INTRODUCTION

Politicized Femininity and Muscular Nationalism

. . . Now you lie limp,
Face down,
Dumped in a ditch . . .
O poor adventuress—
In the name of virtue
They cut off your flaxen hair,
Defiled your lovely breasts,
Before degutting you. . . .

*Gang Bang, Ulster Style*, by Linda Anderson

The Bengali alas! is always pathetic,
Eats, dresses, slumbers, and guards his domestic,
Should you give him a meal—no matter trash or treat,
That instant he’s your slave and falls at your feet!
So why does he worship those red feet with flowers?
Abandon your lion-riding, in these parts O Mother,
Should such a breed worship you, who will then be porters?
Who will be the pen-pushers? And toil in hordes?
For Mother you can never make them unlearn ever:
Bengalis have been slaves—forever and forever.

*A Poem for Vijaya Dashami* (anonymous)

Although these poems are divided by a time span of almost a hundred years and a geographical distance of several thousand miles, the poetic lament they expressed illustrates the complexity and the historical scope of narratives of gendered nationalisms. The broken body of a Northern Irish woman found during the “troubles” that began in 1969 and a groveling nineteenth-century
Bengali man representing collective colonized impotence reveal the location of images of manliness and womanliness within multiple intersections of empire, nation, and race. The opening lines of the Anderson poem identify the adventuress as a Belfast wife, who, worn down by visits to the famous Long Kesh jail, where her husband, a warrior for the Irish Republican Army (IRA), was imprisoned, possibly found some comfort in the arms of a British soldier or Protestant man. But her act of human emotion was seen as national betrayal, and she was punished by the moral guardians of Irish republicanism. The Bengali man also betrayed his nation, represented in the poem by the “lion-riding” warrior mother. However, this act was expressed not through improper sexuality but rather through physical and moral cowardice.

Motherhood, the virtuous wife, and the cowardly man are all entangled in a particular story of gender and nation—muscular nationalism—the genealogy of which is presented in this book. Briefly put, muscular nationalism is the intersection of a specific vision of masculinity with the political doctrine of nationalism. Examples of muscular nationalism center an adult male body poised to sacrifice and kill for the nation. Usually, this view of masculinity is juxtaposed with a chaste female body that both symbolizes national honor and provides a moral code for the lives of women in the nation. This gendered binary remains stable as long as women do not act to challenge the expectations of chastity. These expectations are seemingly fragile, as political behavior ranging from picking up arms to marching alongside men in protest seems to disrupt this binary and, in doing so, engenders societal suspicion of politicized femininity. Put another way, muscular nationalism generally centers a gendered binary—martial man versus chaste woman—and several forms of female activism, especially those associated with facilitating political violence, challenge this cultural dualism to create social dis-ease. Using this social anxiety as a point of departure, this book interrogates the complex ways in which the stories of women and womanhood unfold in the context of muscular nationalism. Specifically, it analyzes ways in which women’s bodies intersect this political landscape by focusing on particular examples of muscular nationalism in India and Ireland. The bulk of the analysis focuses on how women political actors negotiate ideals of chaste femininity within this view of nation; this negotiation is further contextualized within a discussion of the social processes that construct women’s bodies as the canvas on which muscular nationalism stakes its claim.
In an article written in 2004, the scholar Gillian Youngs offers an extensive and pertinent exegesis of the relationship among gender, feminist research, and the broad field of international relations. An important focus of this text is the ontological work required to meaningfully incorporate feminist and gendered analysis into mainstream international relations. Theoretically, this book begins by building on two observations outlined by Youngs. First, she acknowledges the pioneering work done by Cynthia Enloe on issues of war, militarism, and security, which consistently highlight “the dependence of these concepts on gender structures—e.g. dominant forms of the masculine (warrior) subject as protector/conqueror/exploiter of the feminine/feminized object/other.” Important feminist research in the area of gender and war further elaborates these dualisms. Youngs’s discussion of this dualism and her call for further empirical work analyzing the power dynamics that underlie the construction of manhood and its relation to “women but also in relation to men configured as (feminized) ‘others’” provide the second theoretical basis for my work. Indeed, the process of feminization of (male) bodies on the basis of a complicated interaction among whiteness, manhood, and imperial power is an important component of my analysis.

