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Mother Ireland: The Dilemma of Motherhood and Nationalism in Eavan Boland's *Domestic Violence*

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Abstract:

In her poetry, Eavan Boland (born 1944) challenges the inherited image of Irish womanhood and interrogates the Irish tradition that has ignored the feminine and transformed it into a muse. In *Domestic Violence* (2007), Boland attempts to recast the female poet and citizen into real identities and real voices. Having lived most of her life in diaspora between London, Ireland, and the United States, she feels disoriented and disconnected from a place called home or motherland. This, however, does not diminish her desire for belonging in any way. Questioning whether national space and identity are domestic, Boland examines domestic violence in the highly patriarchal Irish society while simultaneously studying the violence innate to both gender and national identities. For Boland, the familial relationship between the biological mother and daughter is skin to that between the female citizen and the nation. This paper will focus on the way Boland challenges the notion of the disempowered woman by re-examining the "Mother Ireland" myth. Boland is acutely aware that a poet cannot write outside the influence of culture and history. In her poetry, she questions the silencing of Irish women in Irish history in an attempt to reclaim the lost voices of the past. Thus, Boland's poetry, which deals with the everyday experiences of a woman in relation to contemporary issues as well as mythology and nationalism, shifts the focus and perspective of traditional Irish verse.

Eavan Boland, in her poetry, attempts to overlap the binary opposition she inherits from Irish poetic tradition such as woman and poet, history and myth, and ordinary and poetic experience to introduce women in her poetry not as a symbol or emblem but rather as the subject in poetry. Bolan's poetry deals with tensions between traditional Irish definitions of woman, history, and myth. By attempting to tell the truth about women's role in Ireland and recovering these women's lost history, Boland challenges the myth that dominated male poetry because it oversimplifies both concepts of femininity and nation. Boland's concern is representing the silenced lives of Irish women as a reaction to the stereotyped image of women in Irish cultural traditions.

As a result of Irish nationalism, women in Irish society are marginalized and excluded from political and public life. Nationalism is gendered in the sense of representing relations to political power. Therefore, Irish patriarchal society deals with women as the bearer of children and keeper of the home and positions them as "Other" in Irish society. Thus, Irish women writers deal specifically with the relationship between domestic and political violence. The main focus of their writings is the theme of women and the nation. They revise and resist national and traditional myths that marginalize and exclude women from public life, such as the "Mother Ireland" myth. Irish women literature, especially poetry, provides in general terms a space that enables women to resist the homogenization of the nation that is related to the discourse of Irish nationalism.

Irish nationalism disempowered women in which fixed gender roles marginalize and subjugate Irish women. According to Catholic values, a woman has to confine to the home for the sake of the nation. Heather Ingman remarks that, "Fixed constructs of gender thus played a central role in the building of the Irish nation. Politics and public life were regarded as masculine sphere and women were confined to a single identity, the domestic" (12). Her role as a woman is to ensure the stability of the nation and family. Traditionally, Ireland was constructed as a woman victimized by the colonizing English male. In this sense, Ireland appears in literature as a passive woman always needs protection, and her sons will sacrifice their lives for her. As Irish men sacrifice their lives for mother Ireland, Irish women embody the purity of the Irish nation. Ingman points out that, "A certain female behavior, based on chastity and purity, guaranteed the purity and alterity of the Irish nation" (7). In this sense, Ireland appeared in literary tradition as either the mother or Virgin Mary.

The connection between femininity and nation leads to oversimplification of the image of motherhood. The idea of "Mother

Ireland" is central to the Irish literature and Irish nationalism. So Irish literary tradition deals with the woman as muse, in which the cultural construction of women depends on the image of woman as muse. In this sense, poets use them both for creative inspiration and a foundational part of Irish national identity. Thus, the role of female citizens becomes more difficult. As Elizabeth Goldberg illustrates one such particular difficulty for the female citizen in *Gender, Narrative, Human Rights*:

> Woman has historically carried several tropic burdens in relation to nation, including, in her chastity, symbol of the nation's honor, and in her maternity, culture-bearing for the nation. The tropological implication of "nation" contains an implicit paradox, a paradox that relegates women and the nation to be in need of masculine protection, but also that the nation must be male in its power relations. (97)

This kind of gender differentiation determines both national and individual ideologies. It structures women's obligations and duties within national and domestic spheres.

Moreover, this feminizing of the nation leaves no space for women to represent their distinctive needs. In Ireland, women are national resources. Tricia Cusack adds that the ideological view of women as natural mothers dominates their public role as citizen in Ireland, which enhances the sense of organic community (558). Eavan Boland, in her essay "Outside History," refuses this allegorical use of women in Irish literature because it enhances the passivity of women. She believes that the fusion of national and feminine simplify both. Therefore she decides to remain an outsider of Irish history to be able to repossess it (32). Boland finds herself rejecting the conventional understanding of national identity as presented in Irish literature.

