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The Gendered Geographies of the New Woman and the Dublin Tramcar: the 'Jolly Flapper' Incident

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Abstract

At the turn of the 20th century, the tram system in Dublin became a key site for commentary on the values and behaviour of the New Woman. Following their introduction, trams became a new kind of urban space in Dublin, public but also intimate sites that brought men and women into new forms of proximity and intimacy, which required ongoing cultural negotiation and constant moral revision. While women were largely excluded from the production of railway space, their occupation of these new mobile territories - where they brought onboard a mixture of new and conventional roles- over time displaced patriarchal claims to public space. Tram systems were spaces of intense sociability and modernity in which the modern Irish woman became a spectacle in motion. In this chapter, I bring into conversation scholarship on the gendered histories of public transport, with new work in cultural studies that casts the relational and overlapping characteristics of infrastructure as social and political assemblages. Using this approach, I revisit the Dublin trams' social, spatial and gendered modalities after Irish Independence to interrogate their

modernity. In all these cases, the disruptive capacity of New Women ensured the tram became a site where she was constantly located, criticised, and also identified as a symbol of resistance. The chapter offers a close reading of the 'Jolly Flapper' episode, a long series of letters published in The Evening Herald in the autumn of 1928. These exchanges drew a debate about the new claims women made to public space via their treatment on the trams, into a more comprehensive discussion. In this episode, the vitality and agency of New Women are revealed, overturning many of the established narratives about the cultural and social disenfranchisement of Irish women during this period and revising our understanding of the Irish Flapper.

I Trams as Gendered Public Spaces

This chapter focuses on how the Irish Flapper is revealed in the social worlds of the Dublin Tram. The kinetic spaces of dance halls and the syncopated rhythm of modern jazz offered some of the most important vibrant scenes to witness the arrival of modern women into 1920s Dublin. However, day and night, it was often the electric tram that moved these women back and forth across the city and where encounters with Flappers were burned into modern Dubliner's consciousness. Such was their impact on the established sensibilities of old Ireland, that one man '…was so shocked at the attenuated attire of females in a tram that he asked the conductor to let him out, as he said he had made a mistake in getting in. He wanted, he said, to ride a tramcar but found himself instead in a bathing box'. (Tuam Herald,1929) Whether criticised for their short dresses, exposed knees and legs, makeup, smoking or exuberant confidence, the commentary we can find about women son tram in Dublin mirrors historical situations in found in Tokyo, Berlin or Buenos Aires, wherever indeed

the confluence of the modern woman and the tram system mobilised women's liberation as they asserted their place in the city. These disruptions around the body mirror the broader urban transformation the trams brought to Dublin's urban material and imaginative spaces. Like so many new spaces of the modern city – the cinema, the hotel lobby, the department store – trams were part of broader space-shaping technology where bodies, identity and place were thrown into motion. In this chapter, I deal with these transformations in tandem, bringing into conversation ideas in feminist geography, the gendered histories of transit, and the relationality of infrastructure to consider how the trams in Dublin operated as gendered spaces of intense sociability and modernity. In the opening section, I consider some of the ways we can think of Dublin tramcar as a social and gendered space. This approach has the potential to reimagine the cultural histories of Irish urbanism, where the Irish Flapper is firmly located. Following on, I offer a close reading of 'Jolly Flapper Incident', a series of letters, poems and songs published in the *Evening Herald* in the autumn of 1928, which drew out the claims women were making to public space via a lively and emotionally charged debate how to ride the Dublin trams. These letters offer a guide to the mores and habits of modern mobility, which can be mined to explore gender politics, which are not available through the conventional studies of the built environment, urban plans and cartographies of the city. Published only a few years after Patrick Abercrombie's *Dublin of the Future: The New Town Plan* (1922), these letters I suggest address the everyday production of space and speak to the agency of women. This I will show mainly by emphasising the way that when attacked in the press, Flappers confronted manifest sexism and chauvinism, which sought to naturalist conservative and masculinist imaginings of public space and women's bodies in 1920s Dublin. This insight, I suggest, contests some of the established narratives about the cultural and social disenfranchisement of Irish women and their sexuality more usually depicted in histories of this period.

