

Violent Realities: Stories of Adaptation and Change from an Irish Minority

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Abstract

The small Irish Protestant minority has had complex, blurred and dramatically changing relationships with roles of both victimizer and victim. It has moved from an alignment with forces of British colonial power to extreme marginality, persecution and the threat of extinction following Irish political Independence. In the last decade it is coping with sudden acceptability and growth. It has moved from being mildly aligned to Britain to being quite fiercely Irish and has been variously (and often simultaneously) execrated, marginalized, silenced, silent, depressed, superior, patronized and patronising.

Utilising Foucault's notions of discourse, power and resistance, this paper explores a small number of vignettes emerging from a recent narrative research inquiry into Irish Protestant identity. The paper draws also on Bronwyn Davies' concept of positioning through language and social interaction to increase, challenge and complicate our understanding of the layered, nuanced and often contradictory dynamics of victimhood and victimizer in that evolving scenario.

Key Words

positionality; violence; social constructionism; power; victimhood; narrative

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Prologue

There is a temptation to seek only the voice ...of participants that is easily discernible, easily understood, easily translatable, easily heard; what we seek Is a normative voice...that ignores the errant voices, the silent voices, those that demand hard listening. (Derrida, 2001, p. 698)

The spring sunshine shone down as we searched for a family grave in the burial-ground surrounding the tiny Protestant church, deep in the remote hinterland of rural Ireland. Surprisingly there were several other people there, searching too, on that Spring Bank Holiday Monday. We exchanged greetings, chatting as we traced weather-worn lettering with inept fingers or parted weeds in pursuit of half-forgotten resting places.

Unexpectedly I came across a small gravestone almost obscured by long grass. The information on the stone was minimal; just the names of two young brothers, the Pearson boys, differing dates of birth and the same date of death in the 1920's. And the caption 'Never forgotten'. In a country where memorials to injured or killed members of the Republican movement abound in virtually every village, there was nothing to indicate *their* story. Protestant victims of a local IRA 'incident', they had been dragged from their parents' farm, blindfolded and shot in the genitals. Father and older brothers away at a Gospel meeting, their mother and sisters were forced to watch, at gunpoint, as the boys bled to death. Later the same day, the barn and farmhouse were burned to the ground. Their story is just one of many tales of sectarian violence which rocked and terrorized the small Irish Protestant minority in those troublous days of political independence. It, and similar tales, are rarely spoken of, and then only in whispers, even within the confines of the Protestant community - still today. In mainstream spaces, these stories continue to be denied or explained away by the majority community.

I looked up as two of the other visitors to the graveyard approached; both middle-aged women, sisters, I suspected, by their similarity of feature and coloring. We'd spoken earlier.

'Ah' said one, 'The Pearson lads.'

There was a long pause.

Then: 'Sure they were related to us. Their mammy was a cousin of Grandma's.'

Another pause.

'Of course we never spoke about it.'

Nodding silently, I felt speechless before all that was left unsaid.

Whenever stories of violence, murder or persecution enacted against the Irish Protestant minority were hinted at they were rigorously denied, silenced or discarded by the majority community. Only now, as scholars of various disciplines unearth such tales, are they beginning to be accepted as a factual strand in the dark weave of Irish history. Of course the above vignette highlights the issue of physical violence against members of a minority group; it also notes however, the issue of silence. This paper explores the use of silencing as a tactic of domination in Irish society, particularly focusing on its operations in the context of the tiny minority site of Irish Protestantism. For decades this particular grouping, despite its small numbers, constituted the only organized minority of any size or coherence. By its very presence it contested the hegemonic versions of Irish history, culture, religion and identity which obtained from the foundation of the State in 1922 until the 1970s and 80s (Fanning, 2002). The paper also highlights a little recognized effect of those processes of muting, and one which is core to the introductory vignette presented above - the silencing of the religious minority's own stories of experience and identity.¹

Introduction

Growing up in 1960s Ireland, in a context where my parents' families had been religiously mixed for generations, left me with a strong sense of the susceptibility of minorities to the influence and exercise of majority power. In the decades following political independence, Irish society was suffused with the hegemony of Catholic nationalism (Fanning, 2002). This continued (albeit in somewhat dilute form) well into the 1970s and 80s. It was expressed in State legislation, in bureaucracy and perhaps more significantly in the minutiae of everyday interactions, conversations and relationships. While the overt physical violence had

¹ Dynamics of violence, oppression, silence and silencing have been variously used by state, ecclesiastical structures, and community, in both Northern Ireland (which remains a political entity within the United Kingdom) and in the Irish Republic. For a variety of reasons the experience of the large Catholic minority (48% of the population) in Northern Ireland has been well documented. The experience of the tiny Protestant minority in the Irish Republic (some 4% of the population) remains largely unexplored, receiving minimal attention. Due to immense historic, demographic and cultural differences it is difficult to create meaningful comparisons between the disparate experiences of these two communities and certainly outside the scope of this piece. As a consequence this article focuses solely on the unique experience of Protestantism within the Irish Republic.

been ameliorated, silencing as another form of oppression had taken its place. It was less visible in its operations, but arguably of no less significance. Social oppression, either physical or psychological is an expression of the power of the dominant groupings of society; Michel Foucault (1993) argues that the expression of such power is both dramatic and insidious in its operations. He contends that its capillary actions reach “into every grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). He argues that the uncritiqued power of the dominant interest groupings of a society is manifested both in the assumptions and in the rituals of that society, marginalizing and silencing alternative ways of seeing and doing. He notes that the influence of this power is rarely obvious to the majorities who exercise it (Ryan, 2006).

In a form of double silencing, the political and religious majority maintained that Irish Protestants were free from any form of discrimination and lived contented lives in a benevolent and forgiving State. Positioned, as a child, *between* majority and minority tribes, things seemed much more complex. Such hybrid positioning, where one draws on the often-competing knowledges and experiences of more than one culture, are, as Olesen (2005) suggests, rarely comfortable. They can however offer a rich and varied view of otherwise occluded realities; in particular they present a unique viewing place whence the operations and effects of the exercise of power may be observed.

Purposes of the Article

In this article, I reflect on a small sample of the stories which emerged during the course of that research. The stories reflect on a number of themes relating to silencing and silencing as acts of domination. The fear (or actuality) of extinction for the Protestant minority constitutes a background meta-theme. Some of the stories included are those of participants in the research, however a number of autoethnographic elements are also included. The article opens with a brief introduction to the background of the Irish Protestant minority. It then considers narrative inquiry, including autoethnography, as a very particular form of research and foregrounds the significance of social, as opposed to solely physical, expressions of violence. The article then presents the stories with a commentary on the themes involved and ultimately closes with a number of conclusions.