Like other forms of identity, masculinity is historically, politically, and culturally constituted. However, one form always becomes dominant or hegemonic in setting the norms for male action. In the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries, militarism formed and forms an important component of Anglo-American hegemonic masculinity: “Soldiering is characterized as a manly activity requiring the ‘masculine’ traits of physical strength, action, toughness, capacity for violence. . . . It has historically been an important practice constitutive of masculinity.” Hooper identifies four ideal types of hegemonic masculinity: (1) the Greek citizen-warrior, in which the manly citizen is characterized by a rational militarism, (2) the more domesticated, patriarchal Judeo-Christian model, rooted in the idea of paternal authority in the family, (3) the aristocratic ideal, defined by male camaraderie, risk taking, and military heroism, and (4) the Protestant bourgeois-rationalist model, which emphasizes competition, individualism, reason, self-control, and self-denial. To the list of these values, I would add the zero-sum notion of strength. Put another way, any attempt to negotiate or compromise is interpreted by all involved in this discourse of masculinity as signaling weakness or a retreat from a position of power. These models of hegemonic masculinity
also shaped ideas of citizenship. Machiavelli, for example, cast civic virtue, to 
be embodied by an ideal citizen, as virile political action wedded to armed 
masculinity. This masculine construction of citizenship was opposed to an 
effeminacy marked by weakness, impotency, and cowardice. As Hooper also 
points out, these are merely heuristic devices, and, in international politics, 
ideologies and nations have drawn on disparate elements from these ideal 
types to both shape and justify political action. Muscular nationalism is no 
exception, centering a version of the heroic, citizen-warrior model linked to 
armed masculinity represented by disciplined, martial male bodies. George 
Mosse’s analysis of nineteenth-century European nationalism reveals the manner in which nationalist ideology used this idea of manhood (hereafter hege-
monic masculinity in this work) to create a particular manly nation, which 
than regarded the enemies of this nation as effeminate (i.e., weak, undisci-
plined, nonmartial). However, Mosse’s work largely focuses on manhood and 
does not specifically and extensively look at the social dynamic between mas-
culinity and femininity within particular cultural contexts.

Not until the emergence of feminist analysis was the gendered nature of 
national identities uncovered and deconstructed. Although all of the works 
in this field discuss women and womanhood in the nation, I would argue that 
the main focus of most these studies has not been the specific social relation 
between manhood and womanhood and the manner in which this dynamic shapes both female political participation and politicized femininity. Mosse 
argues that “the manly ideal deserves to hold the center of the stage as well, 
for it not only played a role in fashioning ideas of nationhood, respectability, 
and war but it was present and influenced almost every aspect of modern his-
tory.” However, in my work, rather than masculinity holding center stage, 
it is the relational dynamic between masculinity and femininity that is high-
lighted. Cynthia Enloe, in her response to Youngs’s article, while acknowledg-
ing the important impact of forms of modern masculinity, cautioned that 
our intellectual curiosity about masculinity should not overshadow the lives 
of women and girls and the manner in which femininities play out within 
masculinized political spaces. Further, if nationalisms as posited by the work 
of Enloe and others cited are in part shaped by competing masculinities, then 
it behooves scholars to trace this competition and its relationship to both 
femininities and female bodies. This book interrogates examples of muscular 
nationalism—Indian and Irish—to reveal this social dynamic.
The cases I have chosen are not the only examples of this phenomenon. Muscular nationalism is not limited to the Indian and Irish contexts; remarkably similar constructions are found in many other cultural settings. For example, in Serbian nationalism, the political actors—defined by the values of hegemonic masculinity—fought to protect Mother Serbia. The feminine “has been employed to include virtually everyone—men and women alike—not conforming to the accepted ‘nationalized’ versions of masculinity.”\textsuperscript{16} Rape is seen as a tool of war. According to this masculinized Serbian nationalist narrative, chaste Serbian women remained in danger of being raped by Kosovar Albanians, and it was up to the Serbian manly warriors to protect them.

Australian nationalism as it unfolded was also informed by the values of hegemonic masculinity. According to Australian national mythology, in the 1915 Battle of Gallipoli, male citizen-soldiers—through their martial prowess, bravery, and physical strength—gave birth to the Australian nation. In other words, nation and manliness originated in war; indeed, war became the test of manliness and national independence. So, mothers and citizen-soldiers were connected by the act of “giving birth.” Lake argues that mothers gave birth to the soldiers, who in turn gave birth to the Australian nation. But mothers were not equal in power or value to these male citizen-soldiers. The major actors within the nationalist terrain were masculinized; women’s bodies, associated with the feminine, either became a threat to these masculine citizens because of their unpredictable sexuality or could enter the fray only in roles validated by hegemonic masculinity (e.g., as chaste mothers). In Lake’s story of Australia, male martial heroism was the basis of nation making.\textsuperscript{17}

