

” Northern Ireland: Segregated Peace and Regional Visions”.

Teaching Material.

**How to use the film “Some Mother’s Son” by Terry George in the Danish
Gymnasium and HF.**

In a course about violence.

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” Northern Ireland: Segregated Peace and Regional Visions”.

Background information for my presentation the 12th of November 2008:

The presentation is about how the film “Some Mother’s Son” by Terry George 1996 portrays different ideological clusters and subgroups in the Catholic community during The Troubles, and specifically the impact that The Hunger Strike 1981 had on the Catholic community.

Target Group:

I pretend that you are future teachers of English in the Danish Gymnasium and HF (Grammar school) and as such that you are participating in a teacher training course.

I am presenting how the film can be used in a first year, A level, class.

Context.

In the syllabus given by the Danish Ministry of Education for teaching of English¹, one of the **aims** of the teaching is:

*“- at anvende viden om historiske, kulturelle og samfundsmæssige forhold i Storbritannien og USA til analyse og perspektivering af aktuelle forhold “ (Læreplan for STXA Bilag 18, s. 1, juni 2008)
(- to be able to use basic knowledge of historical, cultural and social affairs in Great Britain and the US for analysis of contemporary affairs and for putting contemporary affairs into perspective.)*

And some of **the material** should a. o. cover:

*“historiske og aktuelle forhold i andre dele af den engelsktalende verden.”(Samme, s. 2)
(- historical and contemporary affairs in other parts of the English speaking world).*

The syllabus also requires the curriculum to be organised around themes or topics.

¹ http://us.uvm.dk/gymnasie//vej/laereplan_pdf/stx/stx_engelsk_a.pdf

The Teaching Plan:

This is how the film “Some Mother’s Son” fits into a particular teaching plan:

The head line of this theme is

Violence

Sub themes are:

Individual violence

The individual against the group

Political violence

The Frame

Before this part of the theme:

We have read about Violence from different points of views;

- from one individual to the other: *Rendevous* by Daniel Ransom 1985 (A short story)
- from an individual against a group: *Warning* by Terry Mccarthy, 2002(An article)²
- Schoolshooting : *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore,2002(Film)

We have been working with analysis of short story, analysis of non-fiction and film. In relation to the theme we have dealt with the concept of Violence, asking the question: *Are there any common features in the different kinds of violence?*

Political Violence: Northern Ireland as an example.

Introduction to the film “Some Mother’s Son”:

(2 lessons)

We have read the article: *Belfast Protests Leaving Scars on Schoolchildren*” by Brian Laverty. The students read the article at home, and dealt with some language training tasks and some understanding tasks from the CD connected to Context.

Traditionally first year A-level students know nothing about the matter. For this reason they will be presented to images of Belfast, which show them the Peace Wall and the examples of the murals from both the Catholic and the Protestant communities. These links are useful for that purpose:

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/symbols/index.html>

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/photos/belfast/peaceline/lanark1.htm#lanark1>

(2 lessons)

In the article, *Belfast Protests Leaving Scars on Schoolchildren* we find a reference to *The Troubles* which motivates the reading about the historical background for the situation.

² As my main resource I have used the anthology Contexts, Gyldendal 2004

The students read about the history at home by this link:

http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2006/03/northern_irelanlinks.html

A first year student needs some guiding for his/her reading, which is why they will be given questions to deal with while they are reading.³

The film

The film "Some Mother's Son" is about the Hunger Strike 1981 and it focuses on the Catholic community and how the "Hunger Strike" united groups in the community. In the film we can recognise the different clusters and subgroups of the Catholic community.⁴

A hand out of the most important clusters will be given to the students as homework before they watch the film: briefly about the Protestants and after that focussing on the Catholics, which should lead us to the film.⁵

The hand out could also be transferred into a power point presentation.

Before actually watching the film the class will discuss the hand out about the two communities, and they will get a work sheet with questions they should be able to answer after the film.⁶ (1 lesson for the hand out discussion)

The film lasts 2 hours

After the film

Analysis of and discussion about the film through work with the work sheet.(Appendix 3)

As a follow-up of the film we will read two newspaper articles: *The Legacy of Bobby Sands*. Newsweek , May 18, 1981 which is pro-republican, and *Inside the Maze Prison* Newsweek/August 17, 1981, which is anti-republican.⁷

The students are to find the different points of views through an analysis of the articles.

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In this class we will watch an excerpt of the film when the two main characters, Kathleen Quigley and Annie Higgins go to visit their sons in the prison.

How would you characterise the two women from this excerpt?

³ Appendix 1

⁴ These clusters and groups are described in "The dynamics of conflict in Northern Ireland" Ruane and Todd, 1996, chapter 3.

⁵ Appendix 2

⁶ Appendix 3.

⁷ Henning Lange: *Living with the Troubles* Systeme 1982

Appendix 1.

Questions for "Northern Ireland: A Profile.

