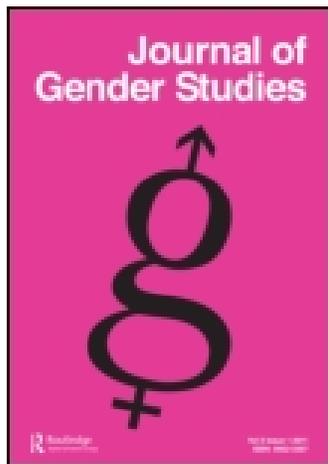


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'Good man, Mary!' Women musicians and the fraternity of Irish traditional music

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘Good man, Mary!’ Women musicians and the fraternity of Irish traditional music

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The study of gender is ‘inherently a study of relations of asymmetrical power and opportunity’ (S.B. Ortner and H. Whitehead, 1981. Introduction to *Sexual meanings: the cultural construction of gender and sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 4). In the masculine space of the Irish pub, women musicians respond to this power differential by adopting an array of tactics aimed at increasing their musical participation and enjoyment. The impediments to women’s public performance of Irish traditional music must also include consideration that the Irish pub is a social space in which women historically had no legitimate presence; but this is only part of the story. Untangling the complex relationships between music and gender in symbolic representations of the Irish nation further reveals a strand of cultural meanings that persists in configuring ‘woman’ and ‘music’, ‘Ireland’ and ‘nation’ in ways that are disempowering to women musicians today. This essay draws on Foucault’s theory of discourse to examine the gendered historical and contemporary representations of Irish music and musicians and on postmodern feminist theory of the performativity of gender to demonstrate how deeply embedded are our gendered conceptions of subjectivity, music, and nationality.

Keywords: Irish traditional music; women musicians; nationalism; space; gender; Ireland

‘The man of the house’¹: men leading the session

To the casual observer, a pub session of Irish traditional music – now its most popular performance context – may seem a delightfully egalitarian form of musical participation. This is not necessarily the case, however, for the session operates neither as a democracy nor as a meritocracy. Convention holds that, in determining who gets the best seat and who ‘calls’ the tunes, whose speed and rhythm and taste are deferred to, a musician’s instrument, ability, reputation, and seniority are all important (Hamilton 1999, p. 346), as are a broad repertoire, Irish nationality, personality, an old regional playing style and being male (Moloney 1992, pp. 192–199). Another crucial factor is ‘whose’ session it is (pp. 183–184) – clear enough at a private session or house party, but more ambiguous in today’s pub sessions, where the ‘host’ is usually employed by the publican, who might value musicians differently. Session leaders are not necessarily the oldest players present, or the most skilled, but with very few exceptions they are men. Why should this be the case, given that the majority of children and adolescents now learning to play Irish traditional music are female?

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There are various ways to account for this differential, the first of which is that the highest-status and the loudest instruments in Irish traditional music have masculine associations. In the past, women in Ireland participated in music making largely as singers and dancers. Women were rarely 'musicians' (in Irish traditional music circles, someone who plays an instrument, rather than a singer). As in most cultures, playing musical instruments and performing any kind of music in public spaces have been regarded as male prerogatives.² This was the case in rural Ireland before social change in the late-nineteenth century saw the demise of the professional (and male) artisan musician and the emergence of amateur domestic music making and dancing (Hall 1999). Women played concertinas and melodeons, considered suitable because they were cheaper and relatively easy to play, while the fiddle (violin) and flute kept their masculine associations (Schiller 1999, Breathnach 1977), as did the uilleann ('elbow') pipes. These costly instruments, which take many years of dedicated practice to learn, are the most prestigious of instruments – regarded as the only 'native' Irish instrument³ – and are played almost exclusively by men.

The modern chromatic button accordion, which became popular in Ireland from the 1960s and dominated many pub sessions from then until the 1990s, also had a strong masculine association although, with the recent return to popularity of smaller and softer melodeon-style instruments and playing styles, more women have taken up the instrument.⁴ Women rarely play the accompanying instruments – mainly guitar, bodhrán and bouzouki – that rhythmically dominate the session and give (or withhold) the boost of accompaniment to a soloist.

The only instruments associated particularly with women are the soft-voiced harp (taken up by women of the upper classes in the nineteenth century, although earlier played by male artisans), which is rarely played in sessions, and the 'sweet and quiet and unobtrusive' concertina (Moloney 1992, p. 196). In Irish traditional music, the louder the instrument, the less likely it is that women will play it. This is consistent with music educationist Lucy Green's observations that women have been discouraged from playing the 'biggest, loudest and most technologically advanced instruments', of which the pipes and the chromatic button accordion are good examples (Green 1997, p. 58). Where women have been permitted to play musical instruments, they tend to be soft-voiced, accommodating a modest posture, or resembling singing.⁵

'The woman of the house': women's musical participation

In twenty-first-century Europe, the legislated equality between men and women is widely regarded as an achievement of the modern state, while the oppression of women is considered a remnant of traditionalism and tribalism. Where legal barriers to women's participation in formerly male-only domains no longer exist, women tend to blame themselves and their own lack of courage or expertise when they feel excluded. As Mary Ann Clawson points out in her study of young women's access to rock bands, girls 'lacked access to an entitlement that seemed to be assumed by boys: the cultural authority to initiate band formation. Nor were girls viewed by male acquaintances as appropriate candidates for recruitment into bands' (Clawson 1999, p. 111). This situation is reflected in the music industry's recordings of Irish traditional music. Apart from a very small number of iconic female performers (Elizabeth Crotty on concertina, Mary Bergin on whistle, Liz Carroll on fiddle and Sharon Shannon on button accordion), the stars of the genre are men. In the long cavalcade of groups formed since the 1960s, the vast majority are exclusively male, with a handful of all-women bands. In bands that include both women and men, women are almost always singers.

