably in the *Alien* and *Terminator* series of films. Action and masculinity were no longer synonymous. According to Yvonne Tasker, 'the emergence of action heroines into the mainstream has necessarily redefined the articulation of gender identity in the action picture' (33). One significant

development was the increased tendency of the '90s action genre to figure the now apparently permanent crises of masculinity *and* society in narrative terms as a crisis of fatherhood. The link between heroic status and regaining the role of good father emerged strongly in the *Die Hard* series. Parallel to the built bodies and seriously deranged masculinities of the '80s genre, this series evolved another stereotype of masculinity: the wisecracking, flawed, ironic persona established by Bruce Willis. This latter stereotype is of course more in keeping in many respects with the traditionally understated hero of Hollywood thrillers, whose cunning, skill with weapons, and intelligence will always defeat the brute strength of an opponent. The smirk with which Willis played this role has spun off a continuing cycle of comedy thrillers, combining humour and special effects. The Hollywood action thrillers dealing with Northern Ireland do not belong to this strain, however, though it is obviously much beloved and aspired to by Irish directors and Irish film. (*Divorcing Jack* [Caffrey, 1998] is an interesting variant on almost every convention of the genre in the context of pre-ceasefire Belfast.)[1]

Harrison Ford, who stars in both *Patriot Games* and *The Devil's Own,* made his reputation and originally established his star persona by playing the hero ironically in the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* series. It is the aura of his other, later roles as the epitome of ordinary, male American decency that he brings to his two films dealing with the Troubles. This, and the downplaying of comic elements, is fundamentally connected to the centrality of family in these narratives and the seriousness with which the role of husband and father is treated. Ford's characters in these two films are the opposite of the always almost about to be divorced characters played by Willis. Strong family men with roles in law enforcement and government, the characters of Jack Ryan in *Patriot Games* and Tom O'Meara in *The Devil's Own* are poster boys for benevolent patriarchy. Since postmodern nostalgia became a major component in the Indiana Jones films, the action thriller has made 'how to be a man' an ironic question. This question can usually only be given emotional resonance by extending it to 'how to be a (good) father?' The predication of the national on the familial in these terms is central to both *Patriot Games* and *The Devil's Own.*

Family, nation, action

The video release and promotional poster for *Patriot Games* carries its caption – 'Not for honour. Not for Country. For his wife and child' – above a still of Harrison Ford

1 The script was adapted by Colin Bateman from his novel of the same name.

pointing his gun directly at the onlooker, with a dark image of an eye peering out from a balaclava in the background, an image of rifle gun sights superimposed on both. The violence of Ryan is legitimated by his need to protect his family. The violence of Sean Bean's character, Miller, is also linked to familial ties, however. The contrast between the good nuclear American family and the dysfunctional Irish one is linked to the film's construction of their very different homes. An establishing opening shot identifies Ryan's home as a large and idyllic seaside family residence, respectable and prosperous. The voiceover features Ryan's telephone message, instructing the housekeeper on the care of the family's goldfish. This call and the shots of his empty home establish Jack Ryan's character: domesticated, responsible, a little humorous, and cutely forgetful. He is very concerned to protect his daughter from any unpleasantness that may occur as a result of an oversight on his part. In this case, the unpleasantness is death, which may already have overtaken the goldfish. Ironically of course, the threat of just this unpleasantness will overtake his family as a result of his intervention in a terrorist attack in London.

The film's London is a tourist cliché. The Ryans are shown ensconced in a luxurious hotel playing Monopoly with their young daughter. When she goes to bed, Jack's wife has champagne and candles delivered to the room as a prelude to the film's only love scene. Having established the hero as ideal husband and ideal father, the film immediately cuts from the Ryans' bedroom to Ryan in his role as senior CIA man addressing the British military on their mutual role in the new world order. The specific context is the aftermath of the Cold War:

> We have all watched with a sense of awe the protean events which have taken place in Moscow and the Republics and the enormous changes resulting from these events. In this volatile climate then I conclude we can only speculate about the future of Soviet fleet development and deployment.

Ryan's speech does several things. It presents our hero as a spokesperson for the United States and, indeed, as its embodiment. It locates the film in relation to the international political scene in a way which echoes the publicity's elision of Ireland into terrorism. It also reminds us why Jack Ryan is engaging with the Troubles in the first place: the horrible dilemmas presented to thriller writers and to Hollywood studios by the redundancy of the good old Cold War plots. The Russians were not coming, not ever again, and *Patriot Games* is part of a transition towards different kinds of plots, in which the new bad guys are terrorists who, however marginalized and misled, combine technological resources and military cunning. This new threat is just as much a menace to the United States as the old enemy.

