

Mother-Daughter Relationships in Francesca McDonnell Capossela's *Trouble the Living*

Brittany R. Blomquist

Department of English, Northern Illinois University
1425 West Lincoln Highway, DeKalb, Illinois 60115, USA
Email: et.alibi@gmail.com

Abstract:

Francesca McDonnell Capossela's recent novel, *Trouble the Living*, encompasses the experiences of conflict and emigration across three generations of women. Within the context of the "troubles" in Ireland during the 1990s and the random acts of violence of the early 2000s in America, Capossela explores the complexity of mother-daughter relationships. This essay focuses on the author's depiction of this relationship, both as a cycle of connections and separations, as well as a guiding force for each character's interaction with violence. Situated among literary references to Irish mythology and the Irish conflict, Capossela's women embody the features of heroines and fighters, with motherhood positioned as its own form of battle. In addition to the relationships of mothers and daughters among the characters, there is the relationship that all of the women in the novel have with "mother" Ireland. Here, too, the cycle of connections and separations exists, with the ebb and flow of the relationship with one's country determining choices of engagement with conflict and decisions to leave or return home.

Keywords: Mother-daughter narratives, ethno-nationalist conflict, Irish "troubles", family romance, motherhood.

There are several themes that emerge from Francesca McDonnell Capossela's novel, *Trouble the Living*, themes like war, violence, trauma, and emergence within new countries and sexualities, among others. All of these themes are woven, and at times, driven by the overarching dialogue within the book of mothers and daughters. Set in alternating time periods of the late 1990s and middle 2010s that converge in 2016, the novel follows Bríd from her teenage youth in Northern Ireland through her adulthood in the United States. Her life in Northern Ireland is surrounded by violence, both outside and within her home. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) has spent the past several decades fighting the British for a unified Ireland, using car bombs, shootings, and disappearances in a war that has ebbed with minimal success. As the IRA approaches negotiations, divergent paramilitary groups, such as the Real IRA (RIRA), form and enter Bríd's life. As the conflict changes and shapes the country and the characters within the story, time transitions daughters into mothers through cycles of birth and rebirth. A cataclysmic moment breaks Bríd from her own mother and family, and she emigrates to the United

States, where she begins her own life as her sister. Bríd begins her new life and eventually has a child of her own. In this paper I explore the relationships of women within conflict and motherhood, specifically the relationships of four women within Capossela's *Trouble the Living*. Using a feminist lens and drawing from sources of psychoanalysis and mother-daughter narratives, I situate the mother-daughter relationships of the characters within the larger context of the ethno-nationalist conflict in Ireland. I argue that Irish nationalism, with its sense of purpose, loyalty, separations in ideologies among military groups, and desire for a future without violence, contains the complexities inherent in mother-daughter relationships. As such, Ireland is itself a "mother" to its people.

In Capossela's book, women are warriors, mothers, and daughters; however, these roles extend beyond the specific time period in which the novel takes place. Capossela's characters are formed within the context of literature on the Irish "troubles," as well as her own heritage and maternal relationship. The novel's title alludes to the poem "Easter 1916" by W.B. Yeats. In it, Yeats describes the revolt of the Irish against the British, specifically the heroic few who, in that moment of commitment to Ireland are "enchanted to a stone/to trouble the living stream" (Dyson 1962, 29). Like the ripples a stone makes upon contact with a body of calm water, the conflict born of heroic revolt continues to disrupt the lives of those in Ireland decades into the future. This analogy extends through the women in Capossela's book, with singular choices and momentary actions that propel future decisions and complexity within relationships. Yeats's heroes are not extraordinary people; they are friends and neighbors who Yeats notes "transformed utterly" into freedom fighters (Dyson 1962, 28). Yeats mentions women specifically in the 1916 uprising, describing them as having spent their days in "ignorant good-will," as if participation in the uprising itself transformed the thought and participation of women in political and public spaces (Dyson 1962, 28).