In Irish pub sessions, men's employment as leaders gives male musicians the legitimacy and authority that women musicians lack. Although a small minority of women have gained employment at pub sessions, in general, women are not perceived as 'leadership material'. One explanation for this perception may be that historically, women have not had access to pubs or to pub sessions. Consequently, while session musicians will generally defer to the oldest musician present, that musician is only rarely a woman, due to the almost total absence in the pub session of women born before 1950. There are several ways to account for this absence.

Among Irish musicians born between 1920 and 1950, women and men typically had very different trajectories. In rural areas, women's musical participation was mainly at house parties but, as renowned East Clare fiddler Paddy Canny (b. 1919) comments, 'If the dance was in their own house they'd probably have a go, but they wouldn't ever follow it up that much' (Vallely and Piggott 1999, p. 54). They were restricted to domestic performance and certainly did not ride their bicycles through the countryside to play at late-night dances, as Paddy did in his youth. Until the 1970s, women in rural Ireland 'stayed in' after they married and so missed out on many of the social gatherings where music was played. Indeed, domestic responsibilities did not even allow them time to play at home in the evenings, as men did,⁶ and many married women put aside their instruments altogether, unless they taught their children to play.⁷ With the decline of domestic dance parties in the 1930s and the rise of the ceili band to provide music for dancing in new public halls, women lost the opportunity for social music making. Very few women – usually only those with male relatives in a band – became professional dance musicians.

If it was inappropriate for women to leave the house and travel around the countryside at night with male musicians, it was unthinkable for them to enter a pub. This proved to be a major barrier to women's musical participation and another reason why older women musicians are absent from today's pub sessions. Until the late 1960s (later in rural areas), Irish women simply did not go into pubs unless they were 'the dregs from the gutter' (Kitty Leyden, personal communication). The same prohibitions alienated women from Irish immigrant bar sessions in American cities. Kitty Leyden, who left West Clare in the 1930s to become a domestic worker in New York, recalls the night she heard Irish music coming from a hole-in-the-wall bar. She stopped outside to listen 'with the tears streaming down', but could not enter. Marcella O'Toole has similar recollections of Ireland in that period. As a publican's daughter in Spiddal, Co. Galway, she observed that '[t]he local women never went into the pubs, except the odd alcoholic. They were outside and their hands on the window sill, listening to the music and the songs' (Standún and Long 2001, p. 114).

In the vibrant musical scene that developed in London's Irish immigrant pubs in the 1950s and 1960s, few women were welcomed into the emergent musical context of the session. Exceptions were Julia Clifford (1914–1997), a fiddle player from Kerry, who also performed in a dance band with her husband and son, and East Galway fiddler Lucy Farr (1911–2003), whose English husband was a keen follower of Irish music. Still, Lucy Farr felt an interloper in a man's world: 'it was all men, there were so few lady fiddle players and you sort of felt that you shouldn't be there' (Farr quoted in Vallely and Piggott 1999, p. 74).

In the 1950s, the pub session in Ireland gained popularity among musicians returning from stints in Britain's workforce and those attending national music competitions. At this time, however, women's presence in public bars was still proscribed. I am aware of only one woman who played in pub sessions in Ireland before the 1960s – West Clare concertina player, Elizabeth Crotty (1885–1960) – and she was the publican.⁸

Irish musicians formed a fraternity that supported their playing and gave them opportunities to perform and engage with new repertoires and styles at *fleadhs*,⁹ festivals

and sessions. Pub sessions cultivated musical bonds that developed into performing groups, but with few exceptions these were all-male bands. Until the 1970s, women generally had neither the means nor the opportunity to travel independently to meet and play with other musicians, enter competitions, join a band, perform publicly or make recordings – all necessary in order to establish a reputation and acquire a broad repertoire. For a period of nearly 20 years, the pub session was almost exclusively a male affair, extending an earlier hiatus in women's participation as dance musicians following the demise of the house dance. Thus for over 30 years, women were severely restricted in opportunities to play publicly either for dancing or in the pub session.