In Patriarchal societies, gender is one cultural aspect that defines the nation. Nationalism is established generally as a gendered discourse. According to Karyn Stapleton and John Wilson, gender shapes the national identity and locates it within the national context; while national and cultural conceptions of masculinity/femininity define gender identity (46). For the nationalist ideology, women are considered the mothers of the tribe. Cusack remarks that, "The burden of national 'parenthood' is carried by women, although the head of the 'family' is generally male" (543). In Irish society, women represent a special symbolic status according to the nation, which consequently constructs them as other. Nira Yuval-Davis adds that, "they are often excluded from the collective 'we' of the body politic, and retain an object rather than a subject position … In this sense, the construction of womanhood has a property of 'otherness'" (47). The exclusion of women from the public life of the nation in Ireland leads women to be imprisoned in stereotypes of Irish womanhood, not of their making.

Irish male poets personified Ireland as a woman and they simplified this female figure as either giving birth to soldiers or waiting for a survivor. Therefore, the real women in Irish society were muted and rarely appeared in poetry. They were objectified and mute. Women were muted not only in the poems but also as writers of poetry. It is hard to become a female poet. Irish women poets, on the other hand – especially in the last decade – resist this image. Among them is Eavan Boland who tries in her poetry to break this silence and sheds more light on the real female experience. Boland asserts that Irish male poets dealt with women as motifs in their poetry, and she cannot approve this image both as a poet and a woman. She adds: "The women in their poems were often passive, decorative, raised to emblematic status. This was especially true where the woman and the idea of the nation were mixed: where the nation became a woman and the woman took on a national posture" ("Outside History" 33).

The problem of representing woman as an icon of the nation lies in excluding her from the collective body politics and the productive sphere of culture. The woman, in this sense, becomes passive and powerless. However, the process of equating women with mother not only excludes them from the society but also deals with them as an object rather than a subject. Therefore, Boland's poetry articulates itself as a struggle to resist such mythic icons which "silent feminine imagery in the lore of the nation" (*Object Lesson* 70). In other words, as Irish tradition portrays women as an icon, it leaves no space for these women to represent their authentic self. Boland is aware of women's situation in her country, and throughout dismantling this patriarchal mode of representation, she engages in replacing such mythic icons by paying attention to the personal and ordinary female experience.

Many women writers have engaged with Irish history by highlighting the cultural contradictions of this history. In doing so, Paul Keen remarks that, "their poetry becomes a kind of critical performativity that highlights the extent to which entrenched narratives are products of often invisible, always highly complex, social relations" (20). Boland states that her business, as an Irish woman poet, is to recover the experience of the previously silenced women to incorporate them into Irish literary history. She utilized the ideas and images of the past to challenge the conventional understanding of the present. In doing so, she re-engaged the reality of womanhood and national identity by illustrating and laying bare the struggle for self-determination as a challenge both for the nation and for women ("Outside History" 36). Boland believes that Irish history tradition misrepresents and exploits women, so she explores the concept of "Mother

Ireland." By mingling the feminized idea of national identity with the form of lived reality, she challenges the idea that a woman is a mere symbol.

Eavan Boland, in her writings, explores the exclusion of Irish women from the political and cultural history of their nation. In Irish traditions, the representation of women reinforces the ideology of patriarchal power. As Cusack points out, women are then identified with the "apolitical institution of the family rather than with the national polity" (546). Therefore, Boland aims, throughout her poetry, to draw attention to this kind of exclusion which leads to the sense of loss in different generations of women. In *Domestic Violence* (2007), Boland traces a direct relationship between public and private, social and domestic, in both physical and mental spaces, which inevitably involves issues of history and gender.

To shed more light on the issues of gender, history, and nationalism, Boland places the Irish political situation in a metaphorical relationship to woman's domestic life. Anne McClintock asserts that the iconography of familial and domestic space determines the nation (63). Thus, Boland, in *The Domestic Violence*, chooses domestic space to examine the relationship between gender identity and nationalism. The poem entitled "Domestic Violence" shows how political conflict affects the private sphere. Boland writes,

Everything changed the year that we got married.
And after that we moved out to the suburbs.
How young we were, how ignorant, how ready
to think the only history was our own.
And there was a couple who quarreled into the night,
Their voices high, sharp:
nothing is ever entirely
right in the lives of those who love each other. (8)

Boland opens the book by asserting the connection between marriage and history, which can be seen as eventual marriage to Ireland. While the "quarrel" in the poem is initially set up as perhaps, an overheard disagreement between a couple across the street, by the end of the poem, it becomes clear that it is not the case. The narrator and her husband are not just listening; they are actively involved in the conflict. The narrator asks:

As for the couple did we ever
find out who they were
and did we want to?
I think we know. I think we always knew. (10)

Throughout the conflicted association with Ireland, Boland seeks to define her role with a "home-land," her poems question what role her status as a woman plays in this relationship. Therefore, in *The Domestic Violence*, in general, the nation is a metaphorical representation of the domestic home. And nationalism for the citizen is synonymous with loyalty to this home.