My analysis of muscular nationalism adds depth to the evidence for the existence of a link between nation and hegemonic masculinity in various cultural milieus. Such analysis is the first step toward grappling with the problem destructive masculinities create for any “body” perceived as transgressive within this ideology. Muscular nationalism is visible in many of the conflicts in the world today. Cynthia Enloe’s recent work gendering the U.S. war in Iraq clearly reveals the manner in which conventional ideas of security, work, and politics assumed a martial male body enmeshed in the sociopolitical network, while women’s role in and experience of war remained invisible to the muscular national gaze.\textsuperscript{18} Women entered this mainstream discourse mainly as bodies whose chastity conservative Shiite militias policed or whose progress the Western coalition purported to defend. The war raging between the
antiterrorist coalition led by the United States against al-Qaeda and, until his recent death in Pakistan, Osama bin Laden is another contemporary example. Images of burly camouflage-clad male bodies patrolling the streets of Afghanistan, keeping it safe for innocent women and girls, as well as intermittent visions of men kneeling with guns and protecting the honor of the Islamic nation are commonly found on our television screens.⁵⁹

Parts of the conflict between Israel and Palestine are also being waged in similar terms. Mosse argues that the most potent “outsider” figure in Western Europe has been the Jew, defined as dirty, ugly, crooked, diseased, nervous, and sexually promiscuous. “But it was Otto Weiniger’s famous and perversely popular book Geschlecht und Charakter [Sex and Character, 1903] that proved to be the most important source book for the feminization of the Jews. Here Jews and women were equated as creatures of passion and emotions, lacking true creativity; both were without any individuality, devoid of self-worth.”²⁰ A dominant response to this “Othering” was the idea of the “New Jew” or the “Muscle Jew” that defined itself against both European feminization and the Diaspora Jew, who was seen as timid and effeminate.²¹ The “Muscle Jew” became the martial hero, constructing and defending the Israeli nation at all costs. A similar masculinization of nationalism occurred in Palestine. The Palestinian national elite viewed liberation “as a transaction between men over the honor of a woman-mother whose ownership passes through paternity.”²² The actors within Palestinian nationalism were masculine, “bourgeois-in-the-making, . . . young and able-bodied—free from the physical vulnerabilities of old age.”²³ According to Massad, the Zionist enemy was masculinized, and Palestinian nationalists were urged to equal the enemy in martial prowess and muscular strength as they defended Palestine, embodied as a nation as woman. So we have the clash of muscular nationalisms: the “Muscle” Jew and the “manly” Palestinian.²⁴

A similar clash is occurring in Kashmir as India and Pakistan amass their troops along the Line of Control that divides the two states. The Indian Hindu man and the Pakistani Muslim man are locked in a struggle defined by the valorization of martial prowess, physical strength, and the unwillingness to compromise (read: as not to appear “weak” or effeminate). But, as both Youngs and Enloe caution, the stories of women and “effeminized” men within the dominant narrative shaping these scenarios are not so easily available. Keeping the focus on the militarized (male) body wielding a weapon either ignores or
diverts attention from the tensions created within muscular nationalism by the presence of girls and women running guns, acting as couriers, and nursing (wounded male) comrades and even picking up guns for a cause. This focus also erases the location and implications of the female body becoming the canvas on which this particular vision of masculinity (not necessarily embodied by all men) writes its nationalist vision. By making explicit complications created in muscular nationalism by the female body and the actions of women who cannot be neatly contained within the gendered binary of martial man versus chaste woman, this book takes a step toward dismantling the impact of competing destructive masculinities in the nation.

The gendered images embedded in the poems that began this chapter reveal two gendered aspects of the story of muscular nationalism. The groveling Bengali signifies that some men desire to achieve the dream of muscular nationalism, yet are not able to do so. Thus, the process of overcoming obstacles—usually “effeminate” traits—becomes a story of the nation. Anderson argues that the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a perfect signifier for imagined community because it offers an anonymous (male) body on which the national imagination can project its hopes and desires. Indeed, if Anderson’s work had attended to gender, it would have become clear that the soldier signifies a specific iteration of imagined community—muscular nationalism—that enables the creation of an invented tradition valorizing the martial male body. For example, the poem that began this chapter presents an implicit yearning for a male, Bengali body to be represented by a militant soldier. Indeed, in both the Indian and the Irish cases, the retrieval of the warrior model of manhood—imagined in different ways—that has been lost under the yoke of centuries of imperial rule is a major theme.