1. What is Northern Ireland?
2. What is the economy of the area based on?
3. What is the primary language of the area?
4. Why did the population of Ireland decrease in 1856?
5. How are Catholics and Protestants represented in the population of Northern Ireland?
6. How many percent of the population want to be a part of Great Britain?
7. How many want to be part of a united Ireland?
8. How is the employment situation in Northern Ireland?

Political History.

1. When did England finally conquer Northern Ireland?
2. Where did the English and Scottish Protestant settle?
3. Why did the economic differences separate north from south in the 19th century?
4. What happened in 1920?
5. How did the Protestants and the Catholics react to the situation?
6. When was a treaty signed?
7. When did Irish Free State become the independent Republic of Ireland?

History of the Conflict.

1. Why did Catholics form the Nationalist civil rights movement in the late 1960s?
2. Why did the Troubles develop?
3. Who are to blame for the violence?
4. When was it possible to establish a cease fire?
5. How did the disarmament of IRA become a sticking point?
6. What was the result of the Good Friday Agreement?
7. What happened in 2001?
8. What happened in 2002?
9. When did IRA finally "dump arms"?

Appendix 2.⁸

Northern Ireland - The two Communities.

When we speak about Northern Ireland, two large polarised communities can be defined:
The Protestant community and the Catholic community.

To day both communities are conscious that Northern Ireland was established to defend the interest of the Protestant community.

But inside each of these communities different groups and clusters can be observed.

Protestants

After the formation of Northern Ireland in 1920 the links between Northern Irish Protestants and Protestants outside Ulster weakened and this meant that the Protestants developed an even stronger British focus than Protestants had before the partition.

Religion

Different religious groups are: Presbyterians 42 %
Church of Ireland 35 %
Methodists 7.5 %

Many Protestants are not regular church goers. Actually 15 % never go to church.

Although they have different interests they remain united in their broad aim which is to be a part of the United Kingdom.

Cultural Identity

Different understandings of cultural identity:

2/3 of all Protestants identify themselves with being British. ¼ identify themselves as Ulster Irish and only 3 % of the Protestant population understand themselves as Irish.

Political and ideological differences

The most important groups are the loyalists and the unionists. The first group, the loyalists are the most extreme ones, whereas unionists present the mainstream Protestantism.

A small group, less than 10 %, of protestants belong to the “bridge-builders”. This group is ecumenical on religious matters, for power-sharing and a Northern Irish Identity.

Class division

In the Protestant community there is a sharp class division. This does not, however, mean that the Protestant community does not stick together against the Catholics.

The discrimination of Catholics

⁸ “The dynamics of conflict in Northern Ireland” Ruane and Todd, 1996, chapter 3.

The majority of Northern Ireland, the protestants have from 1920 to the outbreak of the Troubles been discriminating Catholics in different ways. Examples of this could be inequality in connection with employment, access to important jobs, access to official posts in the administration, lack of political influence, because the election districts were organised so that the Catholics would be a minority and no rules set for protection of the minority.

Indirect discrimination could be that Catholics should be aware not to hurt the Protestants religious feeling whereas the reverse was not the case.

Catholics

When the island of Ireland was partitioned it was a trauma to the Catholics in the North. Before 1920 they had been an integrated part of an island wide unity of Catholics and after 1920 they were thus separated from the wider Irish community.

As a consequence they became a society in a society in Northern Ireland.

Religion.

As a religious group the Catholics is a homogenous group, but the extent of piety (how religious you are) varies. Some people are deeply attached, some take what they want and leave other aspect out, which is called a la carte.

Cultural Identity.

60% of the Catholics identify themselves as Irish

1/4 identify themselves as Northern Irish (The upper class)

8% identify themselves as British (The upper class)

Political differences

80% of the population would like to see a united Ireland in the long term

5 % of the population would like to have a united Ireland realised immediately

6% of the population do not want a united Ireland

The two largest political parties SDLP, the Social Democratic and Labour Party and Sinn Féin, SF have different opinions about a united Ireland.

In SDLP 2/3 are in favour of unity in the long term.

SF support a rapid progress to a united Ireland.

7% of the population belongs to a smaller political party called Alliance.

To most Catholics social and economic issues are more important than the question about a united Ireland.

Differences in the attitudes to political violence (1984):

Four out of five in SDLP, which is the largest Catholic political party, reject political violence

70% of SF supported political violence

Among the Catholics there was more tolerance of the motives of IRA than of their actions.

The two major clusters of people are the republicans and the nationalists. The republicans are for Irish unity and make up the core of Sinn Fein and they are anti clerical(they are not so much for the church). The nationalists are the orthodox Catholics and they make up the core of the SDLP.

In addition there are two minor groups. First, the "Bridge builders", who are represented in something called "Catholic Alliance" and some other groups. Second, the Catholic unionists who support the union. They have a British-Northern Irish identity. But they are a very small group.

Class division

The class difference is smaller in the Catholic community than in the Protestant one. But today we can observe a growth in the Catholic middle class.

The SDLP is a cross- class party, whereas Sinn Fein primarily is a party for young working class men, the unemployed and people living in the country.

Alliance is the party for the upper class and the “Bridge builders” are mostly middle class citizens who live in the suburbs.