The sequence following Ryan's speech intercuts scenes of his wife and daughter doing tourist London with a dissident republican cell planning an attack on yet another family unit, this time a neatly nuclear constituent grouping of the royal family. The sequence establishes a strong contrast between right and wrong family values. The dominant family relationship between the IRA men in *Patriot Games* is brotherhood. Excessive desire for vengeance on Miller's part scarcely needs to be attributed to guilt for involving his 'little brother' in the fatal attack. Their relationship is implicitly coded as diseased, introduced as it is by the handing on of the gun from older to younger brother. The opposite of the Ryans' fertile relationship, this family is constituted by a deathly male-to-male bond.

In the '90s the terrorist attacks carried out on US soil, such as the Unabomber attacks and the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995, were predominantly by internal dissident groupings and individuals. Hollywood movies occasionally mirrored this, as in *Arlington Road* (Pellingham, 1999) for example, but this did not become a major trend. The equation of the foreign and the terrible continued to dominate the popular imagination. The Irish terrorists who feature in *Patriot Games* and *The Devil's Own,* however, do register the cultural impact of these home-grown terrorists. Part of the function of their white foreignness is both to acknowledge and exploit the anxiety that the terrorist is not immediately identifiable by his skin colour or strangeness. The Irish as terrorists keep the new threat at a safe distance and appropriately foreign: they might look like regular guys, but they are from a very different place. The ideas of place as a determinant of character and of origin as destiny run through both films, though the themes are very differently inflected. (While Northern Ireland is scarcely differentiated from any other terrorist origin in *Patriot Games*, the narrative implies that an excess of memory and attachment to the past is a crucial component in Miller's madness.)

The promotional poster and the video blurb for *Patriot Games* never mention the Troubles or Ireland, eliding them in references to 'lethal terrorist action' and 'a radical terrorist group'. Here it is Ireland's metonymic relation to terrorism that gives it its place in the narrative. That relation requires some examination. The Irish terrorist is both the same and different, white and foreign. He lends himself to the paranoid thriller because he can hide so easily, looking just like us, having no particular quarrel with the United States as such. In *Patriot Games*, the fact that this terrorist turns to an American target is motivated by revenge for his brother's shooting, with his obsessive pursuit of Ryan and his family in the second half of the film closer to the conventions of psychotic killer and stalker narratives. *Patriot Games*' fusion of the political and serial killer variants of the thriller genre makes a political point: terror-

ism is merely a particularly crazy variant of criminality. Stemming from excessive devotion to the ties of masculine kinship, its causes are located in the familial and are symptomatic of individual dysfunction. A causal framework in which terrorism can be investigated as a symptom of broader dysfunctions of social, political, regional, or global relations is unimaginable within the conventions of characterization and narrative deployed in *Patriot Games.*

Normal people in an abnormal situation?

Released five years later, *The Devil's Own* configures the relationship of family, nationality, and fatality differently. Its opening sequence features the brutal disruption of both family life and a traditional chronotope of 'Ireland'. Before the action starts, so to speak, in a pre-credit sequence we see a small boy helping his fisherman father on their boat, returning home to a scenic rural home presented as nurturing and warm. A fire blazes in the grate as the mother dishes up dinner and the family talk about their day seated around a circular table. There is a sudden jarring cut to a loyalist gunman, who literally breaks the family circle, shooting the father. The scene ends with an extreme close-up of the little boy's eyes, which fades to a grainy close up of the eyes of his adult self. The rest of the credits roll over this picture, which a voiceover identifies as Frankie the Angel, proceeding to list the number of British soldiers, RUC officers, and loyalist paramilitaries whom he has killed. The cut from Frankie's eyes shows a military briefing room which features both Frankie's picture and the sinister owner of the voice identifying him as a target for a military capture operation. The immediate cut from this room to a group of boys playing football in the streets of Belfast indicates a game is afoot and also reinforces the motif of children caught up in violence. Significantly, it is only at this point, when we cut to the streets of Belfast in 1992, that a caption is deemed necessary, identifying the place and the time. The run-down and militarized streets of Belfast are in strong contrast to the rural idyll in which the boy Frankie was introduced. Indeed they represent a chronotope of Irish place neither as firmly established nor as recognisable as the rural one, which, with its landscape dominated by mountains and isolated homes, needed no captions. 'Belfast, 1992' is the opposite of the scenic Irish landscape which has featured so persistently in films set in Ireland since the silent era. Interestingly, Frankie's escape from the gun battle in a ruined house (where the army ambushers are themselves ambushed by the IRA) involves his disappearance into foliage at the end of the overgrown garden. Nature at this point seems to be his preserve.