In contrast, the Irish poem reveals another aspect of the relationship between women and womanhood and muscular nationalism. By reaching out to an enemy male—either a British soldier or a Protestant neighbor; the poem does not specify—the Northern Irish woman has challenged the proper “chaste” behavior expected of woman in muscular nationalism and hence suffers the consequence. In muscular nationalism, this focus on the purity and chastity of female bodies stems from their role as border guards. By border guards I mean the notion that the boundaries separating “we the people” from “them” are represented by chaste women’s bodies. Put another way, this line of thinking argues that our women are chaste and pure, but yours are
not. This is the difference that separates our nation from yours. Women's role as border guards requires that their purity be vigilantly guarded. Many versions of nationalism see women as weak and hence vulnerable to defilement (usually sexual) and cooptation by the enemies of the nation. In a way, this notion of border guards and the focus on purity may be influenced in the Western tradition by the idea of the beautiful soul. Jean Elshtain argues that women have “served as the collective projection of a pure, rarified, self-sacrificing, otherworldly pacific other.” Indeed, the notion of chaste border guards is nicely accommodated by Elshtain's interpretation of the beautiful soul; this role assumes passivity, since political activism may taint feminine virtue and chastity. In the non-Western context, Gandhi, in delineating his vision of ahimsa (nonviolence), also provided a particularly powerful gendered perspective that may be seen as a variation of Elshtain's conceptualization. Gandhi saw women as the embodiment and guardian of societal morality. Specifically, their maternal role not only constructed a natural feminine predilection toward peace but also provided women with the spiritual capacity to inspire society to overcome moral ambiguity. Using these assumptions as a point of departure, Gandhi actively contributed to female activism by politicizing women's inner worlds and, in the process, allaying conservative anxiety evoked by the sight of respectable women marching in public streets. He insisted that women should come out onto the streets only when they had finished their household duties and had received the permission of their guardians. In public, they were supposed to maintain a chaste, nonviolent, self-sacrificing image of wife and mother, becoming the moral compass of the Indian nationalist movement. Although, in terms of this work, Gandhian nationalism is not muscular, it is worth mentioning that even he was conflicted about feminine activism and its implications for ideas of chastity, tying the female role as the moral caretaker to women's presence in the public realm of politics. Although Gandhi offered a particularly Indian vision of womanhood, feminist research has shown that this conflation of morality, chastity, and purity with women's bodies within nationalisms is found in many contexts. The versions of muscular nationalism analyzed in this book demonstrate the manner in which the expectation of purity (intimately tied to female sexuality and the feminine body) complicates femininity, specifically femininity that will not remain within the boundaries created by the constructs of border guards, beautiful souls, and Gandhian morality.
The gender binary of martial man versus chaste woman is integral to the space of muscular nationalism. But this binary is not very stable because the very existence of certain politically active women can disrupt it. Even though it is possible for female bodies to take on masculine traits and to enter the landscape of muscular nationalism, the fact remains that politicized femininity is perceived as transgressive. Nirmal Puwar argues that “Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually circumscribed) as being out of place. Not being the somatic norm they are space invaders.”

In these particular examples, expectations of chastity and virtue construct women political actors as “being out of place” because they are not the “somatic norm” in the space of muscular nationalism. George Mosse approaches the idea of being out of place from another angle by claiming that, “If woman was idealized [as a symbol of the nation], she was at the same time put very firmly into her place. Those who did not live up to the ideal were perceived as a menace to society and the nation, threatening the established order they were intended to uphold. Hence the deep hatred for women as revolutionary figure.”

As my analysis indicates, the notion of space invaders, as well as Mosse’s idea of menace, is specifically tied to expectations of chaste femininity and anxiety surrounding female sexuality. Put another way, neither movement under study in this book could reconcile women’s activism with female sexuality. Indian and republican women could be imagined only as desexualized, chaste actors. In a way, the movements grappled with female actors by denying or erasing the physicality of women’s bodies. As the study reveals, the lives and action of real women challenged these attempts to empty their bodies of physical and cultural markers of femininity. So how do women political actors negotiate a political terrain imbued with a focus on chaste femininity? I address this question by tracing the shape of muscular nationalism in two dissimilar contexts, India and Ireland, over time (1914–2004) and then further complicate this examination by exposing the dynamic between certain political acts and the ideals of a muscular nation within differing ideological contexts. Put another way, muscular nationalism is not necessarily tied to a single ideology but can wear many guises. As George Mosse observes, “The masculine stereotype was not bound to any one of the powerful political ideologies of the previous century. It supported not only conservative movements . . .
but workers’ movements as well; even Bolshevik man was said to be ‘firm as an oak.’ Modern masculinity from the very first was co-opted by the new nationalist movements of the nineteenth century.” The cooption process referenced in the quotation is the foundation of muscular nationalism; like the image of man, many ideologies utilized the normative contours of a masculine nation. In the Indian case, I note how it emerged within conservative Hindu nationalism, as well as in left-wing Naxalism. In Ireland, these ideals shaped both the radical politics of Irish republicanism, which formed the context of the Armagh dirty protest (1980), and the liberal democratic debate surrounding the meaning of “citizen” that played out in the Republic before the 2004 citizenship referendum.