The narrative exploration supports not only the deeper understanding of one minority and its experience, but also the development of deeper and richer frames of reference for conceptualizing the complex connection which exists between victim, victimizer, survival and resilience, minority and majority relationships.

Introduction to Irish Protestantism

Prior to the achievement of Irish political Independence in 1922 Irish Protestantism had largely been identified with the mechanisms of British colonial power (Cooney, 1999). As a small minority, it had maintained its influence and day-to-day security by its association with an historically oppressive regime. A significant minority among its ranks however, had strongly contested this positioning. They had become nationally recognized leaders in the long fight for political freedom and for a Gaelic cultural revival. On the achievement of national independence, the role of Protestants in these areas was briefly recognized by the new Government and as quickly forgotten. Almost overnight members of the religious minority² passed to a position of extreme marginality and vulnerability.

The Theocratic State

In the early days of the State's specifically theocratic existence there were many episodes of physical violence against the Protestant minority: murder, disappearance, burnings and assault were not uncommon (Biagini, 2012; Murphy, 2010; Maguire, 2004). For a decade, members, particularly those living in remote rural areas, lived in terror of death threats and the late night knock on their door (circumstances revisited in the 1970s when the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' were at their height). On the cessation of violence there followed generations of psychological marginalization and social 'othering'. The religious minority survived in a State which until very recently was rigidly controlled by a reactionary Roman Catholicism, where Government policy, law and public opinion conformed to a particularly rigorous assumptive world informed by the teachings of the Catholic Church. New (or revised) Government policy proposals had to be examined and approved by the Catholic hierarchy before they could even be presented for debate by the Dail (Parliament). What was enacted as law, was law as accepted by fundamental Catholicism.

² The Protestant minority was until recently the sole religio-cultural minority in Ireland of any size or coherence. Despite the number of nationalist patriot leaders who came from its ranks, it was seen as having a very particular positioning due to its history and historic connections with English colonization. This has changed dramatically in the last twenty years as Ireland is evolving into a multi-cultural society.

Decline

In this context, Protestantism represented the only minority of any size or coherence embodying a range of alternative attitudes to culture, spirituality, morality, ethics, education and medicine which contested dominant discourses and practices. In response, its adherents were defined as heretics, interlopers and of questionable Irish identity. Conformity to a particular religious ethos and an interconnected political position were assumed to be the only acceptable form of Irishness. In such an inhospitable context, and aided by an extraordinarily draconian application of the *Ne Temere* Papal Encyclical (which demanded that all children of Catholics marrying those of other, or no religion be brought up Catholic), Protestants fell from 11% of the population in 1911, to just over 3% in 1996. Until only a decade or so ago extinction appeared inevitable. In such a context, the traditional religious minority was variously execrated, marginalized, silenced and silent, its *lietmotif* transformed to be as invisible as possible. Its leaders rarely spoke out against discrimination or to support the legalization of contraception or divorce or other liberalizing agendas. The community has been, often simultaneously, oppressed, detested, patronized, and often accorded a genuine respect for its different moral and ethical stances and for its stubbornness in remaining. It has coped by erecting impermeable social boundaries, creating parallel social communities, by silence, depression and withdrawal. And at times by quiet outrage at the assumptive worlds of the majority, as well as by quiet activism and resistance.

Change

In the last fifteen years sudden and dramatic shifts in Irish society, sourced in increasing secularization and globalization, economic boom and bust and the crises of sexual abuse in Catholicism, as well as significant levels of immigration, have created a situation in which Protestantism has experienced dramatic changes in its positioning. It has suddenly become a courted other, an alternative perceived as encapsulating the values and identities of a postmodern Ireland. Its schools, churches and the ranks of its leaders are thronged with erstwhile Catholics. The ambivalence with which such moves are greeted by the minority, as well as the implied changes to identity, spirituality and community coherence, have together created a fresh range of challenges – survival of a different kind has become part of the agenda.

Identity

Since the foundation of the State, identity in Ireland was viewed as absolutist and bipolar. In this process, Catholicism was constructed as the *sole* expression of true Irishness (Ruane & Todd, 2009). In contradistinction, as suggested above, Protestantism, its perceived ‘opposite’, was defined as politically, culturally and theologically other - and foreign. Other forms of minority paled into relative insignificance in relation to this superordinate reality. In processes of mutual reification a Catholic ‘us’ was defined in contradistinction to the Protestant ‘other’ and vice-versa. In this context there was an unwillingness to recognize the connectedness of the two communities and how each played a function in creating a foil against which the identity of the other was delineated and upheld. ‘An awareness of the enduringly oppositional nature of their tradition(s)’ (Tobin, 2012, p. 6) was central to the creation of the self – and of the other. And both were tied together in what Browne (2000) describes as the ‘yard-brush’ effect: both communities inextricably glued to opposite ends of a metaphorical broom handle, and tied inexorably to responding to the mutual push and pull factor of each other’s movements. There was a profound mirroring of each other’s actions and feelings in the dialectics of identity building and maintenance.

Despite an increasing awareness of complexity, legacies of this construction retain a definite potency which emerges in the stories which are at the core of this piece. An emerging complexity and fluidity in the weave of identity construction continues to be undergirded by a certain essentialism.

Violence

Ireland has had more than its share of violence, both North and South of the political border which divides it. Violence is a complex and multi-faceted entity. Traditionally acts of direct physical aggression were privileged in its definition. While it is essential to recognize direct forms of physical aggression, Scheper-Hughes (2004) reminds us that, “Focusing exclusively on the physical aspects of violence...misses the point [and] subverts the larger project of witnessing, critiquing and writing against violence, injustice and suffering” (p. 1). Violence is a very broad category- it includes physical, social and psychological expressions and the foci of its exercise embrace national, international, communitarian, domestic and both inter and intra-psycho sites (Woodward, 2007).

This chapter invites attention to systemic silencing as an often occluded but significant form of violence against minority groups. And one in which minority groups can themselves become complicit. Denial of minority reality and enforced silencing are often used by majorities, or those in power to mask, repudiate or minimize a variety of forms of aggression

towards minority groupings. In the process, acts of physical or psychological violence, murder, torture and death (Green, 2006) are occluded. Such operations of enforced muting represent a different form of violence to the minorities whom they effect. Denial of a groups' experience itself constitutes an additional and profound form of violence. Muting and denial both constitute significant processes of violence; such pursuits function to validate the position of elites, and to conceal their involvement or complicity in such activities.