In telling the story of how Frankie became a gunman and of what motivates his mission in New York, *The Devil's Own* attempts to restore history to the myth of terrorism. The terrorist is a protagonist in his own story, not just a projection of another's fears. 'We're normal people in an abnormal situation, fighting a disgusting ugly war which you can't understand because you haven't lived it', Frankie later tells O'Meara. The film, despite the assumptions of condemnatory tabloids on its release, resolutely endorses O'Meara's denunciation of Frankie's actions, telling him he is only ensuring that other eight year olds will see their fathers die. The film also affords Frankie ample dialogue space to blame the British government for its failures in Northern Ireland, however. At least some of the tabloid fervour was a reaction to the casting: having Brad Pitt in the role of the IRA man indicates from the start that this is a very different characterization than the one afforded to Miller in *Patriot Games*. There the little-known Sean Bean cannot possibly counter the moral authority of the A-list Ford. In *The Devil's Own*, two Hollywood leading men are pitted against each other, representing different generations and types of hero, but both with the looks, profiles, and salaries of American heroes. It was not surprising that casting Pitt as Frankie would evoke resentment of the film's representation of the IRA in the British media. The breakdown of the ceasefire also provoked the actor to distance himself from the film by describing it as 'irresponsible' in a *Newsweek* interview, which generated another controversy in the US media (Giles, 50).

Yet *The Devil's Own* shares *Patriot Games*' grounding of character development and motivation in the familial and the personal. Numerous shots of children playing in the build-up to the first gun battle and one of a mother trying to shield her small children from gunfire in a recess establish that children are not safe in Belfast. When Frankie, now calling himself Rory, arrives at Tom O'Meara's house in New York, it is as if he has returned to the idyllic familial space of his childhood home. A scene where he shares a meal with the O'Meara family reinforces this, echoing the earlier scene of his own family around the table. A son who has lost his father, Frankie/Rory meets in Tom O'Meara a father who has no sons, though he does have three daughters. Ethnic identity here is almost indistinguishable from the familial. It is also linked to a re-assertion of masculinity: Tom initially tells the young Irishman that it's good to have someone else in the house who pees standing up. When Tom's wife sends him out for milk, he diverts to a neighbourhood bar with Frankie/Rory. Here they exchange insults with a group of local Italian-Americans and beat them at pool, with rousing Irish traditional music on the soundtrack. (When the Italians challenge them to the pool game, Tom tells the barman to throw the milk in the cooler.) This triumphant, macho ethnicity is utterly discredited in the film in narrative terms, but its easy conviviality is never

matched by the complex, negotiated set of relationships between colleagues that characterize Tom's role as a policeman. Rory tells Tom of the murder of his own father, a story which the hard-bitten cop finds both distressing and moving, and one which invokes in him a fatherly protectiveness towards the younger man that ultimately survives even Rory's endangerment of O'Meara's actual family.

Rory's integration into that family seems complete on the day when he participates in celebrating their daughter's confirmation. Accompanying them to church, the camera focuses on Rory's troubled face as the priest repeats the tenets of the Catholic faith. The family party after the confirmation, complete with fiddlers, reprises all of the clichés of Irish ethnic identity and simultaneously marks the high point of Rory's integration into the O'Meara household. It is preceded, however, by scenes of his continued activities acquiring arms for the IRA, and succeeded by one of his romantic meeting with a young Irishwoman who is similarly involved. It is she who asks him if he ever feels guilty about what they are doing and elicits the response, 'Everyone has ghosts, no one's innocent in this situation'. This metaphor of haunting recurs in the film. Frankie is haunted by the death of his father. He himself is a spectre of a history elsewhere which haunts not just Irish-Americans, but all forms of ethnicity and even the apparatus of law and order itself. Not only is Tom O'Meara a policeman, but the prominent Irish-American who has knowingly persuaded him to take in an IRA gun-runner is a local judge.