Although the stigma of a married woman going out to a pub has virtually disappeared, women still maintain domestic responsibilities that limit their musical participation in pub sessions. Social expectations and prohibitions also inhibit young women from committing themselves exclusively to their musical development. In popular music groups, sociologist H. Stith Bennett maintains that the musician must be totally committed to practising, to the exclusion of everything else (Bennett 2000); however, as Mavis Bayton (2000) has pointed out, young women's multiple social commitments make it difficult to achieve this exclusive focus.¹⁰

In the post-1950s revival of Irish traditional music, young women musicians were nurtured, not in pubs, but in domestic or institutional settings such as the national music organisation Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ). Acclaimed harpist Máire Ní Chathasaigh (b. 1956) believes it was only through CCÉ competitions that she was able to achieve the confidence to play publicly, to develop her talents and take part in the national and international concert tours that followed success in competitions: 'basically it's an objective validation of what you've done ... You don't have to push yourself, which a nicely brought up young girl is not supposed to do' (Ní Chathasaigh quoted in Sullivan 1999, pp. 137–138).

As in other countries, feminist historians in Ireland adopted the strategy of reinstating women into the existing historical narratives. This strategy has eventually been taken up in writing about Irish musicians (see for example Rowley 1993, Sullivan 1999). While such projects provide role models, they continue to represent these women as exceptional. As a way of understanding why so few women participated in the public performance of traditional music, the strategy of retrieval is not only inadequate, but can lead women to blame themselves if they fail to develop their musical talents. Singer Delores Keane, for example, has said:

I don't honestly think that the lack of women going out on the road [as touring musicians] or anything else has anything to do with men. It was just something that women didn't do years back ... women in general just didn't have the courage or conviction way back then to take that step. I don't think it was a case that the men were making it difficult for them. Of course, it's the women who have the babies and usually they're the ones that look after the kids while the men go out to work. But if the women were really determined about a career they could have found ways of organising their lives to combine the two. I did it. (Keane quoted in Rowley 1993, p. 95)

Other successful women musicians speak of the difficulties of combining musical performance and raising families, but are at pains not to appear 'anti-man' by blaming Irish men for their society's patriarchal values [see for example the interviews in Rowley (1993) and Sullivan (1999)]. Such views point to the relatively conservative understanding of gender relations that characterises the Irish traditional music scene today, where respect for 'the tradition' includes respect for earlier social values. At the same time, women musicians' disadvantage is often relegated to the past, as when ethnomusicologist Mick

Moloney maintains that ‘until recently women were expected to play a more passive deferential role than men’. The discourses that construct Irish music as a ‘male genre’ continue to inform the ways in which Irish traditional music is understood and performed today.

Feminist geographers’ work on the gendered characteristics of social space and music and the gendered construction of a national culture offer alternative perspectives to an analysis of the question of women’s absence from, or difficulties operating within, the Irish pub session. For while women are now permitted to drink, socialise and play music in pubs, it remains essentially a masculine territory, a space in which ‘men hold and display greater rights than do women’ (Gardner 1994, p. 335).

‘Good man, Mary!’ Women in the masculine space of the pub

Where 50 years earlier, a woman entering a public house was scorned as ‘the dregs from the gutter’, in the early twenty-first century, nothing will stem the tide of Irish women who drink in pubs. Yet in a pub session, a woman musician who is loud or drunk is generally regarded with disapproval, while similar behaviour is not only acceptable in men but often regarded as an essential part of ‘the crack’.¹¹ The pub is a space in which men may take ‘time out’ from public and domestic responsibility. For women, however, it is a different story – as one fiddle player observed, getting drunk makes a woman ‘fair game’ for verbal or physical abuse, while being drunk excuses a man for any abuse he might commit (Anna, personal communication). The pub remains a space in which men’s needs and tastes predominate and where women do not feel ‘at home’.¹²

In many cultures, patriarchal control has a spatial dimension, with the attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere and restrict their access to public space, which is regarded as a masculine domain. Within what Gillian Rose defines as the masculinist discourse¹³ of human geography, ‘place’ is understood in terms of maternal Woman, whereas ‘space’ refers to ‘the public space of Western hegemonic masculinities’ (Rose 1993, p. 62). According to this taxonomy, ethnomusicologist Anthony McCann asserts, the pub, as an informal meeting-place between family and work, is a typical ‘third space’ (McCann 2001, p. 91).¹⁴ As a kind of ‘half-way-home’ for men, between the oppression of the workplace and the constraints of domesticity and feminine respectability, the pub has been a third space for men. In this place, women by implication are the spoilers who limit men’s pleasures and freedoms and from whom they need respite.

The so-called ‘public’ bar can be seen as an example of what Rose argues is the expression and constitution through spatial differentiation of unequal social relations: an arena in which women are deviant, illegitimate – in Lucy Farr’s words, a place where ‘you sort of felt that you shouldn’t be there’ (Vallely and Piggott 1999, p. 74) – and where being acknowledged or heard is contingent upon special dispensations being made. In the case of women in pub sessions, this means either having a powerful male mentor or becoming, through talent and reputation, an ‘honorary male’ – as when virtuoso tin whistle player Mary Bergin’s (b. 1949) audience register their appreciation of her performance by shouting, ‘good man, Mary!’ (Bergin quoted in Sullivan 1999, pp. 28–29).¹⁵ Because women are rarely session leaders, they are more likely to remain on the fringes of the session, however, where they are at a disadvantage musically (less able to hear, less supported if they lead a tune) and socially (‘fair game’ for the harassment of male drinkers).