Irish nationalism is a crucial factor in the creation of the identity of Irish citizens. The troubles in Ireland created moments of nationalistic goals in which war, violence, and conflict inherently increase the sense of loyalty and patriotism in citizens. Though after the troubles have ended, the issue of nationalism remains particularly relevant for women, whose voices have historically been silenced by the patriarchal traditions. In this context, Boland questions whether national space effects on domestic space. Consequently, she studies the national violence that is related to both gender and national identities.

Throughout her poems, Boland attempts to refigure the term domestic by equating violence upon women within the personal home to the violence enacted upon women in the public sphere both socially and politically. In "Domestic Violence," Boland creates the domestic space as a troubled one, highlighting the conflict with the nation as the overarching theme of the whole book. She tries to equate the personal to the public sphere, the domestic violence or the tension that is grounded in home and the distant echo of a terrible war outside this home. Boland wonders the difficulty of building a private life, of building a family, in a house whose little television gave out "grey and greyer tears / and killings, killings, killings / and moonlight-colored funerals" (9).

Ultimately, the narrator in "Domestic Violence" questions her situation, asking "over and over *what else could we have done?*" (10). As Helen Kidd states, the concept of the house or the home relies upon the kinds of domestic silence that reside within the actual home and the home as a nation (35). The sadness that appears in this poem shows the narrator's awareness of her boundaries and fragile foothold over domestic harmony. Her speech is equally disempowered in both spaces, the public and the private one, and these verbal limitations trouble her. Deborah McWilliams asserts that, "Boland's poetry envisions the ordinary world of domesticity and the affinity between the private environment of family relations, and an individual's sense of place within the public arena" (320). Thus, Boland highlights the connection between political conflicts with all cases of violence against women. In Ireland, womanhood has long been subject to confinement, whether in the domestic or public sphere. In "Domestic Violence," for instance, the couple overhearing their neighbor quarreling while pictures of killings and bloodshed appeared on the television. Also, in "Histories," Boland imagines her mother in the kitchen and "her apron with the strings tied / twice behind her back and the door left wide" (17). The kitchen as a domestic space is connected to the public sphere:

That was the year the news was always bad
(statistic on the radio)

the sad
truth no less so for being constantly repeated. (17)

Boland remembers the trouble in Irish society throughout the memory of her mother within the domestic sphere.

In her poetic project, Eavan Boland attempts to re-conceptualize what is historically important to reclaiming a woman's place in this history. In other words, Boland's prime project in her poetry is to demythologize and re-historicize the female image. According to Deborah Sarbin, this requires a rejection of the idealized, dichotomized versions of women appears in Irish poetry (86). Moreover, Boland, in her poetry, seeks to restore women's previous silenced voices. In "Silenced," Boland returns to the Greek mythology – the myth of Philomel – to highlight the silence of Irish women. In the poem, Philomel "determined to tell her story / another way" (16). Pilar Villar-Argaiz, in "Between Tradition and Modernity," adds that Boland, among other Irish women poets, attempts to expand the boundaries of traditional poetics to represent women as active subjects of poetic creation, not just passive objects or decorative emblems (118). After raping her, Philomel's brother-in-law cut off her tongue to prevent her from telling others the story. She finds her way: "She began tapestry. / She gathers the skins, colours. / She started waving" (16). Then, Boland combines this story with the Irish situation:

she never saw me enter.
An Irish sky was unfolding its wintry colours
slowly over my shoulder. An old radio
was there in the room as well, telling its own
unregarded story of violation. (16)

Boland, according to Villar-Argaiz, "forges a link beyond temporality and cultural difference between the Greek legendary figure and the ordinary Irish girl" ("Between Tradition and Modernity" 128). At the end of the poem, Philomel "is pulling out crimson thread" (16) to tell her own terrible story and talking about the untold. Boland is not only comparing private and public history but also calling attention to a serious problem in modern Irish society. In this poem, Boland's concern is the relationship between gender and violence. Philomel represents other silenced Irish women. Hence, Boland believes that there is another way to tell the story.