II Woman and Tramcars in Dublin

In circumstances that mirror the international experience, by the 1920s, Dublin life was wrapped up physically, socially and imaginatively with the tram network. Since their introduction 50 years earlier, the trams dramatically expanded and connected the activity-spaces of the city. The network contributed significantly to Dublin's social and commercial life, animating the new suburbs and moving thousands of people daily between and around Blackrock, Kingstown and Dalkey, Clonskea, Rathgar and Terenure, Palmerston Park and Rathmines, Sandymount Green, Ringsend and Sandymount, Harold's Cross and more. While Dublin had some of the worst slums in Europe, with 60 miles of electrified track and upwards of 50 million trips a year, the density and effectiveness of the network was applauded internationally. (Bielenberg, 1998) Some visitors to Dublin in the early 1900s observed that it was better than what could be found in New York. Advertisements from the 1920s, like those for the Grattan Hotel and Restaurant on Essex Quay that declared that 'Trams pass the Door every three minutes' suggest something of the quickening and connectivity that was central to the dynamic character of the city. Add to this its central role in the 1913 Lockout, there is little doubt that the tram played a crucial role in reconfiguring not just physical space, but also social and class relationships in the city.

As a new feature in the urban landscape and as a new social space, the tram was sketched, written about,photographed, painted and filmed. It became central to many of the new and modern narratives of the city. The tram is consistently captured in the work of Jack B Yeats, as a stage to watch swimmer racing in the Liffey, a platform to gaze over the city, or new urban moving site to capture the like men and women and interiority. {list paintings] In Conal O'Riordan's novel *Adam of Dublin* (1920) the protagonist Adam, '… thought it would be a grand thing to be a tram driver, just standing all day in a fine warm overcoat, with nothing to do but turn a handle that made you go on or stop as you might fancy, and a bell to ring to cheer you up, and the world slipping by on

both sides of you like a procession with no beginning or end'. In many ways, this art and literature suggests that the tram offered classic encounters with modernity. It embodied new forms of speed and mobility, interpolated the individual with the urban crowd and from its windows and upper floor, offered constantly changing opportunities to visualise and judge the continuous transformations of the city.

As such, in a very compressed period of time, at the beginning of the 20th century, the behaviours and the movement of people and machines and how their energies and moods were seen and felt on the tram became a synecdoche for all of Dublin. Tramcars became a site for the observational, the mentionable and the noticeable, a site to know and judge others, often in highly gendered ways. These spatial stories, with their careful articulation of different social type are layered into the urban culture. Consider, for instance, the experience captured by Katharine Tynan, who recalled travelling on the tram from Thomas Street to Inchicore when suddenly the other women passengers on the tram with her began cursing and hissing when the wife of the IRB informer John Carey entered the tramcar. Writing in the *Irish Times* about the gestures she found in Dublin Tramcars in the early 1920s, the Irish journalist May Slade observed the predominance of 'Tram Face'. This kind of Blasé Attitude she described as a '..slight element of hardness and a definite "I'm-as-good-as-you-are' expression. The eyes are cold and the mouth severe, set in a straight uncompressing line.' The disposition she noted was broken by '…the little shop girls who were cheery and natural when greeting their acquaintances [but] directly they were left without someone they knew in the tram, the tram face expression was noticeable again". In a manner that speaks to the social charge of tram space, this kind of urban commentary was a constant fodder for journalists to collect and criticise Dubliners. Typical of this tram journalism, Patricia, known for her provocations on the social trends in modern Dublin, let out in her column 'Who Makes the Best Husband': "Not long ago I saw on a tram…an individual with a young baby on his knee, trying to quieten it with a

feeding-bottle, while his young wife sat opposite him, empty-handed and no doubt admiring her' domesticated' 'hubby….I would swear there was not a woman or man on the tram who did not regard the fellow as effeminate humbug, who should have changed clothes with this wife'. (Sunday Independent, June 14, 1925)