Frequently the very normality of its exercise, and its familiarity, render such violence invisible and uncommented.³ The social and psychological violence of silencing, marginalization and repression often goes unremarked upon, too, because of the social insignificance of the groups against whom it is exercised. Such forms of social violence are frequently the lot of minorities. Scheper-Hughes (2004) contends that we "need to understand violence as encompassing all forms of controlling processes that assault basic human freedoms and individual or collective survival. Our task is to recognize these gray zones of violence which are, by definition not obvious," (p. 22).

There is a strong relationship between power and violence, be that physical, psychological or social violence. Traditional forms of violence have, in the thinking of Foucault, given way to acceptable expressions articulated through the techniques and technicians of 'legitimate' organs of government (Foucault, 1977).

Utilizing Foucault's notion of discourse (Ryan 2005) this paper focuses on an exploration of the 'softer' forms of social aggression which are often the backdrop against which a minority operates and in whose context it makes sense of its world. An understanding of such discourses allows a broadened understanding of what allows violence of any kind to be legitimated within a society. In focusing on the experience of a particular minority, the paper also emphasizes, with Foucault, the 'claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledge against the claims of a unitary body of theory that would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge' (1980, p. 83).⁴

Narrative Inquiry

³ An interesting expression of 'silence' is the almost complete absence of critical commentators, or authors of Irish Protestant background or domicile, who deal with this multi-faceted topic. The emergent grouping of academics and writers addressing the area are almost all Catholic, non-Irish, or Irish Protestants now living abroad (e.g. Biagini, Crawford, Fanning, Inglis, Maguire, Tobin, Trevor).

⁴ While many Irish Protestants are middle class and well educated, those from an urban or rural working class background tend to have been particularly vulnerable. As a grouping whose accounts are frequently disregarded, they are deliberately over represented in this research inquiry.

The discipline of narrative research recognizes stories as unique conduits - lived and told filters, through which humans engage in the projects of building lives, relationships, collectivities and schemas of meaning making. Narrative theorists argue that story-making and storytelling are both *primary* and active modes through which human beings make sense of their world and their experience (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2008; Speedy, 2008; Frank, 2004; White, 1990). Stories are seen as a rich entrée to the assumptive worlds through which people make sense of their lives and experiences (Walsh, 2015). Narrative research is a very broad discipline in that it uses stories in a variety of different ways with a view toward *wondering* or *hypothesizing* about human behavior and assumptions. In keeping with its post-positivist origins it honors *tentativity*, contesting the notion of ‘research findings’ as objective or ultimate truths about the highly complex and interwoven world of social phenomena. In this study I present and explore stories of participants in the research, but also a number of autoethnographic vignettes. In autoethnography researchers present stories of *their own* experience, as part of a subgroup or subculture; they become mediums, simultaneously part of two worlds, using their own experience to describe and to convey a sense of a lesser known context. Rather than being concerned with notions of objective reality, I seek here to convey a sense of *‘how things seemed to be’* as a member of that minority world. While autoethnographers ‘write about themselves, their goal is to touch a world beyond the self of the writer’ (Jenks, 2002, p. 174).

Rigor

It is important to recognize that autoethnography in particular (and indeed narrative inquiry in general) is both rigorous and demanding as a research pursuit. Both call for reflexivity, critical insight and conceptual engagement on the part of the researcher, which are highly challenging. Davies (2006) warns against sloppiness and self-indulgence in the practice; to be effective it must be rigorous, questioning and forensic. Narrative inquiry (including autoethnography) privileges the subjective experience and the subjectivity of both participants and researchers, and aims to convey the *feel* or *texture* of what it was like to be in the midst of the experiences which they describe in an evocative way that moves both head and heart.

Contesting Silence

Narrative inquiry also positions itself as an effective attempt to contest the silencing which often operates in the majority world to render mute minorities or those who are socially marginalized. In doing so it contests the ‘conditions of inarticulation’ (Barton, 2011, p. 440)

which often characterize minority or marginal experience. It is hence a particularly useful vehicle through which to explore the particularities, as well as the wider contexts of physical or social violence. 'Narratives invite us as listeners, readers, and viewers to the perspective of the narrator' (Reissman, 2008, p. 9), privileging the importance of feelings and emotion.

Such explorations can open to critical viewing the larger, and often occluded, processes of silencing and marginalization which are at the heart of social or physical violence. And narrative engagement can reveal possibilities for reflection, agency, change and transformation for individuals, for groups, and at times for society (Richardson, 1997, p. 58).

The Stories

The first story, an autoethnographic piece, paints something of how Protestants were perceived in the wider communities in which they lived; sections of that community who were geographically marginalized and perhaps economically challenged were particularly vulnerable. The story is set in around 1960; the influence of the Irish Catholic Church was at its zenith and infiltrated everything - family life, relationships, communities and the whole political system. The tale implicitly charts the isolation of the Protestant minority and it very explicitly points to how they are seen as heretics, aliens and usurpers of Irish land. In this unenviable context, it describes the response to one small community's (ultimately foiled) attempt to resist an all but overwhelming tide and to strategize for its survival.

The vignette is included as it echoes themes appearing in a number of stories shared by participants in the fieldwork. The convictions expressed in the vignette were not often made *explicit* in everyday relationships with Protestants, nonetheless they were strongly conveyed and *felt*. As a child of about eight, I was hearing the unvarnished reality, embedded in a conversation between Catholic adults about Protestants. I was, I suspect, as a child, assumed to be more or less 'safe' - hence naked attitudes were expressed without need for dilution. The vignette describes a conversation between my uncle, Ned, and a neighbor of my long dead grandmother. My Father's family, of which Uncle Ned was part, were rigid Roman Catholics and Nationalists (with the exception of a branch in Australia who had 'turned' to Protestantism and were consequently never mentioned). My mother's family were strongly Protestant in ethos, spirituality and proud of their Irish identity. They tended to be more tolerant (or perhaps as a minority, more careful about expressing their views) toward Catholicism. Like most of their co-religionists they were pre-occupied with the survival of their own community and its distinctive values and ethos. Growing up in a very divided society, I had learned as a very

young child to negotiate religio-cultural boundaries with care. Perhaps that is why the detail of this story had been so indelibly imprinted on my mind.