In the public, masculine space of the pub, women are at a ‘situational disadvantage’ (Gardner 1994, p. 336). This is exemplified by the experiences of women musicians in

Galway city whom I interviewed and played music with as part of a research project on identity and Irish traditional music (O'Shea 2008). Like Lucy Farr in post-war London, Bernadette, a fiddle-player in her forties, felt out of place in pub sessions – 'I've been to sessions where it's just all men, and you can feel very alone' – but wondered whether this might not be her own fault: 'Maybe it's in my headspace if I'm a woman being intimidated going into that. And maybe that's just generally male–female culture, maybe it's a social or sociological factor, generally' (personal communication).¹⁶ Finding it difficult to gain acceptance in some of Galway's pub sessions, and disliking the atmosphere of these 'lads' sessions', a group of Bernadette's fellow women musicians (who included foreigners and locals, beginners and champions) sought to achieve their mutual goal of playing music publicly in a more enjoyable environment.

One of the women's tactics was to set up their own pub session. Both times they attempted this, however, they found that 'a few old boys' walked into their session and 'not even introduced themselves, just sat down and took over, like we had no right to be playing' (Rachel, personal communication). Eventually, the women settled on 'kitchen sessions' in the home of a different musician each week. These were relaxed occasions involving playing and learning tunes together, conversation and cups of tea. Bernadette valued this weekly meeting with 'the girls' as 'a sharing and giving thing' where 'you feel welcome and encouraged and you're invited to play with others' (personal communication).

For these women, kitchen sessions achieved the ideal of conviviality for which the pub session is famous. They did not provide the excitement of playing 'out' in mixed company, but gave the women the opportunity to develop the musical friendships, common repertoire and practice in playing together that allowed them to re-enter the pub sessions from a stronger position. Where they had been reluctant to go to a session alone, these women were soon able to go to sessions in twos and threes and eventually to introduce their own choice of tunes and play them together. Afterwards, they negotiated the disorder of Galway's late-night streets in the relative safety of one another's company, overcoming another disincentive to take part in pub sessions. For, as Carol Brooks Gardner has argued,¹⁷ public spaces are male preserves in which women are open to evaluative 'street remarks' unless 'seen to be under the explicit control and protection' of a man (Gardner 1994, pp. 338–339).

Doreen Massey, writing of ways in which public space is constructed as masculine and 'home' as woman's place, points out that these symbolic meanings both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is understood, with women's limited mobility 'a crucial means of subordination' (Massey 1994, p. 179). Others (for example, Rose 1993) have taken up the issue of how women's presence in public space is constrained by fear of violence. Research in a Scottish city found that women resist 'patriarchal social control' by not 'giving in' to such fears but at the same time comply with it by being 'careful' (Mehta and Bondi 1999).¹⁸ Women, aware of their change in status in the masculine space of the public bar or the night streets, adopt tactics to ensure their wellbeing. These include both assertive and defensive actions: both resisting and complying with patriarchal social control. This was the case for the women musicians in Galway, who walked through the streets late at night, but took precautions such as walking together and meeting up at a congenial café. They started up their own pub sessions in order to avoid their exclusion and harassment by male musicians. When this tactic failed, the women retreated to the private domestic space. Yet the women regarded the kitchen, not as their 'proper' place, but as an opportunity to enjoy rehearsing a common repertoire that would allow them to reassert their presence in pub sessions.

Not all women musicians had such difficult experiences in pub sessions, particularly those with a male mentor or companion. Other women, however, found the pub environment oppressive but were unable either to draw on the pooled social and musical resources of a circle of women friends or to seek refuge in domestic music making. Since women are *permitted* to go into pubs and to play music in sessions, it seems reasonable to assume that a woman musician with a high degree of ability, a broad repertoire and employment as a session leader should achieve the authority to influence a session's musical direction. Yet there are still more reasons why this is unlikely to happen.

Lovely girls: negotiating the masculine space of the pub

Australian fiddle player Anna was employed as one of several session leaders in Doolin, a West Clare village which in the 1980s drew musicians from all over Ireland to party and play, but now is packed with budget travellers and foreigners playing music or running guesthouses. Even in the capacity of paid leader, Anna experienced her workplace as oppressive, a space in which she had to struggle to be heard and to avoid harassment. In the pub where she was employed, Anna found that in addition to being paid 25% less than the male musicians, 'the men would try and stick their hands up your skirt and the women would be over in the corner, saying, "Look at your one!" because I was getting all the attention from the men. So you can't win' (personal communication).

