

“Introduction: Sinead O’Shea’s *A Mother Takes Her Son to be shot*”

By Brian McIlroy

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Documentaries about Northern Ireland or the six counties or the North have been made continuously since 1968, first about the troubles themselves and the historical context, and more recently, twenty years after the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the after-effects and evolution of that conflict.

Three documentaries of note have been made in the last year or two:

- 1) *I, Dolours* (director Maurice Sweeney), a documentary about Dolours Price, now deceased, who admitted involvement in the IRA killing in 1972 of Jean McConville, a widowed mother of ten children. McConville was abducted and murdered by an IRA unit called “The Unknowns” because they believed she was an informant.
- 2) *No Stone Unturned* (director Alex Gibney) , examines the 1994 Loughinsland murder of six men in a pub by loyalist killers. He reveals the incompleteness of the investigation and names potential killers. Two of the production team were recently arrested in Belfast by the PSNI on the charge they had stolen documents in their possession.
- 3) The film tonight, *A Mother Takes her Son to be shot* (director Sinead O’Shea.) An examination of dissident republican justice in Creggan, Derry for what is perceived as anti-social (drug related) behaviour by a young man.

What links these three films together, and numerous more, is policing, or, more accurately, the lack of legitimacy in regular policing. In a sectarian society that has experienced a trauma lasting 30 years of civil unrest or war, even twenty years on the effects of it are extremely damaging. In the Canadian context, we are aware that the trauma of the residential schools and the forced separations of children from their parents have negatively impacted three generations at least. In Northern Ireland, it’s estimated that more people have died by suicide than died by violence during the conflict. It’s hard not to think that unresolved policing and questions of legitimacy have played a part in establishing this depressing statistic.

Efforts have been made to make the PSNI more representative of the community at large. Catholics now comprise 33% of the police force whereas the figure was only 10% twenty years ago. However, in staunch republican and loyalist areas paramilitaries still exercise control. And this is what Sinead O'Shea is struggling with and as you watch it's quite natural to wonder and think about the ethics of her approach. I'm sure you'll find the film thought provoking.