To repossess the idea of a nation, Boland challenges the conservative images of the past. In doing so, she re-engaged the reality of womanhood and national identity, by illustrating the struggle for self-determination as a challenge for the nation and women ("Outside History" 36). In "How Dance Came to the City," Boland mingles the colonial history with female experience. The violence of the war started with the appearance of the English soldiers in Irish shores. She refers to colonial violence: "It came with the scarlet tunics and rowel-spurs, / with the epaulettes and their poisonous drizzle of gold, / with the boots, the gloves, the whips, the flash

of the cuirasses" (16). In this poem, again, Boland mixes between public and private. She moves from the ballroom into a private bedroom where a young girl experiences the violence of a colonial soldier:" the secrets of the dark will be the truths of the body / a young girl feels and hides even from herself as she lets fall / stain from her thighs to her ankles, as she let herself think" (12). Boland emphasizes that politics affect the private sphere, and women are subject to political violence more than men. Boland's poems, according to Bertrand Rouby, show how political tensions echo in the domestic sphere in which the images of burglary and rape convey the internal struggle (6). The private space becomes, at the end of the poem, an unsafe place where "her face flushed and wide-eyed in the mirror of his sword" (12). Like "Silenced," Boland portrays the domestic sphere as a troubled one where women experience violence because of gender both politically and socially.

Being aware of women exclusion from Irish history culturally and politically, Boland believes that she cannot rely on the concept of the nation as a foundational process of identity formation. She aims to draw attention to this act of exclusion. In "Irish Interior," she returns to history – "the year is 1890" – to portray the gender discrimination in Irish society: "The woman sits and spins. She makes no sound. / The man behind her stands by the door. / There is always this: a background, a foreground" (20). For Boland, women in Irish society make no sound, and those women need to create alternative ways to articulate their relationship to history both individually and collectively. Rouby asserts that there are numerous caesuras created by full stops in this poem which convey an impression of confinement (4). Boland draws a line between public and private, where both spheres are not safe for women.

Boland observes a woman's domestic life, forced upon her by a patriarchal society, as characterized by passivity, limitation, impotence, lifelessness, emptiness, and loss. For Boland, Irish nationalism complicates women's lives. In her collection of autobiographical essays, *Object Lessons,* Boland recounts how Irish women have always been excluded from the writing of Irish history. She points out that she aims to give eyesight to "a woman we never know and cannot now recover" (5). In "Windfall," Boland witnesses: "A small funeral finds its way in and out of shadow." It is the funeral of a young woman: "This is the coffin of a young woman / Who has left five children behind. There will be no obituary. / Words are required elsewhere." (42). Boland emphasizes that Irish society excludes women, so their deaths are natural. She illustrates: "We say Mother Nature when all we intend is / a woman was let die, out of sight, in a fever ward." (42). Stef Craps remarks that Boland's poetry since 1980 has been marked by an acute awareness of the epistemological and ethical problems related to the

recovery of the experience of the subaltern or oppressed subject (166). Boland's endeavor is not only to give voice to a subaltern woman but also she tries to recover what lies outside history.

She wants the reader to pay attention to the nameless and impoverished woman. Then she loudly asserts, "Now say *Mother Ireland* when all that you mean is / there is no need to record this death in history" (42). At the same time, it is for the sake of "Mother Ireland" that citizens' death is demanded and ultimately accepted. This death is sacrificial and "patriotic" as it is for the national cause. As Mother Nature takes the woman without an obituary, Mother Ireland takes the citizens. Both deaths are seen as good and natural, as well as silence, wordless, and unremembered.

In *Domestic Violence*, Boland attempts to recast the female poet and citizen into real identities and real voices. In this collection, she questions her role as a woman in a nation that she loves and resents for its treatment of women. In "Letters to the Dead," Boland demands:

> How many daughters stood alone at a grave,
> and thought this of their mothers' lives?
> That they were young in a country that heated a woman's body.
> That they grew old in a country that hated a woman's body. (38)

In these lines, Boland repeats "in a country that hated a woman's body" twice to emphasize that Irish society excludes and disempowers women for decades. So at the end of the poem, she writes: "They asked for the counsel of the dead. / They asked for the power of the dead. / These are my letters to the dead" (38). Boland realizes that historical national violence will no longer be recognizable, yet the suffering of women in Irish society is the same. As a woman and Irish poet, Boland feels that she has the right to reinterpret the past of Irish poems as well as the present (Villar-Argaiz, "The Text of It" 59). In this poem, Boland declares her desire to reinterpret the Irish history:

> If I could write it differently,
> the secret history of a place,
> as if it were a story of hidden water, known only
> through the strange acoustic of a stream underfoot
> in shallow grass it would be this –
> this story. (37)

In examining Irish history, Boland finds out that woman is not only excluded from this official history, but she also recognizes that this history ignores women's suffering. She realizes the importance of engaging lived experience in the creative process to challenge the idealization of woman as a nation which reduced the female image to an ornamental figure. According to Keen, Boland's writing represents a commitment to the renewal of histories that previously dominate narrative of the nation (26). Boland challenges this dominant narrative by introducing a counter-narrative.