Theresa O'Keefe, however, states that the women in the uprising were both fervent Irish nationalists and feminists participating in a particular moment during the revolt (168). For example, women, such as Constance Markievicz, an icon of Irish republicanism and participant in the 1916 uprising, felt that the fight for an Irish free state was aligned with the fight for women's rights (O'Keefe 2017, 168). Markievicz said that the "first step on the road to freedom is to realise ourselves as Irishwomen – not as Irish or merely as women, but as Irishwomen doubly enslaved and with a double battle to fight" (O'Keefe 2017, 168). Her statement encompasses the belief that the fight for nationalism was also a fight for female liberation in Irish society. Prior to 1916, women had been legally reprimanded in court for "uncharitable tongues," foul language, and public displays of gossip, as well as socially shunned by the Catholic community (Delay 2013, 629). Cara Delay noted that women were considered the cultural representatives of their country; as such, the concept of ideal womanhood became analogous to the "real" Ireland, one in which Catholic women were mild and remained predominately in the private sphere of the home (629). To be authentically Irish was to be authentically Catholic, and for women, that entailed the reserved qualities that removed them from the public sphere. This representation is present in Yeats's poem, with female transformation into the "terrible beauty" of rebels at the beginning of a conflict that would span decades into the beginning of Capossela's novel (Dyson 1962, 29).

This dichotomy of women's roles and notions of what encompassed womanhood became a dichotomy of identities during the years of conflict that would follow the Easter 1916 revolt. These themes are reflected in Capossela's characters, specifically Aoife, Bríd, Ina, and Bernie, and motivate shifts in their relationships reflective of identity. In addition to the role and perceived identity of women within the Irish conflict and society, Capossela draws again from Yeats and Irish mythology to shape the contexts of womanhood and motherhood within the individual characters. Aoife, the oldest female generation within the novel, shares the name of an Irish goddess warrior. This warrior goddess is portrayed as an integral figure in other writings by Yeats, including his play, *At the Hawk's Well*, and "The Death of Cuchulain," a poem in which her warrior qualities are associated with stone (Jordan 1986, 39-40). Not only does this association correlate the women of the Easter 1916 uprising as warriors within Yeats's poem, "enchanted to a stone," but also positions Aoife as the stone in Capossela's novel, the catalyst for the events that ripple throughout the book (Jordan 39; Dyson 28). Aoife maintains her own past in silence, silence that is like a stone. Additionally, Aoife, the warrior goddess of Yeats's writings, undergoes a transformation, through sexual relations with Cuchulain, emerging as a mother and shedding her warrior role (Jordan 1986, 40). In this way, the transformation into motherhood is a reshaping of identity. The transformation into motherhood removes Capossela's Aoife from her role as a warrior within the Irish Republican Army (IRA) yet her desire to engage in battle remains. Aoife continues to wear red, not unlike her warrior goddess namesake, and the fire of battle continues to burn within her spirit. Additionally, Carmel Jordan notes that the devotion of the goddess Aoife as a warrior and of the Irish rebels to their cause connects to the association of stone in Yeats's poem, in that "too long a sacrifice/can make a heart of stone" (36). Bríd's mother, throughout most of her interactions with Bríd and her siblings, does indeed seem to have a heart of stone. This is felt directly by Bríd through her mother's choice words and indirectly through the actions of Bríd's brothers, Enda and Tad, the former leaving home to move to the Irish Free State and the later advising Bríd of their mother's anger at home.

Capossela has grounded her novel within literature that draws on Irish history and mythology, specifically within the contexts of conflict and women. The symbolic nature of stone and warriors structures the events of the novel, as well as the social identities of women. Throughout the novel, Capossela's characters grapple with their own affiliations of nationalism and womanhood, at times defining the meanings of both identities through their actions and, at other times, letting preconceived notions of alliance and femininity define themselves and their choices. Importantly, Aoife's transition from warrior to mother becomes the foundation for the mother-daughter relationships throughout the rest of the novel. The dichotomy of these two roles – freedom fighter and mother – creates either/or decisions for the women in the novel and shapes their relationships with one another. The influence that these roles have on the characters in the novel changes across generations, reshaping the idea of motherhood and womanhood. Motherhood offers an opportunity to engage differently in one's own relationship with one's mother, as well as begin a new relationship with one's child. Specifically, when the child is a girl, this mother-daughter dyad has the opportunity to shape female relationships across generations.