Partners, fathers and sons

The Devil's Own's exploration of Irish-American identity is grounded, through a series of scenes portraying Tom's working days on the streets of New York, in a web of interracial and inter-ethnic relationships characterized by misunderstanding and potential violence. Initially O'Meara's police role in this context is co-extensive with his paternal one at home. We see him intervene in a commonsensical and compassionate way when a rookie cop mistakenly chases a young African-American. O'Meara's relationship with his Hispanic partner, Eddie Diaz (played by Rubén Blades), is also initially a classic buddy partnership, until the latter shoots a suspect. The morally upright O'Meara reports his friend: 'We're in the police business, Eddie, not the revenge business'. This rupture in what had been a co-equal partnership makes O'Meara even more open to and dependent on the paternal relationship he develops with Frankie/Rory. Yet when a group of gunmen raid O'Meara's house and hold his wife hostage while they search for Frankie/Rory's IRA arms money, it is to his former partner that O'Meara turns for help. The multicultural camaraderie of the streets

which binds these two proves more reliable than either the ethnic and familial ties that link Tom to Frankie/Rory, *or* the codified world of 'the force' and the law. Tom needs his old buddy when his family is threatened. When Frankie/Rory kills Eddie while escaping custody, O'Meara's temporary prioritizing of ethnic affiliation modelled on familial (father-son) relations over equal partnership based on common experience proves to be fatal for his partner. It also isolates Tom and pushes him into an oppositional relation with the system that had previously defined his identity. Sloan, the British agent working with the FBI to apprehend Frankie/Rory, asks O'Meara 'What exactly is your relationship with this terrorist?', commenting, 'You *are* Irish.' O'Meara responds, 'So is Cardinal O'Connor', and refuses to co-operate with the investigation. This British-American co-operative venture is condemned by Ryan, just as he had condemned his own partner, because it operates outside the law: 'they're not going to bring him in, they're going to kill him'. The refusal of revenge and the upholding of justice define O'Meara as the moral centre of the film. This dedication initially costs him his partner, then fails to save his adoptive son. 'I've come to bring you in son ... the killing's got to stop', he tells Frankie/Rory, who replies, 'Then you're going to have to kill to stop it. Get's a bit complicated, doesn't it?' This final confrontation both invokes and negates the father-son dynamic between the two. It also epitomises the trajectory of homoeroticism in the action thriller. The men achieve physical intimacy through violence: their final embrace occurs when they have shot each other. Frankie/Rory's dying explanation of the failure of good intentions throughout the film is that this is 'not an American story, it's an Irish one'. This is hard to uphold for the film as a whole. Perhaps, however, *The Devil's Own*'s failure as a commercial thriller may derive from its reflection of the complexity of relationships between US security and its others in the film's central 'buddies'.

Ireland, the United States and the world

These films possess a confidence that history is something horrible that happens elsewhere, which is almost eerie in the aftermath of September 11th. The action thriller at the end of the twentieth century echoed the narrative paradigms identified by Stephen Arata in relation to popular adventure fiction at the end of the nineteenth century. Ford in *Patriot Games* is another 'occidental tourist' and, even if the British Isles are not so far east as the exotic destinations of Kipling and H. Rider Haggard, the same pattern of exposure and contamination occurs and the horrible other follows him home. US security, with all the gamut of meaning the phrase implies, is

haunted by the shadows of political conflicts that threaten to catch it in nets of political and social consequence beyond its control. These horrible others, like Stoker's Dracula or the conspirators in Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four*, are dangerous precisely because they can blend so easily into the anonymity of modern urban environments that are defined by migration, movement, and chance. There is a marked shift from *Patriot Games* to *The Devil's Own*. In the former, danger comes from the unseen stalker on the highway and in the street. In the latter, it comes from the refugee you have invited into your home precisely because he is just like you. The hero in the first instance can ultimately recover his family from tragedy, re-establishing the boundaries between them and us, safety and danger, home and abroad. In *The Devil's Own*, he can neither recuperate the former terrorist into a good American son, as he wishes to do, nor return so easily to a bounded identity. 'If I was 8 years old and saw my father gunned down in front of my family, I'd be carrying a gun too. And I wouldn't be wearing a badge', O'Meara claims. *The Devil's Own* ruptures its own narrative boundaries. O'Meara has become alienated from the police, disregarding orders to co-operate with an implausibly combined FBI and SAS operation which he is convinced aims to kill Frankie/Rory, not arrest him. He is equally alienated from the leading figures in the Irish community, who are complicit in Frankie's gunrunning. There is no stereotype quite so indicative of American political morality as that of the one good cop. O'Meara's form of alienation is typical of the end of conspiracy thrillers, a genre which the director of *The Devil's Own*, Alan J. Pakula, did much to define. *The Devil's Own*, however, does not take the radical chances which made his earlier films like *The Parallax View* (1974) and *Klute* (1971) genre-defining. Faced with the FBI's hostility, O'Meara has the Constitution to protect him: 'Next time you want to talk to me, read me my rights.'