While everybody moved, the tram system particularly empowered women, significantly increasing their presence in public space. Though they were not employed as conductors or drivers as in cities like Glasgow or Melbourne, and only a few affluent women owned shares in the tram companies, they quickly claimed these new mobile territories. They brought their increasingly prominent roles as workers, consumers, carers, and political actors onto the tram. Whether for work, shopping, school, leisure, socializing, or organizing, women of all walks of life traversed the network hourly and daily, shaping their own urban experience and processing their emancipation. As the scholarship on women and public tranist suggest, these new form of mobility were often contested. Gendered locomotion challenged the patriarchial rules around the circulation and mixing of men and women, and provided a platform for negotiating and modifying gender relations. As the scholarship on women and public transit suggests, these new forms of mobility were often contested. Gendered locomotion challenged the patriarchial rules around the circulation and mixing of men and women and provided a platform for negotiating and modifying gender relations. (Davis and Lorenzkowski 1998; Despotopoulou, 2015). Illustrating something how the presence of women in public challenged the city's moral landscapes - the historian Jim Kilroy (1997) notes that when women first sat on the top of the Dublin trams, the scandalous sight of their ankles from the street led to the introduction of 'modesty boards', which were attached to the side of the tram and later used for advertising. The way women's presence in trams could hold this kind of transgressive libidinal cargo is well illustrated across the literature of the period. In *Somewhere to the Sea* (1936), Kenneth Reddin depicted 'Neil' jammed inside a crowded tram on Dame Street,

pressed against a handrail, wondering '…whether he should explain to the pretty typist beside him that his proximity was not an undue gallantry, but a precaution against falling down the stairs'. Later, at a tram stop at Kevin Street, Neil '..worked his way down to the platform, apologizing to his fellow passengers for dragging their clothes off them, but being forgiven by none but the little typist who grinned and enjoyed it well…." In James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916), the tramcar becomes the site of one of Stephen Dedalus's elaborate fantasies about his crush, Emma. When recollecting his time with her, he infuses the tramcar's staircase with sexual potential: 'She too wants me to catch hold of her, he thought. That's why she came with me to the tram. I could easily catch hold of her when she comes up to my step: nobody is looking. I could hold her and kiss her.' (Joyce, 1916) Suggestions of romantic encounters with girls and women on tramcars were widespread. It is also a theme picked up in Nora Hoult's novel *Coming from the Fair* (1937), which depicts courting couples singing loudly near O Connell Bridge the lyrics to George Lashwood's music hall hit '*Riding on Top of a Car*": As we go, go, go for a ride on the tram/And we find out how really cosy the tram cars are/ We go a long way and we've not much to pay/We sit close together and spoon all the way/ There's many a miss who will be Missus one day/Through riding on top of car'. For this oblique reference to intercourse on the tram and more, the Irish Free State banned the book.

For many women, however, the impacts of their gender and the sexism experienced in their everyday movement were much more prosaic. As will become more significant in my discussion about the Flapper below, it appears that while the tram was a boon to women's mobility, there were many occasions when their experiences were uncomfortable and difficult. While there is evidence of women being assertive in claiming space on Dublin tramcars and clashes between women across social classes as they vied for space, a survey of print media from this period shows that women were obliged to remonstrate about being harassed by men at tram stops, being left behind at night when the trams were filled

by drunk revellers, or obliged to stand in the cold rain with children without tram-shelters shelters. There were many complaints from women about being pushed and mauled or neglected by men crowding into tramcars, notably on holidays or sporting occasions. In her novel *St. Malachy's Court* (1946), Olivia Robertson evokes the tensions embodied in these kinds of experiences by relaying a story told to her by a pregnant woman about riding the tram home from the pictures with her child:

> I couldn't get a seat. Believe me the tram was packed stiff with strong young fellers back from watching football and not one of them offered for to give me a sit down . They let me stand there for a mortal hour with a old babba in me arms, God help him, and Winston on the way. After an hour of the standing I addressed them . I addressed the whole car of them . Said I : ' Saint Patrick drove the reptiles out of Ireland, but he forgot the ones in this tram!.'

As argued in the work of Su Lin Lewis, who has explored the contested emergence of the modern women in Penang, Rangoon, and Bangkok, the deeper significance of histories and geographies implicit in these kinds of encounters which will remain cloaked if one holds fast to the state-centred reading of the past or neglects what she notes as the layers of cross-cultural intersections in overlapping realms such as the built environment, print media, popular culture, and the emergence of the modern woman. (Su Lin Lewis, 2016) Indeed, in this case, only by softening the conceptual boundaries between infrastructure, culture and identity can one reveal the historical significance of the tramcar as a gendered and intensely public space.