Mother-daughter relationships, when analyzed within a psychological framework, move through cycles of connection and separation. The way in which each member of that relationship reacts to this cycle is dependent upon her relationship with her own mother or her own daughter. Marianne Hirsch describes the ways in which the mother-daughter relationship cycles through within what Freud termed the “family romance” (*Mother/Daughter Plot* 9). In this paradigm, there are a series of connections and separations that the mother-daughter dyad form in a cycle as part of their relationship. At the child’s birth, the mother is the main connection to the child. As the child matures and realizes her sense of self separate from the mother, the child initiates a separation and gravitates towards the parent of the same sex. For a son, the child would shift to building a relationship with his father; for a daughter, the child would continue to build a relationship with her mother. For a son, the child can return to female relationships as he grows older, with female partners. For the daughter, the cycle of connection and separation continues with her mother or another female figure. Bernie acknowledges that her “mom got jealous of Mia, the only other woman I loved” (Capossela F. M. 2023, 24). This cycle of nurturing connection and separation is one that Hirsch argues extends beyond psychological conventions to allow for and “account for the ambivalences and duplicities contained in the fantasy of difference and singularity, the pull toward complicity, and the difficulties of dissent” (*Mother/Daughter Plot* 11).

Capossela’s novel utilizes the nurturing and separation of mothers and daughters throughout her three generations of women as a guiding source for the impulses, attractions, and nuances of each character’s choices. However, these relationships are framed within relationships to other characters of both sexes which, in turn, mold female character development. Hirsch notes that women’s identities cannot be assessed within a void but must be analyzed within “the patriarchal society and the exploration of gender difference” (“Mothering” 38). This holistic construction and focus of female relationships and identity making places Capossela’s novel outside of early literary narratives dependent upon male characters for progression and within literature in which women advance narratives of their own relationship.

In addition to the cycle of nurturing and separation among mother-daughter relationships, Jane Flax highlights the emphasis of gender difference in the act of mothering. Mothers identify more deeply with their daughters, an aspect of mothering that can intensify the feeling of the mother’s own internal conflict (Flax 1978, 174). This connection between mother and daughter, especially within the framework of a patriarchal family, will embody aspects of “power and esteem” reflective of female roles within family and motherhood, bringing an “awareness” of asymmetry in gender dynamics within society (Flax 1978, 173). For Bríd, this awareness comes in the form of her mother’s religion and the societal norms of Irish women, which is in direct conflict to the personal desires of her mother to participate in IRA activities. Additionally, Flax notes that the stronger bond in mothering between mothers and daughters can evoke “unresolved wishes” from the mother’s formative years (174). For Capossela’s characters, Bríd’s naming of Bernie is perhaps a nod to Bernadette Sands McKevitt, a high-ranking member within the RIRA leadership and the basis for the female character who first

leads, then later haunts, Bríd's memories of driving the car bomb for the organization. Bríd's unfulfilled wish to avenge her sister's death to the fullest and the desire to have participated is reflected in her own daughter's name. Carol Boyd extends Flax's argument of the internalization of inequitable societal values and esteem through social learning practices, in which daughters imitate the behaviors, desires, and relationships of their mothers through practice of those behaviors and engagements (291). Nurturing, as part of the singular mother-daughter relationship, becomes an internalized behavior of mothering rather than just a learned practice (Boyd 1989, 292). This combines nurturing within the societal concept of motherhood. For women within Ireland, this cements motherhood within the context of Irish nationalism as separate and apart from feminism and engagement within paramilitary groups.

Nurturing and separation are two primary themes that weave through the mother-daughter relationships within Capossela's novel. Among the characters in her novel, motherhood is reshaped from an isolated realm to an integrated and flexible identity in which women are both warriors and mothers. For Aoife, womanhood and motherhood are separate realms. Womanhood encompasses her identity as a warrior and an active member of the IRA. The reader never learns Aoife's full involvement with the organization. Aoife alludes to the possibility of involvement in a conversation with Bríd, but never fully discloses it. Upon becoming pregnant, Aoife marries her husband and transforms through motherhood. This transformation leaves her unable to use her anger and fierceness as a warrior. For Aoife, the separation in the mother-daughter relationship cycle does not occur for her but from her. Her fierceness ultimately causes her daughter's separation from her when Bríd moves to the United States. For Aoife, motherhood separates her from herself, leaving her incapable of fully nurturing in her own relationship as a mother.