In "The Text of IT", her interview with Villar-Argaiz, Boland states, "No artist can really represent the past. They can only represent their own view of it" (53). In "Still Life," she recreates the history of Famine from her point of view to shed more light on women's suffering. In this poem, Boland asserts: "I believe the surface of things / can barely hold in what is under them" (14). She argues that male-dominant narrative ignores women. In "Still Life," she criticizes William Harnett's painting, "Old Violin." She tells her readers:

He became a painter.
He painted objects and instruments, household and musical.
He laid them on Canvases with surfaces and textures
no light could exit from. (14)

He was a realist and his "Old Violin" became a symbol of Irish Famine but he ignored the suffering of women in this disaster. What you can find about this in official history is what Boland portrays in this poem:

the same year the *London Illustrated News*
printed an etching of a woman.

On one arm was a baby – rigid, still.
In her other hand was a small dish.

They called it *Woman Begging at Clonakilty*. (14)

The official narrative could not represent the real suffering of the woman. Also, William Harnett, the great realist, failed to recognize that, "(The child, of course, was dead)" (15). The Irish tradition deals with women as a symbol of the nation but ignores her suffering and needs. In her interview with Villar-Argaiz, Boland remarks that "there is a difference between the past and history, but in certain circumstances a version of history can actually suppress what is really happening" (54). Boland distinguishes between history and the past. She tells Villar that history is an official version of events, it is "a constructed narrative," while the past, for Boland, "is a place of silences and losses and disappearance." She remarks that this gap between those two narratives gives her a motive to challenge certain concepts" (53). Writing poetry for Boland is an attempt to give voice to those silent marginalized women by deconstructing the Irish discourse of nationalism.

According to Keen, the redoubled colonization of Irish women leads to the simplified images of femininity within the nationalist discourse. Boland, he continues, would refigure nationalism in the image of women not as ornaments bit but as individuals who experienced their desires and struggles (26). Boland consistently explores the role of women in history

and their understated legacy. In "Inheritance," she asks her role as a woman in this history:

This is an island of waters, inland distances,
with a history of want and women who struggled
to make the nothing which was all they had
into something they could leave behind. (33)

Boland's purpose is to challenge received stereotypes and conventional understandings of gender and identity as expressed in the national and familial consciousness. Women in Irish tradition have nothing to leave to their children so, Boland opens the poem: "I have been wondering / what I have to leave behind, to give my daughters" (33). Boland moves from private inheritance to public one. Legacy in the poem is not only "silver" and "silk," but it may be the land or the homeland which Boland declares: "The ground I stood on was never really mine. It might not ever be theirs." (33). Deborah Williams points out that Boland's poetry reimagines the ordinary world of familial relationships and the sense of place within the public sphere (320). Boland criticizes traditional Irish patriarchy, which disempowers women. She asserts that because of Irish patriarchy, she does not know much about these women, but she needs to know more about them.

Remembering the past is crucial to Boland's developing political thought. Throughout memory, Boland problematizes the state of public and private in her work. This dynamic relationship between private and public spheres highlights the importance of gender to the debates of memory. According to Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, "What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender" (6). Boland focuses on traditional female roles and values that Irish tradition excluded from poetry. Therefore, she returns to the forgotten voices and experiences of women in Irish history to recover this cultural amnesia. Boland does not ignore the existing Irish tradition, but she attempts to make the figure of the woman more representative. In "Wisdom," Boland believes in the "art of memory" to represent women and edit legends:

In this place, archeology was not a science,
nor a search for the actual, nor a painstaking
catalogue of parts and bone fragments, but
an art of memory and this, I thought, is how
legends have been, and will always be, edited – (18)

Boland relies on remembering the past and retrieving ignored voices, in finding her place in Irish past, present, and future. She knows that there is a gap in this history because it ignores and excludes women, so she realizes that, "There was silence. No one looked up. Or spoke / And then I knew I need to tell you something" (19). Boland is aware of her battle with the

notion of Irish nationhood and its traditional feminine expression, which leads to alienation and exclusion of female experience in Irish history.

Boland asserts that national literature has not only simplified women, but it has deprived them of the past and has rendered them to silence whatever the language they use. This silence, as Villar-Argaiz remarks, inscribed within the nature of poetic language itself ("Recording the Unpoetic" 473). In "In Coming Days," Boland imagines a confrontation with old Shan Van-Vocht, who traditionally refers to Ireland and means poor old woman. Boland tries to tell Irish women that poetic sentiments in male poetry betrayed them:

> I will speak to her. Even though I know
> she can only speak with words made by others.
> I will say to her: You were betrayed.
> Do you know that? (68)

