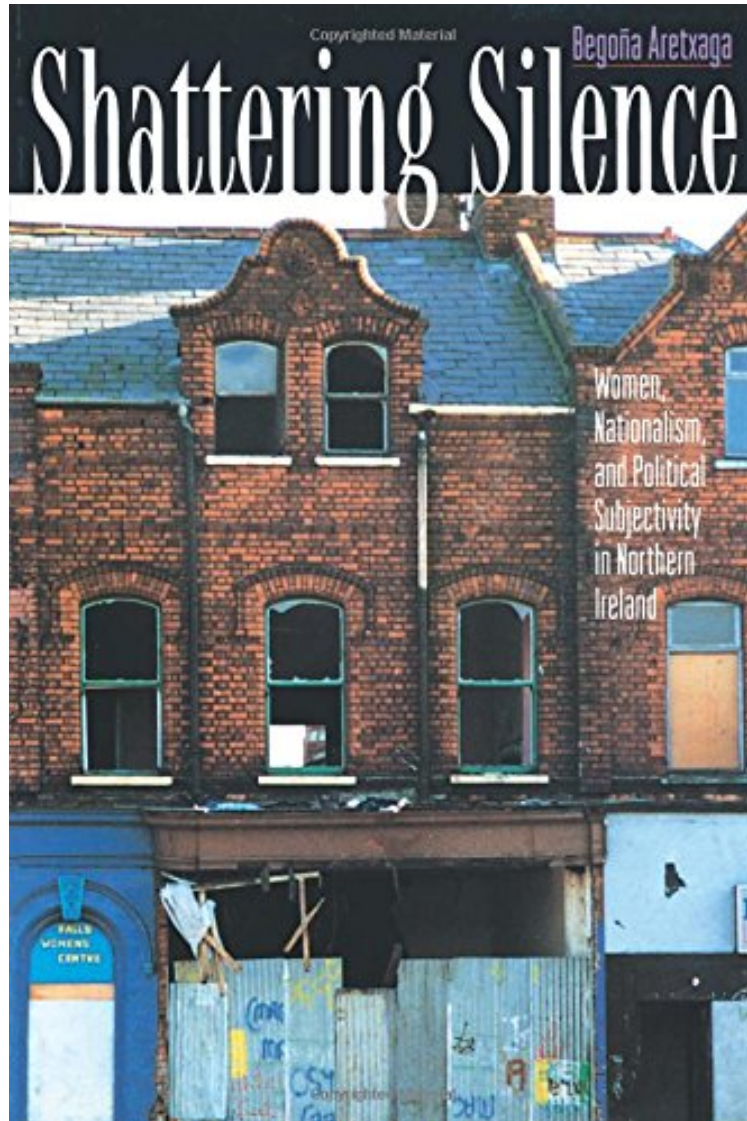


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Shattering Silence

Begoña Aretxaga

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Begoña Aretxaga : Shattering Silence before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shattering Silence:

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Very interesting
By Maria Pia Capozzoli
As a strong reader with a great interest in the "Troubles", I've read many books, by T. P. Coogan, P. Taylor, M. Dillon and others. I found most of them very interesting, but I was amazed by the overwhelming "shattering silence" about women. For instance, in 519 pages of Coogan's "The Troubles", one of the most important IRA women, Mairead Farrell, well known far

beyond the Irish borders, gets only 11 lines. While I was reading these books I wondered why the writers seemed so little interested in highlighting the actual women's role in the "war". In their researches women are seen and interviewed (when they are interviewed) just as mothers, wives, sisters, never as women with their own life, stories, experiences, dreams, their own struggle or political involvement. Begona Aretxaga gives us a convincing answer about the roots and the meaning of this silence. She fills the gap between the Myth of Mother Ireland and the real life of the real women in the North, and, in so doing, she offers an excellent contribution in women studies in Ireland, beyond the stereotypes that sometimes affect mainstreaming feminism. But she also offers a helpful key to understand the "Troubles" as a whole. Her arguing about "the parallel between the struggle of republican women for recognition and voice within the republican movement, and the struggle of republican movement for recognition and voice within the arena of Northern Ireland politics", as well as about the issue of decommissioning, helped me in understanding the full, underlying meaning of what was going on along the difficult months following the Good Friday Agreement. In Aretxaga's words, "this book is an ethnography of unrecognised and misrecognized nationalist working-class women" as political subjects, and it's very useful to people who wish to know more about gender and violence in Northern Ireland through the last 30 years. But because of its analysis of the interlocking systems of inequality of colonialism, class and gender, I recommend it to everyone interested in getting a better comprehension of the complexities of the Troubles and of the ongoing, difficult, sometimes disheartening, peace process. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Mn na hEireann By A Customer When discussing the troubles in Northern Ireland, women are seldom mentioned at all. And when they are mentioned, mostly they are depicted as passive victims of a male-dominated war waged in a male-dominated society. This is often the case, but not a reason in itself to deny or underestimate women's contribution to political and social development in Ulster. Begona Aretxaga's book, born from the author's "prima facie" experience during a 15 months stay in West Belfast (plus several other visits in loco), is a successful attempt to analyse the role of women in Nationalist/Republican struggle. The author makes excellent use of anthropological and ethnographic categories in order to stress the importance of West Belfast women in contributing to the strategies of Irish Republicanism and the creation of Irish Nationalist identity. Although cast in an environment which tends to limit their participation to social life according to traditional values, Nationalist women often succeeded in breaking socially determined barriers. In doing so they contributed to Irish history more than is generally recognized. Moreover, the author's feminist approach, far from being a limit to her analysis, is an effective intellectual tool and succeeds in bringing to the fore a perspective on Irish troubles too often overlooked by many.

This book, the first feminist ethnography of the violence in Northern Ireland, is an analysis of a political conflict through the lens of gender. The case in point is the working-class Catholic resistance to British rule in Northern Ireland. During the 1970s women in Catholic/nationalist districts of Belfast organized themselves into street committees and led popular forms of resistance against the policies of the government of Northern Ireland and, after its demise, against those of the British. In the abundant literature on the conflict, however, the political tactics of nationalist women have passed virtually unnoticed. Begona Aretxaga argues here that these hitherto invisible practices were an integral part of the social dynamic of the conflict and had important implications for the broader organization of nationalist forms of resistance and gender relationships. Combining interpretative anthropology and poststructuralist feminist theory, Aretxaga contributes not only to anthropology and feminist studies but also to research on ethnic and social conflict by showing the gendered constitution of political violence. She goes further than asserting that violence affects men and women differently by arguing that the manners in which violence is gendered are not fixed but constantly shifting, depending on the contingencies of history, social class, and ethnic identity. Thus any attempt at subverting gender inequality is necessarily colored by other dimensions of political experience.

"An important book. Through clearly-written, thoroughly-grounded, and conscientious ethnography, Aretxaga urges readers away from the pat caricature of a brutal and male-dominated Northern Ireland, and toward an informed understanding of the complexity and poignancy of the lives and history of its subjects."--Das Historisch-Politische Buch From the Back Cover" Begona Aretxaga provides a forceful voice in ongoing debates, presenting ethnographically and historiographically the gendering of violence that has accompanied the civil war in Northern Ireland.... There is an integrity and passion in Aretxaga's analysis."--Joan Vincent, Barnard College About the Author Begona Aretxaga is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University.