For Bríd, separation from her own mother transforms her into being a mother herself. In the United States, Bríd is unable to reconcile and reconnect with her mother to continue the mother-daughter relationship. When Bríd becomes pregnant with Bernie, culminating in a premature labor, Bríd realizes that she is able to go through the same situations as her mother, but unlike her mother, Bríd can do them independently. Bríd, upon seeing her husband Dean arrive at the hospital late to Bernie's birth, states, "I was not relieved to see him; I was relieved because, upon seeing him, I knew I no longer needed him" (Capossela F. M. 2023, 181). In this way, Bríd becomes able to be both a mother and devote time to what she wants to do as a woman. Through Bernie's birth, Bríd is able to nurture as a mother, and return as an adult daughter to her own mother. For Bernie, motherhood means being a warrior and making the decision to have an abortion. This decision is what separates Bernie from her unborn child. This becomes not a relationship between Bernie and her child, but a reversed perspective of Bernie and her own mother. Bernie nurtures Bríd through caretaking, the roles of mother and daughter reversed during Bríd's depressive moments. The mental and emotional struggle of Bernie, as she hides her abortion from her mother, is the same struggle her maternal generations experienced in their own separations within their mother-daughter relationships. Among the three generations within Capossela's novel, each experiences nurturing and connection as well as

the inevitable part of the mother-daughter relationship cycle in separation, with the experiences transforming over the course of the book. This transformation becomes a transformation of motherhood into womanhood, merging the identity of mothering with other identities of women and femininity.

Motherhood, as a metaphorical term, extends beyond mother-daughter relationships into the relationship of a country and its people. Ireland, as a free state, is a mother to the people who work towards Irish freedom and unification. The characteristics that embody motherhood include the cycle of connection, nurturing, and separation. Mother Ireland is part of this cycle. Through the birth of an Irish consciousness, the 1916 uprising, and multiple paramilitary groups active across decades, the people of an Irish free state nurture the ideal Ireland while the country endures a separation within itself. While at the border with her mother, Bríd explores this, “trying to feel the line beneath my feet, the evidence of separation” (Capossela F. M. 2023, 4). This idealism conserves the traditional and family values that counter feminism; however, the women’s ability to participate in paramilitary groups merges both the identities of warriors and mothers, in a way similar to the transformation in Bríd, a bridge from the views of motherhood from Aoife’s old to Bernie’s new. Motherhood becomes intertwined into the concept of warrior through the battles fought to be independent of patriarchal family systems; in the case of Mother Ireland, it is to be free from British occupation.

The metaphorical Mother Ireland is additionally a mother to her daughters, the women who fought for Irish freedom and feminist rights (O’Keefe 2017, 170). These women nurture the mother country, while at the same time, nurture the concept of motherhood to extend beyond the boundaries set by Irish nationalism. In this way, mothers become warriors. Female IRA fighters become daughters of Mother Ireland. At times, these women separate, as Bríd did, through moving across oceans or outside of active service, but they return to Mother Ireland to nurture the Free State and to ensure its safety. They feel responsible for fulfilling the wishes and desires of their mother, as well as the asymmetries in power and esteem. In the beginning of Capossela’s novel, Bríd gives a collection of glass bottles to an IRA member for bomb-making, stating that she “had given something secret to my motherland” (Capossela F. M. 2023, 6). The motivations of Capossela’s characters to interact with Mother Ireland lead them to make choices and decisions that alter their own mother-daughter relationships. Aoife feels her own transition to motherhood separates her from her mother country. The violence that consumes Ina separates Bríd from her own mother and into nurturing Mother Ireland through the RIRA. Capossela’s novel is a book about many mothers, including Mother Ireland, and the choices motherhood shapes.