Desperate Remedies

I'm sitting, aged about eight, sprawled over the old table in the warm cocoon of Mrs Byrne's farmhouse kitchen. The room is large and worn; a kettle simmers on the decrepit range; an array of interesting underwear undulates gently on the ceiling rack suspended over its heat. In the corner nearest the door there's a stack of fishing gear and a pile of muddy boots. I always liked coming here; the untidiness was novel and there was an enveloping friendliness in the disarray. A picture of the Virgin hung on one side of the chimney and a 'Sacred Heart'⁵ on the other; all very different from my own family's negotiated eschewal of any iconography. Usually too, there was a cat, and sometimes kittens to play with. When I tired of these, Mrs Byrne would produce a book or crayons; a mother and grandmother herself, she understood that an eight-year-old needed something to do while the adults chatted. My Uncle Ned, sitting close to the range and drinking a cup of strong tea, was paying a courtesy call on these old acquaintances of his long dead mother, my grandmother. Occupied with a packet of broken wax crayons and a half used coloring book, I drew and listened vaguely to the adult conversation. They were catching up on the news of the area.

"Did ye hear tell about the Gilberts?" asked Mrs Byrne. "Did ye hear tell the news about Ian?"

"No, I don't think so," responded my uncle.

I knew the Gilberts slightly; they were one of the few Protestant families remaining in that part of the county and, living on its outskirts, the only ones left in the village.

"Well, ye know there was only Ian left at home, an' the parents were gettin' worried for an heir for the land. It's not much of a place, but they got it in Cromwell's time. Sure like the resta' them, they're part of his mob that robbed us of our land. Of course the old pair were always terrified Ian'd marry a Catholic...that way we'd 'a got our land back. Sure there's hardly any of their kind left 'round here now, thank God." She laughed. "Sure wasn't it the likes'a them caused the Famine."

There was nothing surprising to me in her sentiments; the history books used in the Catholic school I attended were full of the same. But I sensed, rather than saw, Ned eyeing me, slightly uneasily. Maybe he wondered what I would report at home of the conversation. You had to be careful about stories dealing with religion, particularly around 'mixed' families.

⁵ Pictures of Jesus with bleeding heart exposed, usually with a small red light burning before them were, and are, normative in virtually every rural Irish Catholic home.

“Well didn’t they have a family conference, when the rest’a them were home from England during the summer, a few years back. They had the uncles, an’ their minister, an’ all. I remember the evenin’ well, with the crowd there. We wondered what was goin’ on. I thought they must be havin’ one’a their oul’ prayer meetin’s or whatever they do have. Well anyway the news leaked out eventually: didn’t they decide to get some money together and send Ian off to work for a while in England. They thought for sure he’d get a Protestant wife there. Sure they’d do anything to keep goin’.”

“I heard he went away, right enough,” responded Ned.

“Well, an’ didn’t he come back too, an’ a wife with him! But you’ll never guess what! Wasn’t she an English Catholic. Seemingly she didn’t practice an’ Ian thought it’d work out fine. But when they arrived back here, wasn’t Father Murphy up like a shot!” She winked. “An’ he had her and the Gilberts sorted in five minutes flat. Any children would be brought up Catholic and that was that!! He wasn’t goin’ to let them get uppity an’ cause any repeat of the Fethard-on-Sea⁶ business in his parish!” Mrs Byrne threw her head back and laughed uproariously.

Ned shifted uncomfortably and then smiled, “Well I suppose that’s the way it goes.”

“Jesus, the old couple near went into a depression with it all. Sure there wasn’t a thing they could do, without bringin’ the whole of the village down round their heads. I’d say George, the Daddy, is havin’ nightmares about givin’ First Communion money to the grandchildren when the time comes! It’ll surely kill him!”

The peals of Mrs Byrne’s laughter rang through the kitchen again.

“Ye may be sure what goes around comes around! Good enough for the English! That’s what I say. The whole village near broke their hearts laughin’.”

A couple of years later, back again in the same kitchen, Mrs Byrne announced that the Protestant school had now been closed.

“Their aul’ school is gone now; the prospect of Ian’s children was its last hope for survival!” she announced.

Visiting a few years later again, we saw the windows of the Protestant Church in the village had been boarded up, the gate was padlocked and rusted, and weeds had taken over the once

⁶ This was a particularly notorious and well publicised case in the 1950s when the Church of Ireland partner in a ‘mixed marriage’ sent her children to the local village Protestant school in defiance of the papal *Ne Temere* Decree. The violent and vociferous reaction of the press, politicians and Catholic hierarchy supported the social and economic boycott and terrorisation of the small local minority community by the surrounding Catholic majority. A resolution was only achieved when President DeValera, under mounting international pressure, prevailed upon the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin to have an end put to the boycott. The plight of the Gilberts was one of many similar, if less extreme experiences, which were recounted to me during my research, but which, unlike Fethard-on-Sea, achieved little or no publicity.

neat pathway. Later, over strong tea and new baked bread, Mrs Byrne commented: “Did ye hear? The parish priest has bought the land and we’re building our brand new chapel right next their aul’ church; sure that’ll fall down an’ there’ll be nothing left of it! B’ Jesus they’ll know who’s boss here soon, an’ no mistake!”

English invaders, thieves of Irish Catholic land; emissaries of the hated Cromwell; persecutors of the only true religion, a prime causal factor in the Great Famine of the 1840s; these were all assumptions which underlay Mrs Byrne’s attitude. There was nothing surprising to me in her analysis. I also knew that my mother’s family railed quietly against these attitudes and the ascriptions of non-Irishness projected upon them. Converts to Protestantism generations back, they were of largely Celtic stock.

Ireland of the ‘fifties and ‘sixties was riddled with such views. I encountered them daily in the history, Irish language and religion classes of my Catholic school, from friends, neighbors and from my father’s extended family.

Dominant Assumptions and Discourse

Foucault’s concept of discourse provides a useful lens to explore these assumptions, their power, and more particularly, the operations of that power which privilege the dominant assumptions of a particular society and mute those which are different or threatening to the *status quo*. The concept of *discourse* is theorized as the mechanism through which power is expressed (and a tool through which its influences can be made visible) in a society. Discourses are defined by Burman (1994) as ‘socially organized frameworks of meaning that define categories and specify domains of what can be said and done’ (p. 2). More specifically Ryan (2005) argues that, “Discourses are regimes of knowledge constructed over time. They include the commonplace assumptions and taken-for-granted ideas, beliefs systems and myths that groups of people share [...] [they] articulate and convey formal and informal knowledge and ideologies” (p. 23).