Boland's concern is to recover the excluded voices from Irish poems. She challenges the stereotypical icon of Ireland and tries to talk to her. But, the "poor old woman" has no power of communication in herself because this traditional image imprisoned her. She has not her own words; she "can only speak with words made by other." Consequently, when Boland tells her that she is betrayed and "There is still time, I will tell her. We can still / grow older together," (68) the only answer she has was the refrain of the old song "*Yes! Ireland shall be free, / From the centre to the sea*" (68). Jody Allen Randolph, in her book *Eavan Boland*, remarks that Boland meets old nemesis of nationhood and silence, but form a place of power. However, Boland, according to Randolph, meets Shan Van Vocht not to reclaim her but to reject her as a source of suppression for women (172). Boland believes that women of the Irish past were defeated. Yet what she "objected to was that Irish poetry should defeat them twice" ("Outside History" 34). Therefore, in this poem, Boland opens a conversation with the figure of stereotyped, feminized Ireland to dismantle this image. Boland does this because, as she declares at the end of the poem, "I almost loved you" (69).

Boland challenges the notion of the disempowered woman by re-examining the "Mother Ireland" myth. She realizes that a poet cannot write outside the influence of culture and history. She remarks that Irish poems simplified women "most at the point of intersection between womanhood and Irishness" ("Outside History" 33). Therefore, in traditional male poems, the nation became a woman, and that woman turned to be a national muse. Thus, Boland decides to work within the national discourse to represent women as a human being, not an emblematic image. She challenges Iris poetry, as she portrays in "Instructions," which "is an art that had always loved young women. And silent ones" (67). In her poetry, she introduces the

silencing of Irish women in Irish history and attempts to reclaim the lost voices of the past. In "Instructions," Boland encounters Irish poetry to create a new one. She addresses the Irish women: "Now take the syntax. Break that too. What is left is for you / and you only" (67). She decides to recover the experiences of the previously silenced and to incorporate their silence into Irish literary history to make it more complete and representative. She challenges the idea that a woman is a mere symbol; all that remains is "A dead tree. The future. What does not bear fruit. Or / thinking of" (67). She attempts to write her poetry that reflects her own experience.

Thus, Boland's poetry, which deals with the everyday experiences of a woman, with contemporary issues as well as mythology and nationalism, shifts the focus and the perspective of traditional Irish verse. She believes that Irish poetry never admitted to a woman, so she suggests to "make use of feminine imagery." But that is all. The true voice and vision of women are routinely excluded ("Outside History" 36). In "The Nineteenth-Century Irish Poets," she remarks: "Now I see what it is they left us. The toxic lyric. / The poem for which there is no antidote" (62). Her strategy is to combine the female ordinary experience with poetic experience. In "Outside History" she remarks:

> I thought it vital that women poets such as myself should establish a discourse with the idea of the nation. I felt sure that the most effective way to do this was by subverting the previous terms of that discourse. Rather than accept the nation as it appears in Irish poetry, with its queens and muses, I felt the time had come to rework those images by exploring the emblematic relation between my own feminine experience and a national past. (37)

She understands the difficulty of being a female poet in Irish society. To imagine the lives of women outside the historical cliché, she balances between the past and the domestic experience that she has experienced. According to Christy Burns, Boland struggles to construct lost histories by creating the concrete details with which she is intimately familiar. Burns adds that, "This may be a tricky endeavor, but it enables Boland to reclaim an aspect of Irish culture that has been recalled only through abstraction and cliché" (217). In "Violence Against Women," Boland combines historical details of the industrial revolution "Which emptied out the cottage and hillsides / and sent men and women down to Hades" (65) with her familiar experience of writing poetry:

> O empire and the arranged relations,
> so often covert, between power and cadence,
> tell me what it is you have done with
> the satin bonnets and the pastel sun, with
> the women gathering their unreal sheep
> into real verse for whom no one will weep? (65)

Boland's main concern is to record the ignored histories of women in Ireland. She writes about real women. She attempts to invent a space for women to reclaim their own experience and gain power over their bodies and their history. She needs to help those who appeared in this history as "Mindless, sexless, birthless, only sunned / by shadow, only dressed in muslin" (65). Her main aim is to create this space where:

> Wheels turned, the jenny worked, a plain-
> spoken poetry was chanted by the flow
> and finished them. They were the last to know
> what happened in this north-facing twilight,
> the aftermath I saw here, staring at
> an old site of injury, a hurt
> that never healed and never can. (65)

Attempting to see women as a subject of Irish poems, Boland believes that the shift from being the object of the poem to the subject of the poem creates tension. In her interview with Micheal O'Siadhail, Boland asserts that in the last decade image, and myth are changed, and women "have gone rapidly from being the object of the poem to being the author of it" (22). As a female poet, she challenges the Mother Ireland myth to be able to redefine the concept of nationalism and citizenship.