Certainly, there are apparently more significant intersections between women and trams that might be considered when tracing the histories of women's mobility in Dublin. We have reports of the windows of a tram packed with Suffragettes being smashed when they sought refuge

from mobs in Dublin's city centre. (Cullen Owens 2014). We know women protested and held up tramway traffic and demonstrated outside tram depots at Inchicore during the 1913 Lock-Out. Suspected of transporting weapons for the IRA or carrying military intelligence, women were wounded by gunfire and hauled out of trams by British army irregulars during the War of Independence. However, as prominent as these events were, it is also through the everyday politics of body and through habitual forms of mobility where urban transformations are made, where more significant impressions of social and cultural change can be seen and where new perspectives on the histories of gender and urbanism are revealed. The culture and spatiality of the Dublin tramcar and its role in this period in representing, shaping and locating public opinion and gender relations deserves more attention. This is especially because the acceptable disposition of women in public was challenged by the Flapper who troubled the consensus about the proper use and socially proscribed regulations around women's presence in the city.

III The Jolly Flapper Incident

‘Jolly Flapper’ trips the street
Her gait is neither slow nor fleet.
The step is of a measured beat,
She is easily known as counterfeit
Now that's the ‘Jolly Flapper’

She would rather use her heel and toe
Than spring upon the D. T. Co.,
Of speech, she has an overflow
She greets you with a loud "Hello”
Now that the ‘Jolly Flapper’

She always wears a tittering grin
Hides her face, shows all her chin
Her laugh creates an awful din,
And doesn't care the proverbial pin
Now that's the "Jolly Flapper."

She doesn't hurry, doesn't, rush
She doesn't worry, doesn't blush.
All confusion uses push
Her heels against her stockings brush
Now that's the "Jolly Flapper"

Pro Rata
Evening Herald, September 26 1928

Having briefly established something of the social and gendered spaces of the tram within early 20th century Dublin, I turn now to the Jolly Flapper incident, which occurred in city in the Autumn of 1928. The bare facts of this episode are that between late September and mid-October, in the pages of *The Evening Herald*, 45 letters, poems and songs were submitted by women and men in response to a letter from the 'Jolly Flapper' who wrote to the paper complaining about not being given a seat by men in a late-night tramcar following an evening dancing in Dublin. The immediate response to this claim – which may or maybe not have been invented or amplified by a journalist – was explosive, broadening out from a discussion about her claims to a tram seat into a lively and emotionally charged commentary about the character of Flappers and the place of women in Dublin. Consequently the incident offers a significant glimpse into the histories of mobility, gender and urbanism. Everyone wrote with a pseudonym: Shanks Mare, Shy Girl, He-Man, Irish Colleen, Rudolph, Parental Control, Balloon. We also see in this public correspondence an array of affinities: work, public space, shopping, cinema, dancing, fashion and cosmetics, all of which enabled the men and women to imagine and

materialise themselves as part of the larger collectivities which were layered into the social geographies of the city at this time. As I will show in the following sections, taken together, these materials exemplify the significance of the tram as a public space. The correspondence had a lively tone and addressed the affective experiences of moving about the city, where men and woman debate their various claims to the tram in language that is punitive, condescending, sexist, but also boisterous, political, humorous and flirtatious, rapidly filling the columns of across of the newspaper with interjections coloured variously by advise, moral condemnation and sexual innuendo, all played out not just in letters, but in poems, ditties and songs.

The episode starts with the publication of this letter in *The Evening Herald*:

> Please allow to express my indignation at the discourteous manner in which a number of my sex are treated on the city tramcars. The other night about 11:30 in O Connell St, all seats were occupied when we entered, chiefly by young men, with the results that we both had to remain standing throughout the journey. Is this typical of the modern young man? Is it that they are too lazy or too feminine to offer their seats to a lady? Probably the reason was the most of these people were too weary after parading Graffon St. and O'Connell St. all the evening. But then they should have some consideration for two ladies who had been dancing from 8pm. I trust that our modern young men will made a mental note of above.
>
> Jolly Flapper. September 10, 1928

Whats the name of the thing held back - sentiment.