As the examination unfolds in this study, it becomes clear that both notions of chastity and purity tied to women’s role as border guards and the centering of the martial male body within politics were very much embedded in these ideologically disparate political movements. In both cases, there is an assumption that the male martial spirit loses some of its value if female chastity fails to be a dominant symbol of the national community. Further, notions of what constitutes a morally justifiable “Indian nation” and “Irish nation” were explicitly and implicitly assumed in these forms of activism and debates. What this study aims to highlight is the differing ways in which muscular nationalism used ethnic identity and accommodated women and womanhood. This book centers on how muscular nationalism accommodates women political actors, whether or not they actually attempt to embody the values of armed masculinity by picking up arms or facilitating violence as couriers, gun runners, and nursing wounded comrades. Although I use the term “politcized femininity,” it should be noted that my focus is on a particular type of politicization, that associated with violence. Typically, although men in national armies or militia or rebel groups who take on support roles as medics, chaplains, cooks, mechanics, communication specialists, or code breakers are accepted as soldiers and are central to political violence, women’s support roles (as nurse, gun runner, or courier) are seen as peripheral. Hence, I not only center the roles played by women in conflict but also focus on the gender trouble created by politicized femininity in muscular nationalism.

A gendered tension arises when women enter a movement such as Hindu nationalism or Irish republicanism to fight for the liberation of an oppressed group and unexpectedly find themselves struggling with the ideals of mus-
cular nationalism, usually centered on some notion of normative femininity constructed by the expectation that proper women (chaste, modest, virtuous) should remain aloof from the tainting influence of public politics, specifically political violence. If politics centers the martial male body, what are the consequences for women who pick up arms or are associated with violence in other ways (imprisonment, couriering, carrying weapons, running safe houses for wounded men)? This study reveals that, even when women are not actively political, their bodies remain the political space on which muscular national energizes itself through expectations of female chastity.

As Mosse argues, “Nationalism—and the society that identified with it—used the example of the chaste and modest woman to demonstrate its own virtuous aims.” Chaste femininity can be signified by many images: mother (e.g., Mother India), young virgin (e.g., the Irish icon Cathleen ni Houlihan), and devoted wife (e.g., Sita, drawn from the epic Indian tradition and symbolizing womanhood in many versions of Indian nationalism). Two powerful images of motherhood are Ruddick’s mater dolorosa, or suffering mother, who mourns her slain adult warrior, and the heroic, Spartan-inspired mother who cheerfully sends off her sons to defend the nation. Specifically, this study uses the normative tension between politicized womanhood and these iconic representations—wife, mother, young virgin—to reveal the location that womanhood and women occupy within the power dynamics of muscular nationalism. A point of departure for analyzing this dynamic is Nagel’s notion of a nationalist moral economy that “[provides] specific places for women and men in the nation, identify[ies] desirable and undesirable members by creating gender, sexual and ethnic boundaries and hierarchies within nations, establish[es] criteria for judging good and bad performances of nationalist masculinity and femininity, and define[s] threats to national moral and sexual integrity.”

According to the preceding logic, nationalist boundaries are moral. Women as border guards shore up the nationalist morality; however, in contrast, forms of politicized femininities have the potential to disrupt clearly defined moral categories by transgressing normative expectations of virtuous womanhood.

The trope of border becomes useful again. Gloria Anzaldua challenges the implicit binary assumed in the idea of national borders by claiming that “Borders are set up to define the place that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of
an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.” Women activists in muscular nationalism occupy the borderlands; they constantly negotiate their way through the “emotional residue” of the chastity and purity associated with symbolic representations of the nation. The story of women and womanhood that is told in this book reflects the tension that comes with representing borders and occupying the borderlands simultaneously. My analysis reveals that when women were active participants in muscular nationalism, the physicality of their bodies constantly constructed them as “space invaders,” and they had to contend with and negotiate the expectations of chaste femininity, revealing the gendered circulation of power in the muscular nation.

Before I commence my analysis, I would like to address the logic that has guided my choice of case studies. Ryan and Bjorkert-Thapar, in their comparative article, call for a more detailed analysis of gender and nation in India and Ireland, while Holmes and Holmes specifically center the scholarly relevance of such a comparison. Further, two important works on postcolonial nationalism in Ireland explicitly and implicitly point to the value of a comparison between India and Ireland. In her groundbreaking study, Shattering Silence, Begona Artexga repeatedly compares the unfolding of gender and nation in Ireland to India, while Declan Kiberd, in Inventing Ireland, explicitly calls for the addition of the Irish case to postcolonial nationalisms:

In restoring writers to the wider cultural context, I have been mindful of the ways in which some shapers of modern Africa, India, and the emerging world looked at times to the Irish for guidance. Despite this, a recent study of theory and practice in postcolonial literature, The Empire Writes Back, passes over the Irish case very swiftly, perhaps because the authors find these white Europeans too strange an instance to justify their sustained attention. I hope this book might prompt a reassessment. All cases are complex, but it is precisely the “mixed” nature of the experience of Irish people, as both exponents and victims of British imperialism, which makes them so representative of the underlying process. . . . My belief is that introduction of the Irish case to the debate will complicate, extend and in some cases expose the limits of current models of postcoloniality.