Boland lives most of her life in diaspora between London, Ireland, and the United States, so she feels disoriented and disconnected from a place called home or motherland, which by no means decreases her desire for belonging. In "Our Own Country," Boland explains her feelings: "for all I know we have always been – / exiles in our own country" (22-3). Throughout the conflicted association with Ireland, Boland seeks to define her role with a home-land, her poems question what role her status as a woman plays in this relationship. In "Becoming the Hand of John Speed," Boland wonders: "How do you make a nation," and then she replies: "I have no answer. I was born in a nation / I had no part in making" (54). She returns to her personal experience to portray her sense of loss:

> I remember the way it was when I was young,
> wanting the place to know me at first glance
> and it never did,
> it never did, and so. (54)

For Boland, personal memory reflects the dominant power structure of her poetry. Lucy Collins points out that Boland's repeated return to the scenes of her childhood insists on the all-encompassing character of this dynamic for ethical debates in both gendered and postcolonial settings. According to Collins, individual experience, a web of social relations, and behavior expectations create identity, so public narratives reveal the texture

of private experience (27). Therefore, Boland emphasizes the relationship between subjective perception and the experience of earlier generations. Hirsch and Smith assert that individual or cultural identity is a story that stretches from the past to the present and the future, in which gender and other related identity makers connect the individual to the group (8). That is to say, Boland attempts to store these stories that have been forgotten or erased from the historical records.

Boland's concern for the exclusion of women from cultural and political history in Ireland leads her awareness of the effect this exclusion has on all acts of representation. In her poetry, Boland often lays bare the unfavorable position that women take amid the male-centered Irish poetic tradition. By re-aligning women's history and national history, Boland challenges the national and patriarchal Irish society. She revises the idealization of women to create a space for these women to be visible and heard. Moreover, as Catherine Nash asserts, Irish women are often portrayed in terms of the idealization of motherhood and are therefore irrevocably bound to home and tradition (47). In other words, Irish mal poets traditionally imagined women as homely and lovely. Simultaneously, they have been subordinated to and marginalized by the confrontation between British colonialism and Irish nationalism. Boland rejects the conventional understanding of national identity as represented in Irish literature which leads to marginalize and subjugate women.

She recognizes that being a mother is essential in the relationship between nation and identity, but the mother here is not the emblematic mother as in Mother Ireland myth, it is the ordinary mother in the suburb. Boland realizes that it is through her two daughters that she has to accept, understand, and even appreciate her Irishness. Separated from them, she has been left with little sense of how to address this sudden loss of identity. In "On This Earth," the speaker talks to her daughter, and at the end of the poem, she declares: "My first daughter you were my dove, my summer, / my skies lifting, my waters retreating, / my covenant with the earth" (32). Boland uses the land as a metaphor for her maternal relationship with her daughters. Her sense of Irishness is only rooted in her role as a mother looking after her children. For Boland, the familial relationship between the physical mother and daughter is the same relationship between the female citizen and the nation. Moreover, Boland blends personal memory with history to shed more light on the new Irish identity.

In *Domestic Violence*, Boland explores the interrelationships among self, memory, and family to challenge the concept of the nation as represented in Irish poetry. Andrew Auge remarks that Boland seeks to make the national consciousness more representative by expanding the cultural image of women, replacing the mythic icons of a woman with a more authentic portrait of a woman in the domestic life (121). Boland

shatters the iconic figure of motherhood by attending carefully to the actual maternal experience.

She expresses more private and personal female experience to empower those women and strengthen their voices. She constructs poetry from the everyday experiences of women to write her poetry that is related to her own experience. She is interested in private self, as she tells Villar, "I seemed to be elevating the life of motherhood, the life in a suburban house, the life of domesticity to be a subject matter that had a claim on the Irish poem" ("The Text of It" 61). For Boland, motherhood is a source of inspiration which connected her not only with the experience of other women but also with Ireland.

Her relationship with her daughters resembles her relationship with Ireland, where she experiences the sense of loss and the necessity of a mother's separation of her children. Auge suggests that Boland sees the mother as a "split subject," a self that is divided by her desire to an intimate encounter with the other (123). She combines her sense of loss as a mother with the landscape to express her desire to connect with Ireland. In "To Memory," she experiences this sense of loss:

> My last childless winter was the same
> as all the other ones. Outside my window
> the motherless landscape hoarded its own kind.
> Light fattened the shadows; frost harried the snowdrops. (40)

She mixes her personal experience with the landscape to expand her sense of loss. According to Auge,

> By extending this vision of mother as "split subject" to Mother Ireland, Boland elicits a conception of national identity, that like maternal subjectivity, is open to heterogeneity, dehiscent rather than integral, dispersed rather than consolidated, centrifugal rather than centripetal. (123)

Boland works within the Irish cultural sphere to introduce a new image of women, which is more natural and more representative. Boland reclaims the voice of the woman in Ireland by expanding this voice to include a wide range of women and classes. She is doing this by emphasizing the image of the mother, which is far from the image of the iconic mother in Irish tradition. She aims to write in the margin of what is considered the subject of poetry by introducing everyday experience into the domain of poetry.