In addition to the themes inherent in motherhood, including nurturing and separation, themes of religion, war, and violence stitch together the mother-daughter relationships within the novel. Religion connects Bríd to a specific time and place, tethering her to her homeland while she lives in Miami and Los Angeles. It connects Bríd to her mother, a devout Catholic. Religion has become one of the few ways left that Aoife can participate in the struggle for Irish freedom. Through her commitment to going to church and engaging in religious life, Aoife becomes representative of

the authentic Irish woman and Irish nationalist. Her devotion becomes an act of war, conflict that she is unable to participate in in any other way. When in deep conversation with an IRA guest at home, Aoife's husband tells her to go cook supper. She does so, with agreement, leaving her conversation, yet Bríd notices her eyes "burning bright as a petrol bomb" (Capossela F. M. 2023, 34). Aoife's participation as a seemingly mild Irish woman, in that moment, was the best way she could embody the authentic, free Ireland. War shapes the physical and relational landscape throughout the novel. It propels the story forward across time, from Aoife's attraction to it to Ina's ignorance of it. War shapes who Bríd becomes as her mother's daughter, while forming her identity as Bernie's mother and shaping their relationship together among the senseless violence in America. The violence of the bombing that kills Ina ignites a passion for violence within Bríd, who seeks revenge by joining the RIRA. Within Ireland, war and violence have a purpose; through that purpose, war and violence cement an Irish identity. Participating in the violent actions of the IRA is, in part, the nurturing of Mother Ireland. Violence, as a theme, extends into the United States, through night club bombings, school shootings, and terrorist attacks. Unlike the violence in Ireland, the violence in America is chaotic and irrational. In Ireland, violence holds purpose and unity in a cause. The violence in the United States is debilitating for Bríd and creates a struggle with PTSD that alters her relationship with her daughter. Bernie sees violence as her own, in her abortion and the taking of a life. She sees this casualty as necessary for her to maintain her own relationship with her mother.

Within Capossela's book, the relationships of the women are unique as mothers and daughters, at times, being both mothers and daughters. For Aoife, Bríd, and Ina, their relationship is constrained by the social conditions of Ireland, and the complexity of their own cycle of nurturing and separation. Little is known in the novel about Aoife's own experience as a daughter; however, as a mother she is as hard towards Bríd as she is soft towards Ina. This lack of knowledge about Aoife's own mother is replaced by Mother Ireland as her guiding force. The conflict for a unified country nourishes Aoife's spirit as she continues to grapple with the shift from warrior rebel to motherhood, a separation that occurred early in her life. Aoife feels that motherhood was a surrendering, a shift towards fighting for Ireland through her children and social participation. Bríd describes her mother in thinking, "if she hadn't been a mother' I thought, 'she would have been a soldier'" (Capossela F. M. 2023, 4). It has caused anger within her that affects her relationships with her children, and particularly, with her daughters. Specifically, with Bríd, Aoife attempts to be a warrior through her daughter's beliefs and actions. When Bríd joins the RIRA, both from her mother's encouragement and her own convictions, Aoife is pleased that she can partake in the Irish struggle, in some form, through her daughter. Bríd reflects on her mother's desire to participate, noting that Aoife's "possibility dwindled at each of our subsequent births" (Capossela F. M. 2023, 10). Aoife's inability to merge her fight for Ireland with her own role within motherhood did not remove her from battle completely. She is a warrior in her own marriage, angry at her husband for both making her a mother and for removing her from her fight. Sean chooses not to participate in Ireland's struggle, militarily or politically, and this needles Aoife. It is a lack of nationalism that drives Aoife to participate in the

struggle through her daughters. Bríd describes her mother as having “treated Ina like a daughter and me like an accomplice” (Capossela F. M. 2023, 61). Aoife treats her daughters differently, with Bríd as a warrior and Ina as a future. With Ina’s death, that future becomes an impossibility and Aoife’s anger is increased through her other daughter. Aoife reminds Bríd of this through the words that cause their separation.