There have been some works that have examined the similarities and differences in British policy toward Ireland and India and assessed the links
between Indian and Irish nationalists. However, all of these texts are either historical or literary studies or, in some cases, both. Some authors, such as Julia Wright and Purnima Bose, do address gender to a certain extent, but the politics of gendered nationalism is not their central analytical focus. My work differs from all of these previous studies in two ways. First, I use the unique construct of muscular nationalism to situate my theorizing of femininity; second, my analysis interweaves history and contemporary politics. Put another way, my genealogy of women and muscular nationalism traces the legacy of this historical construct to nuance and complicate the location of women and womanhood in certain key contemporary political events in a postcolonial context. My analysis spans the years 1914–2004. It begins at a time when muscular nationalism became ascendant in both contexts, reaching its most militant expression in the Dublin Easter Uprising (1916), the two-year Irish War of Independence (1919–1921), and the Irish Civil War (1922–1923). It also looks at the 1920s and 1930s in Bengal, years that were marked by several revolutionary acts inspired by muscular nationalism. In the postcolonial context, the Naxal movement (1969–1972) in Bengal and the Armagh dirty protest (1980) in Northern Ireland are the two key events that most eloquently underline the tension between politicized femininity and muscular nationalism. Further, the 1987 immolation of Roop Kanwar in India and the 2004 citizenship referendum in the Republic of Ireland evoked a passionate debate that in each context centered most emphatically on the location of a female body in the muscular nation. These examples shore up the tension created by female actors in muscular nationalism by revealing the political consequences when the female body as border guard literally becomes the space on which muscular nationalism plays out.

In a way, this comparison is haunted by racialization. Building on the images offered by the poems that opened this chapter, it is fruitful to note that, according to popular racial nomenclature, the Irish women’s body is “white,” while the Bengali man’s body is not. Therefore, this comparative study also highlights the complicated position of “whiteness” in the unfolding of these two nationalisms. In contemporary Ireland and India, race and gender also intersect in potent ways; however, the racialization process is more complicated. For example, in modern Irish citizenship debates, it emerges (as a response to global immigration patterns) to inform gender in ways that are similar to the observations of the colonial British, but, in the Indian context,
the category “race” as it is used in the Anglo-American context is not very relevant. Hierarchies based on physical identity are articulated not as racial differences but as differences of caste or ethnic or tribal origin (referring to the descendants of the nomadic peoples of India). However, such categorization does certainly inform the fusion of power and gender within muscular nationalism.

Many theorists working in and about India are reluctant to complicate postcoloniality by introducing the Irish case. This hesitancy may center on the ideas of whiteness that imbue certain expressions of historical and cultural Irish muscular nationalism, the implication of Irish soldiers and administrators in the British empire in India, and Ireland’s position as the erstwhile “Celtic Tiger.” Indeed, as Julia Wright has pointed out, Ireland disturbs the neatly defined binary of oppressive colonizer and oppressed colonized on which many studies of imperialism rest: “If Ireland is ‘that’—European but colonized, Christian but not Protestant, rebellious but providing soldiers and administrators for the British Empire—the question then becomes whether ‘that’ is best described as allied with ‘this’ or ‘the Other.’” Indeed, continuing with the border metaphor, Ireland lies on the border between “this” and “the Other,” occupying the borderlands of imperial power.

As becomes quite evident in my analysis, Ireland’s position as “that,” in contrast to India’s position as an imperial space that was unequivocally “the Other,” offers the opportunity to provide a comparison of gender, nation, and race that disrupts neat categories of masculine/feminine and white/nonwhite. The manner in which men and women live and interpret muscular nationalism within diverse ideological and cultural contexts serves to remind us of the complex circulation of power. In contemporary times this comparison is further complicated by the fact that the Republic of Ireland’s per capita GDP of $37,000 in 2010 was ten times that of India, while its 2003 universal literacy rate of 99 percent contrasts sharply with the general Indian literacy rate of 61 percent and the female literacy rate of 48 percent. Although Ireland is politically a postcolonial country, is it so in terms of economics and other aspects? I do not want to enter into an argument over Ireland’s postcolonial status; however, echoing Declan Kiberd, I offer this exploration of muscular nationalism as an attempt to “extend and complicate.”