The Functions of Discourse

Discourses have three basic functions: through them the social majorities in any society order, see and make sense of the world and their experiences of it and define the nature and parameters of what is accepted as ‘true’. It was the particular combination of political and ecclesiastical power that lent such a potency to the discourses of Irish Catholic Nationalism; anyone outside of this description was by definition other, non-Irish. In the above vignette

identity was reinforced by the definition of the Gilberts as ‘other’, traitors and foreigners. Secondly, through being taken up in the discourses which are regnant in a particular society or culture, members of a dominant grouping enter into a shared grid of common understanding with others, which reinforces shared systems of meaning, facilitates communication and simultaneously excludes and marginalizes those whose meanings, behaviors and assumptive worlds do not accord with these. Arguably the emergent Irish State needed this clarity to define its identity. This was particularly so as it sought to define itself in contradistinction to centuries of colonial rule. Thirdly, discourses maintain the power of a particular society’s elites through privileging certain knowledges, assumptions, behaviors and ways of being which then come to be seen as normative, rational and acceptable (Ungar, 2004; Ryan, 2001). Mrs Byrne’s tirade certainly had the effect of marginalizing the Protestants in particular, but it simultaneously validated the unquestioned power of Church, and government, and of a particular version of Irish history and culture. And lastly Davies invites attention to the nature of discourse; any dominant assumptions are not ‘real’ or ‘objective’. Rather they constitute selective narratives which play ‘a powerful part in shaping what we take to be real, and that ‘the real’ is a more or less a powerful set of fictions, albeit fictions with powerful effects’ (2006, p. 2).

Discourse and Power

Irish society of that time was riddled with the hegemony of Catholic nationalism. The President, Eamonn De Valera proclaimed Ireland as ‘a Catholic nation, the moral authority of the Catholic Church was enshrined in the 1937 Constitution’ (McKay, 2000, p. 352). This was expressed not just in State legislation and bureaucracy; perhaps more significantly it was manifest in the minutiae of day-to-day relationships. Foucault (1994) argues that the power of certain interests and positions in society is manifested in language and dispersed and made effective in everyday social encounters and relationships. This process is almost dramatically demonstrated in Mrs Byrne’s tirades. She conflates religious and ethnic identity, defining the Gilberts as “English”; the reality that they had lived in the community and worked their small farm, which she defines accurately as “not much of a place”, for almost four hundred years was irrelevant. Like the Gilberts, one branch of my mother’s family had also come to Ireland as Cromwell’s foot soldiers. They were deeply committed to Ireland and to the community of which they were a part. However they countered the dominant assumptions which saw Catholicism as a *sine qua non* of Irish identity, with a broader and more inclusive definition of Irishness. And they worked tirelessly for an Irish society which was just and inclusive of all

religions. Common and repeated ascriptions of non-Irishness outraged and upset them. “How long does it take to belong? Isn’t three hundred years long enough?” queries the Anglo-Irish writer, Elizabeth Bowen (1999, p. 170).

Social Context

During the course of the research from which this article is drawn, I became aware that forebears of the Gilberts had played a leading role in the 1798 Rebellion against English oppression. This reality had been obliterated; it did not fit with the dominant discourses of the time regarding Irish Protestantism. Of course, while Mrs Byrne’s is the active voice in the vignette, her views are tacitly, if uneasily validated by Uncle Ned’s agreement. Davies (2008) invites attention to the significance of social context and exchange as a site in which dominant assumptions are explicitly and implicitly acted out. She highlights the potency of everyday attitudes which reflect the themes of dominant veracities and their efficacy in suppressing and undermining all but the dominant versions of reality. This she terms as the ‘ongoing repetitive citations of the known order, citations that offer some a viable life and at the same time deny it to others’ (2008, p. 173).

Operations of Discourse

A stark element in this vignette is Mrs Byrne’s assumptive world. Another significant element however is the operation of these assumptions in community life - to which she makes reference. Ian has married an English woman, and ironically a Catholic, albeit a non-practicing one. Innocently his assumption is that this will enable any children of the marriage to be brought up in the Protestant faith and to attend the Protestant school. The minority community in the area is tiny, its survival hanging by a thread. In such situations, common throughout Ireland at the time, one family can make the difference between minority survival and extinction, between mono-culture and tenuous plurality. The *Ne Temere* Papal Decree insisted that all children of marriages between Catholics and those of other faiths (or none) must be brought up Catholic. While the Decree received State enforced sanction in the Irish courts in 1952, there was also another force at work, the effective policing by local communities. Couples who defied *Ne Temere* came under huge pressure from the dominant Catholic community to conform.

Mrs Byrne makes reference to Fethard-on-Sea where a ‘mixed’ couple defied the Decree. Their action resulted in a boycott of the small Protestant community, the Protestant owned shop and the village music teacher (McKay, 2000). Ultimately the boycott was only

suspended further to the intervention of Eamonn DeVelera, the President, acting under international pressure. Other non-compliant couples frequently emigrated to avoid such circumstances. Mrs Byrne sees nothing amiss in such a situation. She jokes that Father Murphy, the Parish Priest, had the threat of non-compliance “sorted in five minutes.” Any children of the marriage would be brought up Catholic. Ian, now deceased, ultimately had fourteen grandchildren. Many live and are bringing up their children in the area where he and his forbears lived. But with Ian’s death, ten years ago, Protestantism was rendered extinct in that corner of Ireland. And similar versions of this scenario are repeated throughout the country. In an increasingly secular society, the Decree is rendered largely irrelevant, but its operations persisted well into the 1990’s. One of the few academics to break the silence on its effects is the sociologist Tom Collins; he referred to it as ‘Ireland’s answer to ethnic cleansing’ (2010).

The vignette closes with Mrs Byrnes statement “B’ Jesus they’ll know who’s boss here.” Davies and Harré (1990) argue that the forces which operate in the service of the power groupings of society have very real consequences. They are experienced at the practical level of lived experience. Ryan (2011) argues that discourses “... *shape* [emphasis in original] social relations and have actual effects on practice and identity. Discourses are real with real effects.”