Anna perceived that 'if you follow the rules of being a lovely girl, you're probably not going to get into trouble, you're not going to get anyone trying to hassle you'. Learning to perform an acceptable feminine role involved circumscribing her gestures and not making eye contact or smiling at anyone: 'Now I do it different. Now I have cultivated that "feet, knees together" tap ... they can't even put their legs apart so far that they might tap their feet individually!' Monitoring and adapting her behaviour inhibited Anna's music making: 'Now, I can't just play. Now, there's all these other things in between'. She was uncomfortably aware of the confinement that Gillian Rose identifies as a recurring image in women's accounts of their lives: 'We often do not gesture and stride, stretch and push to the limits of our physical capabilities' (Rose 1993, p. 144). Iris Marion Young links women's acute awareness of their bodies and their need to look 'right' for the masculine gaze (including its refraction through the eyes of other women) with women's sense of space as not their own, where they are objects to be looked at.¹⁹

Anna's experiences suggest that the difficulties women face in trying to assimilate into the fraternity of the session are not solely a matter of unequal power and opportunity that will eventually be redressed once women's equal rights as citizens become embedded in social values. One of feminist thought's most enduring aspirations, the notion of a universal subject – the complete equality of women and men – turns out to be masculine, not gender-neutral.²⁰ Yet, as musicologist Marcia Citron notes, accounts of women's lack of access to the professional, patriarchal world of music continue to 'rest on a model of oppression and implicitly situate male culture as the norm and female culture as the Other in relation to that prevailing culture' (Citron 1994, p. 18).

In Anna's case, however, her presence in the Doolin pub session was disruptive not only because she was a woman doing a man's job, but also because she was not considered womanly, notably by older women present: she did not perform femininity in a socially acceptable way. Judith Butler's authoritative work on the performativity of gender may help to clarify the question raised here of the relationship between individual subjectivity and gender. For, as Butler asserts, gender is not inherent, but 'performed'. Rather than understanding gender as a stable and foundational identity, she



Figure 1. Modest pose of the 'lovely girl'. Photograph with kind permission of Nutan Photography.

argues, gender is produced over time through a 'stylized repetition of acts', of bodily gestures and movements, resulting in the *illusion* of a continuous gendered self (Butler 1990, p. 140).

As Anna's case suggests, gender is not only socially constituted, but is constituted differently according to time and place, or, as Butler puts it, gender is an 'ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification' (Butler 1990, p. 33). This theorisation of gender as always in process has been misinterpreted to mean that individuals may deliberately change the performance of gender (as Anna feels pressured to do). Butler stresses that performativity is not a deliberate act, not a matter of individual choice, nor is it performative in a theatrical sense, but 'a reiterative and citational practice' (Butler 1993, pp. 2, 3–15). In other words, gender is socially constructed: we learn (or fail to learn) to perform our social identity in ways that reproduce culturally and historically specific meanings of gender.

As noted above, women's musical participation in Ireland historically has been predominantly as singers rather than as instrumentalists. This is consistent with Lucy Green's observation that in many societies this is the most acceptable form of musical performance for women as it affirms the 'feminine delineations' of nurture, submission, and feminine display (Green 1997, pp. 21–51). As singers they are involved in 'an

explicitly or implicitly sexual display in which the displayer is coded as “feminine” and the spectator as “masculine” (p. 25). The generic woman musician whom Anna scorns, with her downward glance, the constrained posture of her knees and feet together, her arms resting demurely in her lap, affirms her femininity (see Figure 1), just as the seated figure of the woman playing the piano, accepting her audience’s gaze but not looking at them, is accepted as a feminine performance (Green 1997, p. 59).

Similar conventions of modesty circumscribe a young woman’s performance of Irish step dances. As ethnomusicologist Jane C. Sugarman writes in her analysis of Prespa Albanian dance, a rigid and erect torso, limbs held close to the body and knees close together are typical of women’s dance in many cultures. ‘By moving her body as a unit and carefully controlling the movements of her limbs, a woman assures that the attention of onlookers will not be drawn to the more “private” and sexual parts of her body’ (Sugarman 2003, p. 90). The phenomenally popular dance musicals *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* present updated versions of Irish step-dancing and dance music. *Riverdance* was hailed as ‘putting back the missing ingredient of sex’ (O’Toole 1997, p. 150); yet in both productions, characters, costumes and movements present a ‘brutal division of masculine and feminine stereotypes’ (McCann and Ní Bhriain 2002, p. 368). This is more pronounced in *Lord of the Dance*, in which a virginal blonde competes with a predatory brunette for the ‘Lord’. While mythical representations of Irish womanhood and a virgin/whore dichotomy continue to be reproduced in Irish culture, they have been contested in the visual and literary arts (see, for example, Chan 2006, Kirkpatrick 2000). In music, however, such myths are unexposed because they are unarticulated and retain their power to circumscribe the ways in which a woman may become an Irish musician.

Anna’s performance in the session was disruptive not only because she performed femininity in a way that was inconsistent with the sign of ‘Irish woman’ and which is implied in the gendered discourses of Irish nationalism and Irish traditional music, but also because she was a foreigner, her presence as a musician performing Irish traditional music in a tourist venue threatening to devalue the advertised authentic cultural experience.