To sum up, this book offers an examination of a particular story of gender and nation, muscular nationalism. Although the notion of “border guards”
and its norms of chastity and purity have the theoretical possibility of limiting women as the passive symbols of nation, this book reveals a more complicated reality by interrogating the contested path women followed as they participated in a nationalist politics that saw their passive, chaste bodies as defining the borders of nation. This examination follows what Judith Halberstam calls a “scavenger methodology,” because “it uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour.” My scavenger method consists of examining colonial texts, political cartoons, biographies, films, political organizations, and fiction. In the case of Ireland, field work was conducted in Dublin (the National Library of Ireland), Belfast (Linen Hall Library), and Derry. Archival research was supported by conversations with Irish academics, personnel at Sinn Fein bookstores, leaders of political walks and museum curators (e.g., the leaders of the IRA walk and officials at the Bloody Sunday Museum in Derry), and perusal of political murals lining the streets of Belfast. The Indian case study draws on archival sources in the India Office Collection in the British library and at the Centre for Social Science Research in Kolkata, as well as interviews conducted in Mumbai and New Delhi.

The story of muscular nationalism in both India and Ireland begins with hegemonic masculinity and the British Empire. In chapter 1, I underline the manner in which various imperial forces “racialized” and “effeminized” both the Irish and the Indians, specifically Bengalis. I focus on Bengalis because the Bengali babu was a particular influential colonial image of Indian effeminacy. Colonial administrators used a gendered and racialized lens to classify Indians into various groups, one of the most important being “martial” and “nonmartial” races. The former not only embodied certain features of hegemonic masculinity but also were tall and fair-skinned, with light-color hair and eyes (e.g., the Pathans or the Sikhs). In contrast, the “nonmartial” races were effeminate as well as being short and dark-skinned, with dark hair and eyes (e.g., Bengalis or Tamils). The nineteenth-century science of ethnography shored up the racialization of such gendered observations. Hardy, Protestant, white Englishmen were seen as superior because of their regular and symmetrical features; an emphatic mark of this racial superiority was their embodiment of hegemonic masculinity.

This process of categorization generally worked visually in India, but how did it work for Irishmen who were similar in complexion to their English
In the mid-nineteenth century, there was a self-conscious attempt to “Africanize” or “simianize” the “effeminate” Irish, since the racial inferiority of Africans and other people of color was justified by various eugenic scientists in terms of their observed “ape-like” features. The process of racialization in both India and Ireland emphasizes the significant extent to which gender and race can fuse within a nationalist narrative. Chapter 2 elaborates the imperial process of racialization and gendering by drawing on primary texts, secondary literature, and political cartoons.

Chapter 3 goes on to examine the consequences of this cultural discourse. There was, of course, a multiplicity of nationalist responses in each context. Although many nationalists (not always self-consciously) drew upon ideas of masculinities and femininities, their interpretations of nation were quite different. These differences largely hinged on the role of militarism, women, and religion in the nationalist vision. This book focuses on a specific intersection of the quest for manhood within the nation: muscular nationalism.

In the years spanning the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, nationalist leaders in India and Ireland created an oppositional identity that challenged British racialized gendering of the colonial Other. The Irish forged an image of the muscular Gael (with its undertones of Catholicism) in opposition to that of muscular Christianity (rooted in Anglo Protestantism). The Gaelic Irish nation, represented as a woman, was to be protected by these manly warriors of Ireland. A continent away, certain nationalist elites in India were imagining a Hindu nation embodied as a beautiful woman and were calling for masculine Hindu warriors to defend Mother India. These forms of resistance were necessary since the British denigration of both Irish and Indian manhood was linked to a justification for continued British presence.