Ina is Aoife’s youngest daughter and is carefree in her spirit. Unlike Bríd and her mother, Ina does not participate in Ireland’s struggles. For her, the identity of being Irish is not constrained by war, violence, or religion. Likewise, Ina embodies modern womanhood, going out in public, dancing, and laughing loudly. This sets her apart for the social expectation of authentic Irish women and from the social constraints placed upon her mother. In Capossela’s narrative, Ina represents the other female, non-sexual relationship for her sister and is the alternate female figure that enables Bríd to engage in the separation from her mother within the family (Hirsch, *Mother/Daughter Plot* 137). This is the figure Bríd gravitates towards to find relief from the desires and wishes of her mother. For Aoife, Ina represents motherhood, separate and apart from the conflict in Ireland. Ina embodies a freedom that is representative of a future Ireland that has already been attained, a free country. Bobby Sands, an IRA member and brother to Bernadette Sands McKeivitt, is memorialized through his statement of purpose for the organization’s violence, that the IRA’s “revenge will be the laughter of our children” (Metres 2021, 22). Ina embodies that laughter of a unified Ireland. In this way, she symbolizes her mother’s revenge. She does not fear the violence, or differentiate between Catholic and Protestant; instead, she goes out dancing and, ultimately, to her death. Ina is already separated from her mother’s ideology; however, because Ina’s free spirit is the outcome of the Irish conflict desired by her mother, Ina returns to the mother-daughter relationship through her mother’s nurturing, both of her daughter and of Ireland’s future.

Aoife’s other daughter, Bríd, is different than Ina. The Irish struggle is ever present in Bríd’s life, guiding her choice and interactions with her mother. Unlike Ina, Bríd is not separated from her mother within their mother-daughter relationship. This is realized through Bríd’s desire to please her mother and gain her mother’s attention through participation in the IRA and RIRA. Unlike Ina, Bríd is fearful of the war and of violence; this fear prevents Bríd from moving beyond her youthful present to Ina’s embodied future of unification. Bríd contemplates this, stating, “I wondered how she had gotten to be like that, while I still felt like a child at times” (Capossela F. M. 2023, 13). When Aoife tasks Bríd with looking after and protecting Ina, Aoife positions Bríd to both fulfill Aoife’s own desire to participate as a fighter and Bríd’s role as an older sister. Bríd is both protecting her sister, as well as the symbolic future of Ireland. When Bríd fails to protect her sister from the bombing, even aiding her in lying to their mother about her whereabouts, Bríd faces her first separation from her mother.

Through the loss of her sister, Bríd experiences both the loss of a relationship and the symbolic loss of Ireland’s free future. While Aoife sees Bríd as a warrior, Bríd’s fear keeps her from telling her mother the truth about her knowledge of Ina’s whereabouts the night of the bombing. Bríd views

this fear as both a failure to live up to her mother's expectations and a failure to protect her sister. In an attempt to resolve her own anger and to reconnect with her mother, Bríd joins the RIRA and drives a car bomb across the Irish border. Symbolically, this is also an attempt to seek revenge for the future of Ireland, cut short in Ina's death. The death of a pregnant woman in the car bombing transforms the concept of motherhood for Bríd, from one of obligation to one of protection. This transformation moves Bríd beyond her understanding of motherhood as a daughter and into her own understanding of motherhood to her daughter, Bernie. Realizing the violence she has engaged in, Bríd reflects that it brought her closer to being her mother, that violence "would turn me into her: pinched, hungry eyes; broken heart; anger throbbing through her like a pulse. I did not want to be my mother" (Capossela F. M. 2023, 125). In her grief, Aoife tells Bríd that she should have been the one to die, rather than her sister Ina. Bríd realizes that, for her own survival through grief, she will need to leave her mother and the Irish conflict. Aoife's five words to Bríd are the catalyst for their separation, both as a natural transition in the mother-daughter relationship and as a reaction to Bríd's refusal to satisfy the desires of her mother. Boyd notes that daughters struggle to separate from their mothers throughout their lives, because "mothers and daughters identify with each other...their individual boundaries are not always clear" (293). Bríd leaves the country without telling her mother or other family members and begins a new life in the United States under her sister's name. This begins a separation within the mother-daughter relationship from which there is little reconnection. Flax states that, "autonomy, rather than being experienced as a way of pleasing the mother and being supported by her, is experienced as a rejection of the mother, for which the daughter in turn will be rejected" (292). Bríd's move to the United States is also her transition into motherhood, as she begins a new life, finds herself struggling with PTSD, and becomes pregnant in a relationship that is damaged by her anger.