The gendered discourse of Irish nationalism

Foreigners are perceived to be out of place in Irish music sessions because they lack both the cultural capital that bestows on them status and acceptance, and the *habitus* or unconsciously performed musical values and gestures internalised and incorporated in childhood and recognised as ‘local’ by other musicians (O’Shea 2008). Another aspect of Irish traditional music that tends to exclude or devalue the contribution of foreigners and to limit women’s participation and recognition is music’s symbolic representation within the discourse of Irish nationalism. Since the canon of Irish traditional music was constructed within a nationalist movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is not surprising that the outcome should be a body of musical practice and repertoire understood both to reflect and to represent an Irish national identity. In relation to this widely held understanding of Irish traditional music, musicians who are not Irish are a disruptive presence, inspiring responses that range from wonder to suspicion and hostility.

That the discourse of nationalism represents the nation and the music as feminine and patriots and musicians as masculine poses a further problem for women musicians. The collective identities of colonised peoples as imagined by their colonisers, the hoped-for nation of anti-colonial movements and the nation as celebrated by nation-states all tend to be represented symbolically as feminine. There is now a substantial body of work in Irish

studies on constructions of gender in both colonial and nationalist discourses (see, for example, Jones and Stallybrass 1992, Lloyd 1993, Goldring 1993, Kearney 1997, Graham 1996). These trace symbolic representations of Ireland following Ireland's invasion by England, first as the vulnerable virgin raped by the masculine invader and later, with the rise of nationalism, as a mother to be defended and protected from colonial domination. The colonial discourse of Celticism represented the Irish as feminine in contrast to the superior masculinity of the Teutonic English (Cairns and Richards 1988). Cultural nationalism in Ireland (as also in the models it drew from in Germany and other European countries) represented the patriot in terms of the masculine intellect and virility that would protect the nation's body (its territory) and soul (its culture), both associated symbolically with the feminine.²¹ Conversely, as Angela Martin notes, Irish nationalist discourse represented women as 'proto-typical Mothers within the confines of the proto-typical Home, where they could see to the moral and physical development of the masculine and Gaelic Irish race' (Martin 1997, p. 105). Elizabeth Butler Cullingford takes up this point, arguing that not only are such representations so pervasive as to have become invisible, but that they continue to constrain Irish women:

Historically, the personification of Ireland as a woman has served two distinct ideological purposes: as applied by Irish men it has helped to confine Irish women in a straitjacket of purity and passivity; as applied by English cultural imperialists it has imprisoned the whole Irish race in a debilitating stereotype. (Cullingford 1990, p. 1)

These symbolic representations became fixed in the rhetoric of the nation-state following independence, where they also informed notions of the state's ideal citizens. In Taoiseach (prime minister) de Valera's famous 1943 St Patrick's Day speech, the ideal woman of the new nation he envisioned was a version of the mythical 'Mother Ireland'. The effect of such tropes, repeated over the decades in song, story, painting, political speech and educational texts, has been to delineate narrowly the notions of the masculine and the feminine in Irish society.²² At the heart of the patriot's vision of Ireland is the farmhouse kitchen where traditional culture is reproduced. The idea of home as a refuge and retreat from the world of work is a masculine one (Rose 1993, Massey 1994). For the woman of the house – the idealised mother who embodies the Irish nation, the Motherland – the home is a place of work and confinement. Both these ideals were enshrined in Ireland's 1937 Constitution.²³

Post-colonial studies have shown how nationalist movements, in achieving political freedom from colonial oppression, invariably do so by mimicking the structures of their former oppressors, one result of which is the dominance and oppression of other marginal groups, including women. In the case of Ireland, this can be seen, first, in the identification of Ireland with the feminine within both colonial and anti-colonial discourse and, secondly, in the increasing political exclusion of women within the nationalist movement, a subject that has been explored by feminist historians (see, for example, Ward 1991, Coulter 1993, Beaumont 1999).

Feminist analysis of Irish colonialism and nationalism has moved along a similar trajectory to feminist geographers' work on public space. Catherine Nash, for example, points out that not only has Ireland the nation been gendered feminine, but so also has the Irish landscape and the cottage in which the idealised rural wife nurtures the next generation of patriots. It is against this construction of the Irish landscape as passive, organic and maternal, that an Irish identity has been asserted as active, independent and masculine.²⁴ Elizabeth Butler Cullingford similarly argues that the personification of the Irish nation as woman challenges nationalist men to become 'hyper-masculine' and to

demand that Irish women be ‘hyper-feminine’ along the lines prescribed in the Constitution (Cullingford 1990, p. 6).

An analogous reclassification has been observed in cultures that define music as a feminine or an effeminate activity. In *Feminine endings*, musicologist Susan McClary argues that, while Western classical music typically has a feminine delineation, male musicians have redefined it as masculine by focusing on its mental work rather than on the body, by excluding females from participation, and by insisting on its ‘masculine’ virtues (rationality, objectivity, universality, transcendence) (McClary 1991, p. 17). One of the ways in which Irish music has been redefined as masculine is through the discourse of nationalism.