Drawing on both primary sources such as nationalist newspapers and political speeches and secondary source texts, I sketch the general contours of muscular nationalism in each context by highlighting similarities as well as differences. Then, in an attempt to provide a nuanced analysis, I trace the genealogy of a specific iteration of this view of nation: muscular Catholicism as articulated by Patrick Pearse (1879–1916) in Ireland and Vivekananda’s (1863–1902) ideas of masculine Hinduism in India. Although, in each context, these ideas were one of many nationalisms in circulation, it cannot be denied that these two figures released a vision of nation that still resonates in contemporary politics. Further, this chapter nuances the comparison by
discussing the Irish Volunteers, founded in 1913, an eloquent institutional expression of Pearsian nationalism, as well as the prominent revolutionary group the Anushilan Samiti, which was influenced by Vivekananda’s interpretation of Hindu muscular nationalism. In both contexts, this ideal of nationalism valorizing the martial male body emerged in tandem with notions of female chastity that tended to view women as passive mothers and wives both in and as the nation requiring the protection of manly warriors. Despite this presumption of passivity, women were not absent from this particular quest for manhood. Indeed, a particular interesting niche was created by women who insisted on their right to participate in the muscular nation. In chapter 4, my discussion of Pearse’s work is complicated by a discussion of the Cumann na mBan (Irish Women’s Organization, founded 1914), which reflected an ambiguous relationship with Pearsian muscular nationalism as expressed by the Irish Volunteers in their attempts to interpret the role of woman as warrior within a national context imbued with women’s role as border guards, whether as chaste wife or mother. I also pay specific attention to two figures, Countess Markievicz (1868–1927) and Margaret Skinnider (1893–1971), both of whom were active as soldiers in the anti-imperial 1916 Easter Uprising in Dublin. The actions of Bengali women who advocated and participated in “terror” as an anti-imperial tool complicate the muscular nationalism expressed by Vivekananda and the Anushilan Samiti. Additionally, I briefly discuss the writings of Saraladebi Chaudharani (1872–1946), an ardent advocate of muscular nationalism, and the life and ideas of Preetilata Wadedar (1911–1932), who lost her life in an armed raid. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 set up the present, so to speak, by revealing certain historical discourses and political acts that have specific resonance for modern muscular nationalism. Chapter 5 compares two versions of modern muscular nationalism by focusing on the location of women and womanhood within its social dynamic. The ideas unleashed by the Bengali revolutionary society surfaced in modern India in Naxalism, a specific iteration of radical Marxism. A close examination of the class ideology underlying this movement reveals a gendered association with a “new” Naxal man constructed with the traits of hegemonic masculinity. When women joined the Naxalite movement, they not only faced a politics centered on the martial male body but also found themselves being evaluated according to ideas of chaste and pure womanhood as they struggled against the Indian state and representatives of bourgeois capitalism. A spe-
specific focus on three Naxal women—Krishna Bandyopadhyay, Ajitha Narayanan, and Joya Mitra—adds depth to my analysis. Similarly, when women joined the Irish Republican Army once it was rejuvenated in 1969, they found themselves embedded in a muscular nationalism that was still very much tied to Pearse’s vision of male warrior and suffering mother. After a general discussion of the implications of this legacy for IRA women, I move on to an investigation of the 1980 Armagh dirty protest in Northern Ireland, a high-profile political event that revealed the social suspicion of and the destabilization wrought by politically active female bodies in a context of muscular nationalism.

Chapter 6 shifts focus to illuminate another aspect of womanhood in muscular nationalism that serves to complicate the discussion of politicized femininity. Two key political events—the 1987 immolation of Roop Kanwar and the 2004 Irish citizenship referendum—are unpacked to reveal the contested position occupied by women in a context shaped by muscular nationalism even when they do not explicitly challenge their roles as border guards. Vivekananda, in his ruminations about muscular nationalism, also influenced another political ideology, commonly referred to as Hindutva or Hindu nationalism, that has emerged in modern India. Women activists and politicians occupy a rather fraught location within this ideological terrain. This chapter briefly discusses this feminized space in general and then goes on to unpack a high-profile event that reveals the complicated position of women within modern Hindu muscular nationalism. The immolation of Roop Kanwar on her husband’s funeral pyre, in 1987, evoked ideas of chastity and womanhood within muscular nationalism and for the first time provoked a countrywide debate around these issues in India. In contrast, the controversy surrounding the 2004 Irish citizenship referendum in the Republic clearly emphasized that the colonial past, specifically in terms of racialization and the legacy of Pearsian muscular nationalism, still troubled the modern Irish nation. Woman as mother in muscular nationalism entered a post-Pearsian Republic through public debates surrounding the meaning of Irishness and a perceived threat to this identity through the fertile black female body.

Chapters 5 and 6 illustrate the logic of postcolonial muscular nationalism by highlighting several facets of the tension between politicized femininity and chastity within this ideology. Not only did the politicized femininity expressed by the Naxalite and Armagh women challenge the images of
women inscribed within a masculinized nation, but also Roop Kanwar and the bodies of migrant Nigerian women highlight the considerable anxiety that surrounds the production of “proper” bodies as border guards of a nation.

The last chapter uses the work done in the previous six to briefly discuss the relationship between women and muscular nationalism. Women’s bodies and ideas of womanhood occupy a complex position within the several contemporary articulations of this particular ideology. The tension between politicized and chaste femininity creates a complicated terrain that women have to negotiate carefully if they are to be acknowledged as legitimate nationalists and hence equal stakeholders in a nation that accepts a femininity that is much more complex than the unidimensional images and icons of chastity that erase the robust and physical lives of women.