The writer here has all the characteristics of the stage flapper: overtly confident, loud mouthed, disruptive, demanding. As it is picked up later, there is some ambiguity about the authenticity of the letter, but in fact, there is no way to know. What is more certain is that its content and mode of address seem to have been provocatively set up to incite a lively response. If this was the intention, it worked. For this reason, it is not the letter's authenticity that should hold our focus but rather its reception. In the days that followed, as if a dam burst, the criticism rained down on the Jolly Flapper. Given the context of what was to come, things started mild enough. The Jolly Flapper's claims about the tram were immediately challenged, initially being used as a means to comment on equality. (Equal voting rights for men and women has only been in place since 1922) Someone going by the pseudonym 'Congo' was the first: In reply to "poor abused Jolly Flapper" who went through the trying torture of standing in tram after her three hours of nocturnal gymnastics….. I wonder does she remember the feminine boast of equality in all spheres. If so, why such a, fuss about standing? (*Evening Herald,* September 12) 'He Man' wrote, 'Now that women are enjoying the same rights as men, I consider they are as much entitled to stand in Trams as we are' (*Evening Herald* September 12?,1928) Woman's slogan of to-day is " Men and women are equal." Well, then, why should she? not be expected to stand in a crowded tram in the same way as men do? *Is* she not being granted what she is clamoring for - equality? Sit Tight Evening Herald September 14, 1928 Barney followed up with: 'For when ladies start Atlantic flying and Olympic swimming is it not time for them to be treated the same as men and made to understand the hardships which many men have to face? **(***Evening Herald* September 19, 1928.) Another, calling himself ' He Man' argued that 'In these times of "Light, Air and Vitamin" campaigns modern young girls are quite an healthy and as strong as modern young men; and my advice to all men is under no circumstances should they fall under the female spell and surrender their seats in a Tram or bus to "Jolly Flapper" and her set'. (He Man Evening Herald September x Herald 1928)

These kind of observations are revelatory in terms of the patriarchal positionality assumed by the correspondents, who assumed they had to the natural authority to lecture women about equality. However very quickly the tone and focus of the letters changed and the criticism expanded to encompass all the Flappers in Dublin to criticise their mode of dress and the proper place in the city. In the beginning of relentless barrage of criticism - which only a small amount I can record here. Amongst the letters from a small group of women criticising the flappers of Dublin, Kay wrote:

> In referring to her ability to earn sufficient money to provide the clowns motely adopted by her modern “jazz” vamps she should never have thrown out the sneer at men young and old [many] who are compelled to exist on the dole.. If the modern girl is capable of ‘paddling her own canoe’ then why kick when men, tired either after a day’s work or from tramping the city in vain search for one of the jobs always to be filled by underpaid flappers, refuse to vacate a seat when she elbows he way into a full tram.

‘Mental Note’ complained that '…the modern young woman only seems to feel fatigued when she enters a tram, train or bus. But she is not too tired to stand outside a picture house or theatre for two hours or more in a queue a quarter of a mile long….Let them practice ‘early to bed, early to rise’ curtail their dancing, and by coming home at a reasonable hour they will stand a better chance of getting that much desired rest’. These sexist attitudes toward The Jolly Flapper reflected concern about the modern girl's associations with mobility and confident sexuality. In so far as she challenged tradition, the consumer culture of working women made her a "troublesome" figure in which progress in sexual equality was mocked and undermined. The diatribe continued, exercising increasing sexual tension via an attack on the morality of women in the tramcar, many of which became increasingly

emotive: ‘If there is one thing I hate more than poison, it's the Dublin flapper’ (Ralph the Rover *Evening Herald* September 14). A letter signed by ‘Three Good Men from Drumcondra,’ whose doubled subtext appears to stems from some kind of repressed thought, declared that ‘By keeping our seat, which we pay for ourselves, we deprive them of specialising in the art of knee showing which is to all clean minded men find disgusting and fit only for the cover of English Magazines’. A man going by “Dubliner” expanded this obsession about knees, legs and thighs. However, while this appears to exhibit the full range of condescending and manifestly sexist observations, mixed with a strong dash of prudery, typical of these kinds of protestations, he also teased enough content to sensationalise and sexualise the body of the young women in the tram.

> Young men respect and admire natural refined girls, than whom no more charming or desirable companions can be found. Such companionship is a blessing and an inspiration, but they have nothing but contempt for the scantily-attired caricatures we see nowadays who should be let stand as often as possible, lest sitting they discredit themselves and offend others. Their brazen and deliberate attitude of some flappers on trams and elsewhere are disgusting: they seem to revel in showing as much leg as possible, and if people stare at them the brainless things believe they are making an impression. They are, but not the impression they image. By all means, give this type the "go-by". They are good for nothing. When "jolly Flappers' has had a few more lessons she will realise that the much maligned young man of today is no "mug". He respects the girl who respects herself and when he meets her he knows how to offer her the courtesy that is his due.