Nationalist discourse and Irish traditional music

If music generally is constructed as a feminine art in European cultures, Irish music in colonial times represented the feminine construction of the Irish temperament and its symbolic inferiority. The process by which Irish nationalism was transformed from a cultural to a political movement included the transformation of the music used to represent both Ireland and this more militarised anti-colonial politics. Music that had symbolised Ireland’s vulnerability and femininity (Irish airs played on the harp or piano and sentimental songs such as those of Thomas Moore) was passed over by political nationalists, who enlisted in their project popular songs in march time that exhorted patriots to ‘manly’ action (Martin 1997, p. 102). Following independence, traditional music was institutionalised on national radio, in the school curriculum and from the 1950s within the nationalist musicians’ organisation CCE (Martin 1997, p. 102, Uí Ogáin 1995, Gibbons 1996, pp. 70–81). This repertoire included military music (marches and patriotic ballads) as well as the dance music that was becoming known as ‘traditional Irish music’. A mix of ballads and dance music was performed at meetings of the strongly nationalist Gaelic Athletics Association, where the accordion became a particularly popular instrument. Today, the patriotic songs and marches, including those played by session leaders in some pub sessions, may reflect their membership of this organisation. In rural areas, it is not uncommon for these older musicians to play the Irish national anthem (‘Amhrán na bhFiann’: ‘The Soldier’s Song’) to mark the end of a night’s music.

This co-option of Irish traditional music to a masculinist nationalist identification is evident today in music-event advertising, in tourist brochures and books about music, where the generic Irish musician is invariably male.²⁵ While the Irish in the abstract may be mythologised as female, Irish people, particularly in the diaspora, are generally represented as male: ‘the Paddy’. Bronwen Walter (1995) contrasts the feminised Irish ethnicity deriving from Ireland’s colonial relationship with Britain with the construction of a male ethnicity in respect of the Irish in Britain. She asks where this leaves the ethnicity of Irish women, both in relation to Ireland and as Irish emigrants, in which context they have become invisible. This is an important intervention in relation to women’s position in the Irish music session, for it was in such masculinised diasporic contexts that the session developed as an exclusively male, and masculine, activity. What Irish composer Seán Ó Riada called the ‘vigorous masculine’ dance music (in contrast to the ‘drooping feminine’ style of modern harp music) (Ó Riada cited in Schiller 1999, p. 203) was taken up by emigrant musicians as a music largely dissociated from dancing and played almost exclusively by men. At the same time, the Irish dance music played in these pub sessions bore potent associations with an idealised and generalised Irish nation: that is, not just a local home, but a communal home. Women’s presence as listeners and particularly as

musicians disrupts the performance of Irish identity, for the symbolic language of nationalism represents the Irish patriot, the Irish emigrant and Irish traditional music as masculine. Masculine and heterosexual, that is, for 'Irish' and 'queer' are mutually exclusive identifications both in the discourse of Irish nationalism and in the Irish music scene, where gay musicians must remain discreetly closeted.²⁶

Music is a gendered discourse in which the meanings of musical acts differ according to whether the musician is male or female. In Irish traditional music, there is a residual effect of women's historical exclusion from public music making in Ireland on their understandings of the roles open to them today, for 'the symbolic order and the imaginative structure of contemporary Ireland are still very much rural' (Keohane and Kuhling 2003, p. 134). Musical performance in the session takes place within, and in relation to, a constellation of gendered discourses. Women musicians in pub sessions disrupt the masculinist discourses of music, nationality and space, even when they play demurely on soft, unobtrusive instruments and even when they do not assert themselves through musical leadership, for patriarchy is 'a *relationship* in which men overall have more power than women, articulated through a separation that is both empirical and symbolic, of public and private life' (Green 1997, p. 15). In the context of the Irish pub session, this relationship is manifested in various ways: in the unequal representation and status of women musicians, in the constraints on their presence and their behaviour in what remains a masculine social space, in the emphasis placed on women musicians as sexual objects, in the lesser authority and power of women musicians, in their subjection to harassment and their relegation to less privileged positions.

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Notes

1. 'The man of the house' and 'The woman of the house' are Irish reels often performed at pub sessions.
2. See the essays in Koskoff (1987) for ethnomusicological research illustrating numerous cultural contexts in which women's musical performance is restricted to the private sphere, where it is accorded low status. In musical traditions where women do perform in the public sphere (Japanese geisha, for example), these performers are isolated from family and community life. See also the essays in Magrini (2003), particularly those on Rom women's musical participation.
3. Although Breathnach dates the emergence of 'a distinctively Irish instrument' at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Breathnach 1977, p. 72), the more elaborate instrument used today was a development of the nineteenth-century fashion for piping among the Anglo-Irish gentry (Carson 1986, p. 14).
4. Sharon Shannon's self-titled 1991 solo album marked the beginning of this new trend. The proportion of women playing accordions is still relatively low, however.
5. In the late twentieth century, research in England and the USA found that girls and boys today continue to understand the gender implications of musical instruments from an early age and tend to select instruments that fit their gender identifications. Children perceive percussion and brass instruments and guitars as suitable for boys only, and keyboard, plucked and orchestral instruments and singing as girls' prerogative (O'Neill and Boulton 1996).
6. Biographical essays on male musicians including Paddy Canny, Martin Rochford, Willie Clancy, and Tommy Potts record the many evening hours spent playing their instruments (for example, Valley 1999).