The underlying assumptions which uphold and express such power go regularly uncriticqued, accepted as normative or ‘well known facts’. Mrs Byrne has totally bought into a particular set of assumptions and operates out of them unquestioningly. Their effect is to reinforce one reality and to demonize – and occlude or suppress - those of minority groupings which operate outside of the majority discourse.

Making Power Visible

Teasing out the discourses which are dominant in a society was for Foucault (1994) a way of shedding light on how that particular society functions. The concept of discourse creates a lens through which the underlying distribution and operation of power can be brought into visibility. It is this exercise of power which can often ultimately be translated into acts of physical violence- or which may remain less visible as a form of social ‘othering’ and marginalization. In either situation certain attributes, activities or histories are unquestioningly attributed to a particular non-dominant group. In conceptualizing discourse, Foucault was very clear that such meaning repertoires exist *outside* the sense-making processes of individuals or groupings; instead they are pre-existing, external (and largely unconscious) channels which organize the thinking and assumptive worlds of a society and its members. Individuals and

groups in a particular society are unconsciously recruited into these ways of seeing and being. Mrs Byrne, who in others ways I never experienced as anything but a warm and caring woman, is an unconscious and uncritical carrier; such is the power of societal discourse. The institutionalization as well as the social exercise “of power favours the dominant group” (Trahar, 2011). It also serves to silence and occlude other versions of reality.

Whatever ye say, say nothin’

The next story conveys something of the response of members of the Protestant community to such attitudes. It was told by Roy an old friend, who had volunteered to be part of the original research project. A retired and deeply dedicated pastor, he had spent some forty-five years ministering to small evangelical congregations in rural Ireland. His knowledge of the religious minority’s experience is encyclopaedic.⁷

“On my way home from a church related meeting in rural Ireland I stopped for a cup of coffee and to have a look at the paper. Running my eye down the ‘Death Notices’, I saw a familiar name - and then was shocked to read the appendage ‘tragically’. This almost always means suicide. Of course I suppose it wasn’t that unexpected - George had worked the small farm alone since the death of the aunt and uncle with whom he had lived. Strong Methodists, they had run the little preaching house,⁸ built on their land generations ago, in the time of a revival. With death and emigration, in latter years there had just been the three of them attending it. And then only George - and ultimately it had been closed. You know a neighbor persuaded George to let him have the bit of land around it for some extra grazing and then without any reference to George he turned the preaching-house into a cow-house. That near killed George, but he got nothing but abuse when he objected. Oh there’s no doubt about it, the latter years of his life were miserable and isolated.”

When I’d finished my coffee I made a brief detour to visit mutual friends, to inquire about George’s death. Bob and Elsie and their two adult sons were just finishing the evening meal in their farm kitchen. After a few minutes of general chat Bob could contain it no longer:

“I suppose ye heard the news? ‘Twas a terrible end for poor oul’ George.”

⁷ This story was electronically recorded and then minimally edited by both researcher and participant.

⁸ Preaching-house was the term traditionally applied to simple Methodist or Baptist nonconformist chapels; unlike the more ostentatious ecclesiastical structures of Catholicism or Anglicanism, they were often virtually indistinguishable from domestic or agricultural buildings.

"Yeah, yeah...I saw the paper ... I presume there's no doubt...?" I said.

"Ah, there's not a doubt in the world; I hear the shot gun was found beside him, still warm. His oul' dog was with him. That neighbor who rented the land found him...inside in the preachin' house"

"Trouble was when George's uncle was alive he never took his hand off the reins," Bob continued. "Sure poor George never had a chance to have his head with the farm; an' when the time came it was too late, all the initiative had gone outa' him."

"A nicer fella you couldn't meet, but sure latterly he had no go," said Elsie. "Ah but, ye know yourself, there was more to it than that."

"Imagine doin' it in the little church though," Elsie continued after a pause. "Oh I often remember bein' at the Conventions there, years back. The place'd be packed and the singin' would lift the roof."

A meditative look came into her eye:

"There'd be tea for all in the farm between the meetings. George's family always loved a crowd. Ye'd meet half the countryside there. Ah, there was many a match made at the Ballycarnane Conventions. Of course there was always very good teachin' too," she added hastily. "Real spiritual food."

"Well it didn't do much for poor oul' George," responded Bob, the pragmatist. "Either way."

There was silence while the group digested this. There was no demur.

But Elsie was soon back on a roll: "Well I tell ye this, it's the Pope and his '*Ne Temere*' decree, I blame for what happened and the way it was legally enforced to make all the children in mixed marriages Roman Catholic. Sure we were decimated – we never had a chance."

"Yeah an' look what happened to anyone who tried to go against it; sure they had to leave the country," interrupted young Joe. "And God help those that were left."

"Sure I suppose it was a release for him in a way," butted in Elsie. "But ye couldn't say a happy one; 'twas a terrible sad end. You know there's virtually none of our own, of any description, left round that area now. Clonlea parish was closed down last year."

"I was talking to a man, a pretty well-known sociologist recently who referred to '*Ne Temere*' as Ireland's answer to ethnic cleansing," I nodded.

"Well now, sure it reduced us from near eleven per cent of the population to less than four in a coupla' generations."

I told them then about the neighbor who had rented the land and tethered his animals inside the old preaching-house. And how when George had objected, neighbors had told him he had no rights there anyway - he was 'nothing but an interloper.'

There was a burst of outrage from all quarters:

"An' they want respect? An' they say there's no discrimination? I could tell ye a tale or two. It's that silent discrimination, the looks, the nods the comments - you try to ignore them, to pretend they're not happening. It's the asides and the attitudes from your neighbors, an' those who are supposed to be friends that's the worst, that's the real discrimination! Makin' ye outsiders. George's family was on that land, an' a poor enough bit of oul' mountainy land it was, for over fourteen generations. An' look what's happened!" Bob was furious.

"Oh the others had the name of bein' very bitter down there. It was the isolation killed him. An' none of the neighbors ever bothered to visit him or give him a hand out."

"Jesus..."

"Don't misuse the Lord's name in here," Bob snapped at his son. "Ye're getting as bad as the other lot!"

"Sorry Da, sorry Da, but I was only goin' to say that Jono," Joe looked at me, "that's the cousin, that's above teachin' in the High School in Dublin, was told he wasn't Irish. He couldn't be because he's a Prod. And I remember well George tellin' us one time that some of his neighbors told him he was only 'a fucken' planter'⁹...Sorry Mammy, sorry Pastor... 'with no rights here'. That must have been about the preachin' house incident!"