These letters sit amongst many indictments of the flapper, which flooded in. The concerns about Flapper tramcar behavior and values speak to how the new woman was confronted when she in turn

confronted those very spaces and values. Someone calling themselves 'Parental Control' wrote that 'The modern young man who cannot help being contaminated by these undeveloped, lip-sticked, greasy, bobbed flappers, at the back of his head has an idea that flappers returning from a dance, at 11.30- p.m. unchaperoned, are not his sincere idea of a nice girl'. (Parental Control, September x, 1928) She added : 'More power to the men and youths who ignore the glances of these youngsters who would need less cosmetics to bring out their beauty if they were in bed at 11.30 p.m. instead of being out looking for seats in a tramcar'. (Parental Control', September x, 1928)

In ways that have been extensively addressed in work in feminist geography, these largely negative accounts of women and tramcars offer insight into how everyday habits and spaces can be produced by punitive masculinist rhetoric. (Domash and Seager, 2001). In her work on transforming gender norms in early fin de siècle Paris, Thompson draws on these perspective and upon the work of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre's to show that gendered spaces are not premade but delineated and performed through practices, objects, ideas, imagination and experience.(Thompson 2000) Following that methodology, if we superimpose into the tram system the letters from these anti-flapper correspondents, we can see their interjections as their strategy to produce a version of social space where women would be marshalled and surveyed as they moved around the city. The purpose of their observations was to put women in their place, ensuring that they were constantly observed and judged, demanding they return a modest-steady-state which would affirm the authority of men and the moral majority. This process became more apparent when the diatribes against the flapper that turned up in the newspaper column grew darker and more threatening. A jokey threat of some light violence from one man: 'Poor little Jolly Flapper, Them's lots who would gladly slap her/ With her pretty way/ And her make-up gay/ And her neat little Eton-cropped napper'. (Balloon, Evening Herald September 24, 1928) As the discussion opened out from a letter from a woman called 'Shy Girl'

where she alerted readers that she was pushed and almost knocked over by men while walking at night on O Connell Street, the response she got was bellwether of the chauvinism that governed the streets. 'If Shy Girl and her companions who walk about our street at night and stand with their looking glasses and powder puff gave up this habit it would be better for themselves and everybody else (Gerry, *Evening Herald* September 26, 1928) Another calling him 'Rudolph' added malevolently : "If Shy Girl would live up to her newfound name she would not be in the men's way in O'Connell street at night time (Rudolph, *Evening Herald* September 24, 1928)

IV Claiming space - the Flapper's Riposte

Who is it that sits in the tram
While the modern girl stands?
Who jokes about the Eton crop style
Ruby lips, and painted dial?
It's the man, every time, it's the man!
Who writes to the 'Evening Herald' and says
We will not respect 'Jolly Flappers' these days
And lies in bed while she earns her bread?
It's the man, every time, it's the man!

"Eton Crop" *Evening Herald* September 28, 1928

So far in the story arc of the Jolly Flapper incident, the modern woman is the focus of resentment and rage and ridicule. In these letters we see the mobilization of the harmful tropes about the Flapper, which while located in Irish national and urban contexts, are shaped by international stereotypes circulated in print media and cinema. It's also clear, as observed in the research on the transformation of gender relationship in the 1920s that what we have here an eruption based on more profound sentiments, emotions and feelings. (Ryan (1998; Hogan 2010; Hanna,

2020). Sentiment is like sediment. It lies low in still water, until troubled. And in this case 'The Jolly Flapper' was the trouble, and the sentiment was the rapidly transforming identities of men and women being policed, debated and vividly expressed on the streets of Dublin, its kitchens, dancehalls, colleges and factories. Hence when faced with this barrage of criticism, the women of Dublin were ready to respond. And if the attacks on the Flapper revealed the depths of sexism in the public sphere, the confidence and rationale of the women's response illustrated to some degree lively and contentious the gender politics of the social scene in 1920s Dublin. Of interest here is how all these responses return agency to women and overturn the premise of earlier studies that have focused on the objectification of women through the male gaze.