7. The biographical entries in Valley (1999), interviews in Irish music journals, and books about Irish music, include stories of musicians whose first teachers were their mothers.
8. Elizabeth Crotty and her husband ran a pub, famed as a 'music house' where visiting musicians were welcomed, in the West Clare town of Kilkee. It is worth noting that even today, most pubs in Ireland will not tolerate musicians unless hired by them for specific occasions.
9. *Fleadhs* (correctly, *fleadhanna*) are the county and national competitions hosted by the Irish musicians' association, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Eireann (CCÉ).
10. This contention appears to be corroborated by Fintan Valley's analysis of competition entrants and results for the 1994 national CCÉ competitions, which found that while there was an overall majority of female competitors (51%), girls were over-represented in the under-18 groups (57%) and under-represented in the senior categories (32%) (Valley 1999, p. 151).
11. A reputation as a drinker has different cultural meanings for men and for women. Numerous research projects over the past 20 years concur that (in the West) men drink more frequently and more heavily than women, but that 'there is added stigma attached to women who drink, in particular to those who drink excessively' (Olenick and Chalmers 1991, p. 329). This double standard is evident in remarks by the judge who in 2000 condemned the young women of Galway for their binge-drinking and late-night carousing and, on the other hand, my elderly neighbour's assurances that the young men in Tulla, Co. Clare, whose shouting and fighting disturbed our sleep, were 'just having a bit of fun', reaffirming the different standards for men and women regarding drunkenness and territorial rights to public space (O'Shea 2008).
12. Since the 1990s, certain (mainly urban) Irish pubs have been refurbished in a reimagined Irish rustic style that responds to the increased number of women in pubs: more chairs, homelier decors, clean toilets, more soft drinks and wines. Such establishments have a separate public [sic] bar where there are few, if any, women drinkers.
13. A masculinist discourse is one which, according to Michèle Le Doeuff's widely used definition, 'while claiming to be exhaustive, forgets about women's existence and concerns itself only with the position of men' (Le Doeuff 1991, p. 18).
14. Anthony McCann (2001, p. 99, n. 8) cites John F. Freie's definition of 'third spaces' as 'the informal gathering places for people beyond the family and work. They include cafes, pubs, corner stores, pool halls, coffee shops, barbershops, parks, and other hangouts' (Freie 1998, p. 50).
15. The process of 'goodmanning' is an expression of appreciation for and encouragement of a public musical performance. Although the equivalent 'good woman' is occasionally heard, the masculine is the norm, especially in the pub.
16. All personal communications quoted have been allocated pseudonyms.
17. See Gardner (1994, p. 336) who cites Reiter (1975) and Wylie (1974).
18. Gillian Rose also notes this fear: 'I have a strong sense of space as oppressive, for example, from being scared walking at night in the city in which I live' (Rose 1993 p. 143).
19. Here Rose (1993, p. 144) draws on the work of Iris Marion Young, who has argued that 'a space surrounds us in imagination that we are not free to move beyond; the space available to our movement is a constricted one' (Young 1990, p. 146).
20. See Anne Phillips's historical account of the 'see-sawing in feminist thought between aspirations of equality and assertions of difference' (Phillips 1992) and also Carole Pateman's argument that the subordination of women in patriarchal societies invalidates subsequent contracts claiming equality, which falsely assume a gender-neutral 'citizen' (Pateman 1989).
21. This view is elaborated in Goldring (1993, pp. 126–131).
22. While the Irish in the abstract may be mythologised as female, Irish people, particularly in the diaspora, are generally represented as male: 'the Paddy'. Bronwen Walter contrasts the feminised Irish ethnicity deriving from Ireland's colonial relationship with Britain with the construction of a male ethnicity in respect of the Irish in Britain. She asks where this leaves the ethnicity of Irish women, both in relation to Ireland and as Irish emigrants (Walter 1995).
23. Republic of Ireland, *Constitution of 1937*, Article 41, 2.1: 'In particular, the state recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved'; 2.2: 'The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home' (cited in Lee 1989, p. 150).
24. Catherine Nash argues that while postcolonial and feminist remapping and renaming risk 'reproducing the dualities of masculinist and colonial discourse', a poststructuralist understanding of identity allows the reappropriation of the Irish landscape, not by replacing

'one authoritative representation with another but with multiple names and multiple maps' (Nash 1993, pp. 53, 54).

25. Illustrated reference books about Irish traditional music – Breathnach (1977), Ó Canainn (1993), Carson (1986), O'Sullivan (1969), Feldman and O'Doherty (1979), and Ó hAllmhuráin (1998) – include between them in their many line drawings and photographs of musicians not one female instrumentalist. In contrast, the most recent authoritative text (Vallely 1999), includes numerous women musicians in its illustrations, while in Vallely and Piggott (1999), one-third of the interviews and portraits are of women singers and musicians.
26. This does not necessarily imply social intolerance, for as Bidy Martin notes, ideas about social equality may differ from received social identity – as when the Irish-American woman at New York's St Patrick's Day Parade claimed that 'we grant [lesbians] their sexual preference, but they don't belong in a parade of this kind' (Martin 1992, p. 94).

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