There was a stunned silence after that - and then the stories started. I was shocked at the powerful emotions the conversation was perturbing in myself. Elsie was near tears. Even the lads were intense and angry. Story followed story. I rarely remember such a frank discussion of issues relating to the position of the Protestant community in rural Ireland. Such conversations are rarely encountered even within the safety of the tribal boundary. When such issues are named it's normally with a shrug; a deprecating laugh or a sigh. Maybe it's too hard to face the 'othering' explicitly.

When I left a few hours later, Bob came out to the car with me. We stood in the farmyard under the stars. He eyed me ruefully:

⁹ Ireland has suffered from wave after wave of settlers and invaders - Picts, Celts Normans, English etc. Each new wave to some extent supplanted the previous grouping. Because Ireland is at the extremity of Europe, there was nowhere else to move to, so such groups gradually settled and developed a working relationship with each other. 'Planter' is the pejorative term still applied to those who were settled on Irish land by successive English Governments. Their function was originally to form a core of citizens loyal to the Crown.

“Well that was some talk. Sure we were all taught to keep our heads down, to say nothin’ or we’d be burned out. Thank God those times are over, but ye still need to watch what ye say.”

He’d smiled then. “They still say ‘Whatever ye say, say nothin’...”

Poststructuralism and Subjectivity

There are two related themes running through this story; the first refers to the notion of acceptable subjectivities; the second to the closely related issue of silence. The vignette moves the focus from the embeddedness of discourse in social institutions and day-to-day exchanges, to a consideration of acceptable personhood. Foucault de-centres “the position of the individual in the authorship of his or her own life...to place the work done by and through discourse in a much more central place” (Winslade, 2005, p. 351).

The above story highlights the fragile and contingent nature of acceptable forms of subjectivity, and of who is defined as being within these norms and who outside. It invites attention to the power of the other and the influence of context (and community) in granting or withholding conditions in which it becomes possible to belong, and to maintain life to the fullest. Or indeed to maintain it at all. For the community in which the late George lived, the preaching-house, with all it represents as an alternative form of spirituality and community, was requisitioned – for a cattle shed! All it stands for trampled, like George’s assumptive world, beneath the cattle’s hooves. Bob and Elsie and their sons are defined as outsiders. The State-sanctioned structural operations of the *Ne Temere* Decree meant, “Sure we were decimated – we never had a chance.” And “You know there’s virtually none of our own, of any description, left round that area now.” The choice for many of the minority had been to marry a member of the majority and sign their children over to Catholicism, to remain single or to emigrate; either implied numerical decimation and the dissolution of counter-hegemonic possibilities. “Ireland’s answer to ethnic cleansing” may be putting it strongly, but the results were not inconsistent with such an aim. De Velera and his State’s commitment to creating a Catholic country had profound implications.

Acceptable Subjectivities

Poststructuralism invites attention to the role of dominant discourses in defining the parameters of belonging and acceptability in a society. Such discourses determine and proscribe the forms of subjectivity which are acceptable, and indeed available within that culture. Butler (2008) emphasizes this point, arguing that there can be no making of the self outside the possibilities determined by the discursive norms of a particular culture or society.

Such norms imply a society whose discursive climate conveys either recognition or proscription of these forms. The ‘self’ implied in this analysis is very different from the all powerful ‘self’ central to humanistic theory; it is a self created ‘in-relation-to’.

Foucault commenting on the unrelenting power of the operation of dominant discursive power notes its ‘capillary form of existence... where it reaches into every grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). As Bob remarks in the story, “It’s the asides and the attitudes from your neighbors, an’ those who are supposed to be friends that’s the worst, that’s the real discrimination! Makin’ ye outsiders.” Davies makes a salient point in this context: the discursive climate is not just cognitively deduced, it is felt. Dominant discourses are active in *creating* reality; they are profoundly implicated in the construction of feelings, emotions and subjectivities (Davies & Gannon, 2006a) – both those of the majorities whom they serve and the minorities whose realities they oppress. Those who are outsiders *know* and *feel* themselves to be so. Those who are insiders have no need to critique their assumptions, their positionings and the assumptive worlds which lie behind them. With the demise of the preaching-house community, as the sole progenitor of an unlicensed way of being, he is in a particularly vulnerable space. In this space he is exposed to the dominant discourses of the wider society in whose discursive climate his ways of being are unrecognized, or perhaps more accurately, are recognized but dismissed as deviant and unacceptable. He and his, in their very way of being, are ‘fucken’ planters...with no rights here’. And there is that quiet rejoinder at Bob and Elsie’s kitchen table: “Like ourselves.”

The Subjected Nature of Human Identity

In using the term subjectivity to describe experiences of human selfhood, Foucault is engaging in a play on words which emphasises the subjected nature of the human experience of identity. In doing so he is implicitly commenting not just upon the subjugation of ways of being, but the subjugation too of voice for minority groupings. He notes that ‘There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to’ (1982, p. 212). One is made a subject by the external forces of discursive power; one also becomes a regulated subject as the discourses of society, or of one’s own group, unwittingly enter and control one’s way of being. George’s story, and its framing, point to both. “Every regime of power produces certain knowledge that describes

the reality produced” (Gore & Parkes, 2008, p. 53). There is an accompanying subjugation of alternatives.

Silence and the Dominated Group

The second theme running through the story of George, is the notion of silence. George is very obviously silent; he does not contest his outsider status, or the colonization of the preaching house. In the 1970s Dr. Victor Griffin became dean of St. Patrick’s Protestant Cathedral in Dublin and heir to his illustrious – and outspoken -predecessor Jonathon Swift. Unlike his clerical peers and other leaders in the Protestant community, Griffin committed himself to speaking publically against the overall dominance of a particular culture, and against discrimination and the denial of rights to minority groups, particularly the Protestant minority in Ireland. His horrified family begged him to desist. In a country where slogans and threats of ‘Prods out’ were still not uncommon, protest was seen as dangerous; silence was a way of coping, lest worse should happen. Minorities frequently have to make this choice. Silence is often used by dominated groupings as a *modus operandi*, to allow them to slip beneath the radar of unwelcome attention. Perhaps it is also used as a way of avoiding an acknowledgement of the unpleasant reality of being ‘othered’.