Burns argues that Boland's focus on motherhood may seem narrow to feminists who have worked to expand the range of models open to women (221). Yet, Boland declares that she could not be a feminist poet because she writes about a world familiar to many women. She points out, In *Object Lessons*, that she both experiences and expresses such life. She

adds that, "One part of the poem I wrote was in light, the other in shadow. As a woman the life I lived – its daily-ness, its complexity – had been given a place of passivity and silence in the very tradition that had given me my voice as a poet" (184). Boland's poetry visualizes the ordinary domestic life of Irish women and the relationship between the private environment of family and an individual's sense of place within the public sphere. In her interview with Randolph, Boland emphasizes this idea because she believes that "the poem is a place of experience and not a place of convictions … My poems have nothing to do with perspective; they have to do with the unfinished business of feeling and obsession" (125). Boland confronts the poetic traditions that silence women by writing as an Irish woman. Moreover, motherhood can be a positive force that connects women to each other and to nature and fosters a liberating knowledge of self.

By using the motherhood metaphor, on the other hand, Boland refers to the powerlessness of women in Irish society. According to Laura Lojo-Rodriguez, the motherhood metaphor helps Boland to illustrate her argument. She points out that by extending her vision of motherhood to Mother Ireland, Boland "elicits a conception of national identity, which like the maternal subject, is open to heterogeneity and ambivalence" (113). Boland attempts to portray motherhood as a complex experience full of contradictions. Throughout her poetry, Boland paves the way for a new cultural and literary discourse. At the end of her poem "To memory," Boland introduces a new female identity: "and I am telling you this: you after all / not simply the goddess of memory, you have / nine daughters yourself and can understand" (41). Boland uses Greek mythology to distant herself from inherited poems. By doing this, she tries to challenge the iconic female figure in Irish poetry.

In *Domestic* Violence, Eavan Boland challenges the simplification of the discourse of femininity and maternity in Irish cultural nationalism. She questions her role as a woman poet in the Irish literary tradition that excluded women for decades. She challenges "Mother Ireland" Myth that dominated Irish male poetry. Therefore, Boland advocates the importance of portraying the particularities of women's ordinary lives to replace the iconic female figure in Irish tradition. In her poetry, she highlights the experience of real silenced marginalized women. For Boland, Mother Ireland turns to be an ordinary woman in a domestic as well as a public sphere. In *Domestic Violence*, Boland challenges the discourse of Irish nationalism that reduces the woman to a mere symbol by equating the violence against women in the domestic sphere with violence against women in the public arena. Boland manages to deconstruct the myth of Mother Ireland by introducing an ordinary experience of a mother in the suburb.

الملخص:

الأم أيرلندا: معضلة الأمومة والقومية في العنف المنزلي لإيفان بولاند

لمياء حسن ابراهيم عبد العال

حاولت ايفان بولاند من خلال أشعارها أن تتحدى الصورة النمطية للمرأه فى أدبيات الشعر الايرلندى و التى حولت المرأه الى مجرد الهام للشعراء مما أدى الى تجاهل حقيقة دور المرأه فى تاريخ ايرلندا. ففى ديوانها "العنف المنزلي" حاولت بولاند ان تقدم الصوت الحقيقى للمرأه الشاعره رغم علمها بالصعوبات التى تواجه المرأه الشاعره فى أيرلندا. فعلى الرغم من أنها عاشت معظم حياتها بين ايرلندا و انجلترا و الولايات المتحده الامريكية الا أن هذا لم يمنعها من التعبير عن الواقع الايرلندى من خلال فحصها للعنف الناجم عن المجتمع الابوى و الموجه للمرأه على المستويين العام و الخاص. هذا العنف الموجه للمرأه على وجه الخصوص لكونها أمرأه أدى الى اشكالية المرأه المواطن و علاقة المرأه بالفكر القومى الايرلندى. و لذلك فان بولاند أعادة النظر فى أسطورة "أيرلندا الأم" التى سيطرت على الادبيات الذكوريه فى أيرلندا من خلال اعادة احيائها للتاريخ المنسى للمرأه فى أيرلندا من ناحية ومن خلال تصويرها للحياة اليومية العادية للمرأه من ناحية أخرى للتأكيد على أن هذه المرأه انسان حقيقى و مواطن حقيقى. بعبارة أخرى فان بولاند ركزت على الحياة العادية للمرأه فى مقابل المرأه الاسطوره فى الشعر الايرلندى القديم من أجل تمكين هذه المرأة و اعطائها الحرية فى التعبير عن نفسها كمواطنه ايرلندية حقيقية.

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