First however, it's noteworthy that the authenticity of the letter was called into question. "A Mere Minx" wrote to the paper, argued that 'I don't for a moment believe that any female of the present day would be so silly and foolish as to write such a letter. My opinion is that it was written by one of the male sex who had no loftier aim than to have ridicule heaped on the modern girl.' Others mocked the extremity of the criticism: 'Your correspondents on the "Jolly Flapper' seem to think they are living in the Latin Quarter of Paris, judging by the very lurid pen-pictures they give of "Jolly Flapper" (*Evening Herald* September 19, 1928. Another woman declared:

> Are not we, modern girls, as much entitled to utilize the dance halls and even the streets of the city…As for conducting ourselves in those places, I think it is generally considered that we are more capable of doing so than many of the 'gentlemen' who frequent them. I am proud that I am in a position to earn enough to enable me to clothe and feed myself, and with whatever I have left over I see no reason why I may not devote it to enjoying the few and all too short hours after a hard worked day

Like their peers in Shanghai, Bueno Aires and Toronto, many of these contributions relish their access to work, their own money, new media and consumer products and are filled with conviction about how to translate these experiences – sensory and otherwise – into new moral codes and behaviours out and about town. Following on, a woman calling herself 'Another Jolly Flapper' made it loud and clear that '… we are at liberty to keep up to the times as well as those fellows, and have not to ask their judgment of what we should wear. (Another Jolly Flapper, *Evening Herald* September 29, 1928). In response to the damning letter about Dublin flappers from 'Parental Control', a women going by 'Shanks Mare' replied '…that the girls coming home from a dance, or wherever they may be, at 11.30 can have respect for themselves, and it costs him nothing for the youngsters— as he calls them—to lipstick, powder, or grease their hair. We girls of today can well afford to pay for ourselves in dance halls or any place wish to go, and there is no need to be hanging out of a fellow on the dole. I am one of the many who paddle their own canoes. (Shanks's Mare, *Evening Herald* 1928). **"**Fourteen" criticised the response for the narrow mindedness and maintained that 'the Jolly Flapper and Co have not lost their manners although they do wear shorter skirts and use cosmetics. It is the times that have changed and not the girls" (Fourteen, *Evening Herald* 1928).

In broad terms, the nature of this resistance is a further reminder of the gendered politics of space, a realm in which banal oppression can be contested and the mobilities of men and woman can be remade. It also important to note that collectively the response of these women turned the tide of public opinion. Two poems – from 'Red Micheal' and 'Power Puff' published in the middle of these episode are noteworthy for their impact and we need to acknowledge that they are as important, it indeed even more radical, as the direct protestations made by women about the chauvinism of the Jolly Flapper criticism, in challenging patriarchal assumptions about urban space.

Well here's to the "Jolly Flapper,
By some she is despised
They say her clothes are rather short
When in tram or bus she rides.
That's why they leave her standing
When the seats are occupied
But I, for one will just stand up
When occasion does arise.
I love those "Jolly Flappers"
I think they are a treat,
For me, they have a cheerful smile
When I meet them in the street.
I feel they are a tonic
When my spirits are so low,
For this world would be a dreary place
If the flapper, she should go.
I know she paints and powders,
That's why I love her more,
She has not got a shiny face
Like the girls in days of yore.
Yes. I'll wed a "Jolly Flapper,"
Then, my joy will be complete.
So now, my girls, watch for me
My name is underneath.

Red Michael. *Evening Herald*, October 1, 1928.

As much as there is something optimistic and joyful in this text there is also something quite risqué, presenting a proposition not often expressed so publicly or associated with the norms of interwar Ireland. In Ireland, the term “Mickey” or “Mick” can be used to refer to a man’s penis. “Red Micheal’ is ambiguous enough to evade the censor, yet in keeping with the erotic latency of the tramcar found more widely in the

culture, the phallic innuendo is still instantly available to the more worldly reader. The lines 'that I for one will just stand up when the occasion does arise" and "my name is underneath" adds to this interpretation. It seem at the very least that the sexual tension implicit in the weeks of men and women trading insults and challenges to one another gets released in this poem, a feeling greatly amplified in a reply to ‘Red Micheal’ that followed on almost immediately from ‘Powder Puff’.

‘Red Michael’ is a poet,
Of that, I feel so sure.
I would love him for a hubby
Though he be rich or poor.
On day I hope to meet him
In a crowded tram or bus
When he says “Now, Miss be seated”
The cranks will make a fuss.
He will help me with my lipstick ,
And my little powder-puff.
And if there are four or five of us ,
He will make the cranks stand up,
And when we girls are seated,
The cranks can hold the strap.
Then all we Jolly Flappers,
Will seat " Red Mike '" upon our lap.