Internalized Silence

For the Irish Protestant minority another element appears to be particularly noteworthy and that is the internal silencing of its own stories. Dynamics of external silence appear to have been internalized to such a degree that even within the safety of the community such things are rarely mentioned. The story in the prologue to this article presents such an example. “Of course we never spoke about it,” say the sisters as we stand at the grave of their murdered relations in the country graveyard. “Whatever ye say, say nothin’...” warns Bob ruefully after the emotional outpouring in his farmhouse kitchen, following George’s suicide. And there is Roy’s comment: “I rarely remember such a frank discussion of issues relating to the position of the Protestant community in rural Ireland. Such conversations are rarely encountered even within the safety of the tribal boundary; when such issues are named it’s normally with a shrug; a deprecating laugh or a sigh.”

It is only in extremis, in the emotional outpouring after George’s death, that the group around Bob and Elsie’s table explicitly confront experiences of discrimination, boycott and aggression against the minority. Murphy (2010) argues that silence is intrinsic within the Irish religious minority. In his research into murder, disappearance and atrocity he notes that, concerning the violence and massacres of the 1920s in Cork “the Protestant community, with

its legendary reticence is as silent as the grave” (Murphy, 2010, p. 273). Freire (1972) notes that this characteristic is a significant feature of oppressed groups. At least some members will always fail to acknowledge their oppression. Others will often “angrily reject those who try to show them otherwise” (Ryan, 2015, p. 53).

Freire (1970) and Santos (1999) recognize this silence as a symptom of minority or oppressed experience. Silence is part of the dynamics of societal oppression. In this process marginalized groupings become domesticated and tamed, unwittingly losing their critical edge in the service of not threatening the power groupings of society. Freire (1977) maintains that marginalized groups often internalize the position which they have been accorded by the powerful, or the majority. Those defined as alien or outsiders come to see themselves as such. Deep within, often without conscious recognition, those defined as on the margins become silenced and cloistered, colluding in their definition and taking on these positions as part of their core identity. They are unable even to recognize the dynamics of their positioning or the processes involved. New learning, which implies a shift in, or perturbs existing understandings of identity, can be far too troubling to easily incorporate. Freire (1972) emphasizes the significance of the telling and sharing of community stories as a tool for transformation and change.

Breaking the Silence

Irish Protestantism’s identity appears, as Jackson (2004) says of her own life, to have been “produced by certain power relations, but is also a site for reworking these power relations so that something different may emerge” (p. 685). Stories of course are neither immutable nor unchangeable. The invitation to critical reflection whereby a group names its world is important (Freire, 1972). The telling of stories creates a different relationship to those stories and facilitates the possibility of re-interpretation and of the re-authoring of accounts. Discussion also creates opportunities for potential re-positioning and agency to emerge and the possibility for a group to find new ways of creating its future. Such an invitation can constitute a call to re-interpret the past, and more importantly to re-imagine and become agentic in the creation of a future that is no longer bound by silence, by the *status quo*. Mitchell (2009) in a recent article refers to the experience of an African American professor and the difficulties she experiences in relation to race in the academy. Mitchell highlights the latter’s reluctance to name issues of inequality, and her avoidance of any candid discussion of issues relating to race, either in the classroom or the institution. She concludes: “Adhering to this approach...seriously curtails the possibility of developing counter-hegemonic discourses” (Mitchell, 2009, p. 86). Breaking the

internal silence by telling the stories which are central to any group's experience and then beginning to name the sites and processes of domination in the wider society, begins to create counter hegemonic discourses. Such actions imply a shift in the operations of silence and as Davies & Gannon (2006a) remind us, allow new possibilities for voice, agency and change to emerge.

Conclusion

Irish Protestantism is a very specific minority and one with a very specific history and cultural positioning. The centrality of the issue of silence and silencing to this group's experiences raises this issue in regard to other minority groupings, particularly those who are marginalized. It is critical that such silence becomes the focus of interrogation in order to reveal what it conceals. Paulo Friere emphasizes the importance of oppressed people naming their world. It is in naming that world, and in the telling their stories, that change and transformation can take place. Etherington (2004) argues that "When we use our own stories, or those of others for research we give testimony to what we have witnessed and that testimony creates a 'voice' where there was previously silence and occlusion" (p. 9).

An exploration of Irish Protestantism as a distinctive minority with a complex and contested place in Ireland's history and society invites attention to the issue of silence in the group experience and in minority experience in general. Ireland's Protestantism is not alone in adopting silence as a strategic choice. In this instance it enabled its survival, as a distinctive way of being which was perceived as deeply oppositional to the dominant assumptive world of a fundamentalist state. The vignettes emerging from the study suggest, however that this choice may also have had a deeper and less visible effect. Silence as an *external* social strategy may have had an unwanted concomitant, affecting the *internal* psyche of the group. This discouraged, and often disallowed the recounting of the group's particular history and the overt recognition of the specifics of marginalization, difficulties and pain associated with minority experience and history. This affects a group's sense of itself, as well as choices regarding its agency and its future. It is noteworthy that researchers and writers currently breaking silence around such issues come either from outside the Irish Protestant minority or else from outside the country. Ultimately attention to silence within the context of the Irish Protestant minority invites the attention of researchers to an examination of the role of silence - and to the rich and multifaceted nature of muting in the experience of minorities in general. In this regard a comparative study of silence and silencing and the very different experiences of Protestants in the Irish Republic and Catholics who make up 48% of the population in Northern Ireland, and

that of Catholics, 11% of the population in England, would be illuminating. Neither of the latter appear, at least on the surface, to have experienced the same degree or quality of silencing as the former.

This raises an important issue. A significant expression of violence is embodied in State licensed constructions of exclusion and belonging – and in definitions of ‘otherness’. Powerful political interests are frequently proactive in the manufacture, or at least in the support, of definitions of difference. In the service of maintaining control, societal power groupings engage in or support the construction, propagation and essentialization of sociopolitical, cultural or religious categories in place of more fluid and varied forms of identity (Hinton, 2005).

The world of research is frequently closely allied with domains of power through its associations, and consequently with the dominant discourses of a particular society. An unwitting concomitant is a blunted awareness of complicity in the replication of dominant discourses. This occludes a critical awareness of minority reality. Research is itself a powerful tool which either reveals or connives in the maintenance of occlusion, sourced in the witting or unwitting preservation of the *status quo*. The privileging of a critical attitude to research agendas, to researchers’ embeddedness in the values of their dominant world and the inability of certain research methodologies to facilitate critical awareness consequently need to be foregrounded as deeply significant for the world of research. In this regard, there is a role for researchers in the telling, or in supporting the telling, of previously untold stories as a pathway for transformation and change.

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