In the 1980s the SDLP and Sinn Fein competed to be representing the Catholic community.

In the early 1980s it seemed to be SF which would take the lead, but in the late 1980s the SDLP was the leading party.

Both the Catholic and the Protestant communities have “bridge builders” but inside the communities they do not have a great influence because the extremist groups put an end to their initiatives.

The Troubles

In the 1960s the Civil Rights Movement started as a reaction to the discrimination of Catholic citizens in Northern Ireland. The movement was a part of an international movement which among other had its equivalent in the US in the Civil Rights movement.

But in Northern Ireland the Loyalists saw the movement as a threat.

During the years of the Troubles the Catholic community turned more into the direction of the republicans as a response to the harsh treatment which the peaceful Civil Rights movement experienced. In 1981 a group of Catholic political prisoners organised hunger strikes, because the British government with Margaret Thatcher as prime minister did not recognise them as prisoners of war.

The hunger strike managed to unite groups of Catholics from different observations and different classes in a joint force to support the prisoners.

Also to the Republic of Ireland the hunger strike 1981 meant a new interest in the living conditions of the Northern Irish Catholics. Until then they had not really been interested in being involved in the Northern Irish conflict.

The hunger strikers later became an icon or a symbol of the sufferings of the Catholics of Northern Ireland.

So for the years to come the hunger strikes had an important influence on the politics of Northern Ireland.

Appendix 3.

The Film "Some Mother's Son" by Terry George 1996

Work Sheet.

Notice the following while you are watching:

1. When is the action supposed to go on?
2. What is the conflict in the film about?
3. Which concrete action do we follow in the film?
4. Who are the main characters in the film?
Can you define to which class or group in the community they belong ?
What are the attitudes of the main characters in the beginning of the film?
Do the attitudes change during the film?
Why, why not?
5. From which point of view do we experience the film?
6. What is the message in the film?
7. What is the ideological function of the film?

Appendix 4.

A Survey of the Film: *Some Mother's Son* by Terry George, 1996.

In the year 1981 Kathleen Quigley lives, alone, in a suburb of Belfast with her three children. A daughter, Alice, who works in a bank, a son, Liam, who attends school and her grown up son, Gerard, who is involved in the IRA without her knowledge. She is herself a schoolteacher in a Catholic school.

Annie Higgins lives on a farm with her disabled husband and her daughter, Teresa, who attends the school which Kathleen Quigley teaches at. Annie also has a son who is deeply involved in the IRA.

The film is about the hunger strike in 1981 which the IRA set up as a final protest to the British attempts to break the moral of the IRA members in prison.

They reacted to the criminalisation of IRA prisoners, which Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of Great Britain introduced. First the prisoners objected to wearing ordinary prisoner's clothes by wearing blankets. Second, when the first attempt turned out unsuccessful, the British refused to let them empty their "dirt" from their cells. So as a consequence the IRA prisoners started a hunger strike.

Half through the hunger strike the relatives of the hunger strikers were told that they could take their sons off the strike if they went into a coma. In the end 10 men had died but the strike ended because several relatives took their sons off the strike.

In the film the historical facts are seen through the characters Gerard and Frank, but we mostly follow the plot of the film through the mothers' point of views and especially Kathleen's.

The two families can be seen as representatives of the groups which are described in appendix 2:

The Quigley family is a typical middle class, except for Gerard, who is unemployed.

Although Kathleen seems to be rather politically unconscious in the beginning of the film, she could easily represent somebody in the Alliance or one of "the bridge builders".

But Gerard is unemployed and fits into the characterisation of somebody belonging to Sinn Fein or the IRA.

The Higgins family in the country is the tough, hard core, IRA family. Frank is deeply involved in the IRA and has contact to leading members of IRA.

Annie Higgins is shown as a tough woman too in her confrontation with the British soldiers at the bridge in the beginning. Just like her daughter who will not pass the street when the British soldiers ask her to do that.

Through the course of the film Kathleen changes and joins the campaign for the hunger strikers. She even turns her back to the priest who blames the Catholics for revenging themselves on innocent Protestants. In this way the film shows the unification of the Catholic community during the Troubles. Nevertheless Kathleen is also true to her non-violence when she stops Liam from throwing stones and in the ending of the film when she takes Gerard off the strike.

The point of view in the film is both Fenian or pro IRA and pro non- violence. In an interesting way the film shows the different attitudes in the Catholic community through the two women; the

extreme Annie in contrast to the non- violent Kathleen. But the overall impression of the film which the audience gets is the sympathy with the hunger strikers. This means that the film is ambivalent. Kathleen is a representative of reason but Annie and the hunger strikers outlive the emotional reaction to the Troubles.

The film was made in 1996 and it should also be considered in this context. At the same time it is a homage to the hunger strikers and a suggestion of a new way, Kathleen's non- violent way.

List of sources

George, Terry, "Some Mother's Son" , 1996

Contexts, Gyldendal 2004

CD or the tasks can be found: www.contexts.gyldendal.dk

Lange, Henning: *Living with the Troubles* Systime 1982

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