Powder Puff, Evening Herald, October 4th 1928

It difficult to ignore the carnivalesque encompassed in this exchange. These two poems subvert and reconfigure the conventual gender consensus in the tramcar though humour and chaos. The fact that Powder Puff imagines Red Micheal putting on her lipstick and sitting on her lap amplifies the libidinous charge of this particularly flirtatious fantasy encounter in the Dublin tram. This fantasy picks up on the

unruly spatial form of jazz dancing and, by putting men's and women's bodies into intimate connection - men's fingers on a woman lips, women inviting men to place their heads on their laps - challenged the Catholic prudery that sought to confine contacts between the bodies of men and women as a means to ensure social order. This exchange also brings back to the foreground the latent sexual potential of the tram as a space of transgression more widespread in the culture. However, there is a difference. Rather than the men fantasying about women, as we see in the work of James Joyce, here it is women fantasying about men. Interestingly, as noted by Susan Mooney (2017:220), while the men in Joyce's Dublin '…squirm and struggle with their urban relationships and circumstances", as represented by Powder Puff, these young women are assertive and sure of their rights to the city and their own bodies and who can touch.

V Concluding

In my analysis to these materials, I have drawn inspiration from scholars working with comparable examples of epistolary culture, like those found in 'Letters to the Editor', who have suggested that these can regarded as 'public spaces' in the sense that the private view of the correspondent moves into the public sphere, shaping in turn the civitas of the city. (Randall 2008) In taking measure of these letters and the contested place of new woman in the public sphere of early 20th century Ireland, we must acknowledge, as observed by Connor (2004) that the women occupation the public sphere was very often facilitated through the production of new kind of media and news. In this episode women used the newspaper to surface their voice in the male-dominated public sphere. It also very interesting to see in the exchange back and forth here, how powerful and sensitive the political latencies found in everyday and gendered space were. In Dublin, the modern city, its shared spaces, the ordinary and habitual were charged with complex ontological depths. Something as banal as a tram seat encompassed

dissonant cosmopolitan and traditional values and when the Jolly Flapper made her challenge, she triggered the moral majority and unleashed a cacophony of opposing world views about the place of men and women in the city. This is an important reminder to attend to the ephemeral, to dissolve the boundaries between the infrastructural and the social, to capture their affective and emotional potential and to seek sources outside of approved archives to reach new insights into the historical geographies of gender and the city, insights that remain potent into our own time.

With the exuberant and emancipatory picture of 'Red Micheal' and 'Powder Puff' in mind, the Jolly Flapper Incident ran its course. However, it is notable that she was permitted the last word. It was essentially within the interests of the *Evening Herald,* which was filled with advertisement for cosmetics and women's clothing and health care products, to support its growing female readership. But while Flappers did come in for criticism again and again in the pages of the newspaper in the years that followed, in terms of this incident, the editorial decision to silence moral and sexist crusade against the flapper is crucial. It is the flapper who speaks last and loudest. In her final letter, the Jolly Flapper is unimpacted by the moral outrage. She resists. She maintains her opinion of men, who have spent their ink trying to put her down. There is nothing coquettish or despondent here. Instead, she goads them: 'Isn't it amusing' she says '…to stand in Woolworths for a few minutes and see the number of young men who purchase face cream, cold cream, face powder, perfume, hair oil, manicure outfits' who she makes sure to note are standing around in 'such ladylike shoes'. It's clear she has not been admonished. She writes without shame. She speaks in a full voice. She is assertive. She is confident. In taking this stance, we are reminded of Conor 's proposition about the agencies embodied by modern women via these 'techniques of appearing' that enabled them to produce themselves as modern, feminine subjects who embodied modernity in their bodies and their occupation of the public sphere. (Connor, 2004) Through the Dublin Flapper's capacity to

represent the cosmopolitan consumer world, enjoy nightlife and unmoor themselves from traditional modalities of patriarchal urbanism, and vocalise all this in public during this episode, they resisted the male gaze and extreme chauvinism of their detractors. In contrast to the demur, natural girls who inhabit the dour imagination of the cranks, as the Jolly Flapper episode came to a close, she is entirely in charge. She relishes in declaring her independence, her sexual powers and her freedoms, signing off proudly as herself:

> Probably many of your readers think I have taken their advice. Well, I am still dancing, 'having an occasional cocktail (when opportunity avails), and a cigarette. But I must say my letter had the desired effect. When I board a train now some sheik immediately offers me his seat. I also have a young man now and could have several others, who are infatuated by the short skirt and good makeup of the…
>
> 'Jolly Flapper' *Evening Herald*,October 10, 1928.

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