For Bríd and Bernie, their mother-daughter relations is transformed from Bríd's own childhood experiences. In America, Bríd lives as Ina, both as a way to keep the memory of her sister alive and to live through Ina's dreams of being in the United States. In this way, Bríd allows Ina to live through her, just as Aoife lived through the actions of Bríd. As in Ireland, there is violence in America, but for Bríd this violence lacks the purpose of the Irish struggle. It is a chaotic and traumatizing violence that triggers Bríd's PTSD and depression, causing her to have sporadic employment and setting her own patterns as a mother later in her life. Bernie is symbolically conceived in the aftermath of violence. When Bríd makes her way to a bar to recover from the news of a mass violence event in the United States, she meets Bernie's father. Months later, when Bríd reaches out to her own mother to tell Aoife of Bríd's pregnancy, she is told by Aoife that Ina's birth was "a bloody war" (Capossela F. M. 2023, 174). Labor and motherhood are viewed as a battle, in which Bríd becomes a warrior. In this space and time, not only does Bríd battle through labor, but she also fights to remain a mother while Bernie is in the NICU. For Bríd, her identity as a mother only remains as long as she has a daughter; motherhood is secured through Bernie's ability to live. Bernie's birth is a rebirth for Bríd, as she realizes she can live independently of male figures within the narrative. This independence is

something that Aoife was not able to attain in her own life, and Bríd's ability to be independent becomes another separation from her own mother. Boyd observes that "in a society that equates maturation with autonomy, affiliation with others is often seen as a failure to mature, although effective mothering cannot take place without it" (293). This newfound autonomy for Bríd enables her to be a better mother for Bernie than Aoife was a mother to her.

From Bernie's perspective, the roles of mother and daughter are reversed in her relationship with Bríd. Bernie cares for her mother during episodes of depression and PTSD, taking care of herself and distancing her own friendships. Bernie observes that when Bríd is angry, her accent appears, "like anger pulled her back to that old home" connecting Bríd to Aoife (Capossela F. M. 2023, 166). When Bernie seeks out her own separation from her mother, and rashly conceives her own pregnancy, it is done with the same conviction and impulse as Bríd joined the RIRA. It is Bernie's decision to prove something to herself and her relationship with her mother. Once Bernie realizes that she is pregnant, her choice for abortion and motherhood is enabled by where she lives. As an American, she is not constrained by the choices available to her, like her own mother and grandmother. Bernie chooses not to tell her mother about her pregnancy. She realizes that the secret she keeps will be the catalyst of separation from her mother, the "icy chill of the severance yet to come" (Capossela F. M. 2023, 138). Flax states that "as an adult, the daughter repeats the process by thwarting her daughter's moves toward autonomy" (179). Bríd enables this pattern of protection by always asking Bernie to return home and taking her out of school when Bríd is concerned about violence.

The death of Bríd's father initiates her return to Ireland and Bernie's realization of her mother's true identity and heritage. Upon travelling to Ireland with Bríd, Bernie meets her grandmother, who treats Bernie as she did Ina. To Aoife, Bernie is the future, and the only one who is still able to give the future "laughter of children" to Aoife. Bernie's abortion takes place while she and Bríd are travelling along the same route that Bríd presumably drove the car bomb years earlier. Bernie notes that her mother drives this route with familiarity. In this way, the route becomes symbolic of war, through participation in the RIRA and through the violence of maternal labor. Unlike her mother, who feels that her daughter's life maintained her own identity of motherhood, Bernie believes that the process of labor enters her into motherhood, regardless of the life of her child. Bernie's decision to have an abortion and maintain her own relationship with her mother is the sacrifice that a mother would make to secure her family and future.

Capossela draws upon her own family heritage and experience as a daughter within the text of her novel. She notes that while she was writing *Trouble the Living*, Capossela worked with her own mother on a short film, during which "we were either on fire or at each other's throats...we were both looking back at our family's past. Both of us trying to understand ourselves, each other" (Capossela, "My Mother"). Capossela's novel intertwines the narrative of mother-daughter relationships within the historical and cultural context of Ireland's struggle for unity. The geographical shift of the characters from Ireland to the United States aligns with the shift in concepts of motherhood and nurturing, while still securing ties to each individual's past. The narrative of motherhood is not solely

one in which women are shaped by maternal circumstance; instead, the choice made by individuals as women and the engagement in identity-making shapes the notion of motherhood itself. Through Capossela's novel, the connection between mother and daughters is apparent, particularly in the ways those connections shape our choices and, for women, the people we become for our own daughters.

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