The final scene where O'Meara grieves for the man he has regarded as a son, killed, and tried to save, mirrors the opening scene where Pitt's character is seen with his father prior to the latter's sectarian murder. Both scenes are connected with the sea, and the two men fighting on the boat are sharing the same kind of space as the father and son had shared in the idyllic pre-credit fishing scene. The metaphoric construction of the US as father is hard to miss in these films, even if the special relationship it has with Britain in *Patriot Games* is that of a responsible son caring for a parent country in its dotage. (The stereotypes of English characters in both films, as either quaintly ineffectual or despotically ruthless, are in many ways more offensive than the Irish ones, despite their very different views of the Troubles.)

The action movies of the '90s contain within them maps of imagined global relations defined by two opposed chronotopes, the United States and Ireland, that is,

home and abroad. Each of these is in turn defined by a series of internal antinomies of urban and suburban, violent ghetto and rural idyll, familial and public spaces. The cinematic construction of these opposing places maps the imaginary relation between the United States and its (self-) images. The specific role of the Irish Troubles, in this context, is connected to the instability of the boundary between 'them' and 'us' in the '90s. In *The Siege* (Zwick, 1998), which focused on Arab terrorism, the confrontation with an apparently racially identifiable enemy provokes a confrontation between two very different versions of the United States: one epitomised by Denzel Washington as its democratic, individualist, and free-speaking sense of itself as defender of truth and justice; the other played by Bruce Willis as a kind of sub-Macarthur, with a strutting, patriotic sense of US importance. In *The Devil's Own* and *Patriot Games*, the Irish enemy confronted is more like the real terrorist threat that the United States could not admit to itself in the '90s: white, hard to distinguish, related.

In her fascinating study of the Irish-American twenties star Colleen Moore, Diane Negra makes the point that the Irish at that time were the model minority, assimilable advertisements for the immigrant American dream:

> If Irishness connotes transformative potential, such an association carries within it a fundamental dismissal of the desirability of retaining Irish characteristics ... Irishness is assimilable in large part due to the fact that it is capable of becoming something else. (45)

In the Hollywood action thrillers of the '90s it seems it was harder to lose the Irish story in a new American one, but Irishness began to connote transformative potential of a different kind. In 1996, just when *The Devil's Own* must have looked like a surefire box office hit in production meetings, Bill Clinton made two speeches which featured Northern Ireland prominently. In an address to the Democratic National Convention on 30 August, President Clinton declared that he sought 'to build a bridge to the twenty-first century with the world's strongest defence and a foreign policy that advocates the values of our American community in the community of nations'. In this context he surveyed the US role as arbitrator of international political conflict:

> We have helped to bring democracy to Haiti and peace to Bosnia. Now the peace signed on the White House lawn between the Israelis and the Palestinians must embrace more of Israel's neighbours. The deep desire for peace which Hilary and I felt when we walked the streets of Belfast and Derry must become real for all the people of Northern Ireland. And Cuba must finally join the community of nations. ('Address')

Clinton's address to the United Nations on 24 September of the same year reinforced the parallels, again featuring Bosnia and Haiti briefly before linking developments in Northern Ireland and the Middle East even more explicitly:

> In the Middle East and in Northern Ireland, there is progress towards lasting peace, and we are moving in the right direction. Now we must support continued progress between Israel and Palestinians, and we must broaden the circle of peace to include more of Israel's neighbours. We must help to give the children of Belfast a chance to live out normal lives. ('Remarks')

The imperative case is differently directed here, this time stressing the obligations on the United States rather than the participants in the conflict. Presenting himself to his own party Clinton constructs the United States as in a position to dictate terms to others: addressing the UN, he presents the United States as part of an international community subject to the moral imperative of peacemaking. The contradictions between these two positions have exploded since the change of administration in the United States.

If Ireland had a metonymic relation to terrorism at the beginning of the '90s, by 1996, it had apparently acquired an allegorical function. This new configuration established itself in the thriller genre with the box office success of *The Jackal* (Caton-Jones, 1997). The casting of Richard Gere as the former IRA man indicates the possibility of moral ambiguity, but by the end he has been so far assimilated as to achieve a form of partnership with the FBI man, played with his customary moral authority by Sidney Poitier. The landscape of global politics is now so unstable that it will prove increasingly perplexing for the thriller genre to map. It is impossible to predict how Irish characters and situations will be deployed in the genre in the future, but probable that they will remain as deeply implicated in the discourses of race and gender and as unconcerned with getting the accent right. It is certain, however, that Hollywood will continue to project its hopes and fears onto the troubles of others.

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