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Catholic nationalism and feminism in twentieth-century Ireland

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Catholic Nationalism and Feminism in Twentieth-Century Ireland

by

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Abstract:

In the early 1900s, Ireland experienced a surge in nationalism as its political leanings shifted away from allegiance to the British Parliament and towards a pro-Ireland and pro-independence stance. The landscape of Ireland during this period was changed dramatically by the subversive popularity of the Irish political party, Sinn Fein, which campaigned for an Ireland for the Irish. Much of the political rhetoric surrounding this campaign alludes to the fact that Ireland was not inherently "British" because it defined itself by two unique, un-British characteristics – the Gaelic language and the Catholic faith.

As Sinn Fein's hold on Ireland increased, the Catholic Church took advantage of Ireland's pro-Catholicism political climate and became an extraordinarily powerful force in the everyday lives of Irish people. This thesis questions whether or not the religiosity associated with Ireland's uniqueness was also associated with freedom and independence for the women of Ireland during this period.

This thesis poses several key questions in order to posit the role of both nationalism and Church in the Suffrage movement. First, was it possible for Catholic women in early twentieth century Ireland to remain true to their faith while also seeking the right to vote? Additionally, how did feminists go about achieving the seemingly impossible task of appealing to the "proper" authority when lobbying for voting rights – by imploring the rebellious Sinn Feiners or by pleading to the British crown? How did they resolve the "Catch-22" of being either a rebel or a traitor? How did the Irish people react to militant feminism during a time of militant nationalism? Was it encouraged of discouraged?

This thesis concludes that the most "subversive" feminists who made the largest strides for women in Ireland also became the most rejected both by society and the church. This is affirmed in the anti-feminist nature of the Constitution of Ireland of 1937.

Chapter 1: The Beginning of the Catholic-Protestant Divide in Ireland

The story of Ireland's violent past begins with the unlikely character of a woman, Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII of England. Anne and Henry began their love affair while he was still married to Katherine of Aragon. In 1533, Henry, who was desperate to have a son and realized that Katherine was no longer able to bear children, decided to take the drastic measure of securing an annulment for his and Katherine's marriage. After Pope Clement VII refused to grant the annulment, Henry decided to take matters into his own hands by aligning England with the Protestant Reformation and severing all ties with the Catholic Church. In doing so, he officially created the Church of England and introduced the practice of divorce into his country. However, he also introduced a far more detrimental divide into the political culture of England – a religious divide between his followers and the adherents of the traditional Roman Catholic Church.[1]

Henry's decision to abandon the Vatican did not sit well with his newly-colonized subjects in the territory of Ireland, where the majority of the population identified themselves as Catholic and were unwilling to bend to Henry VIII's desire to have a new wife. It also rankled the Catholic monarchs of mainland Europe, particularly the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, the nephew of Katherine of Aragon. In attempting to satisfy his personal whims, Henry turned the political fabric of Europe inside-out. The Irish people were already resisting Henry's encroachments into their territory, and this "manipulation of Christianity" cemented their distaste for his authority. Youssef Courbage notes the presence of this attitude in Ireland:

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[1]   Thomas E. Hachey, Joseph M. Hernon, Jr. and Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Experience: A Concise History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 17.

> It was only when Henry VIII founded the Church of England (in 1534)
> that the identities of Irish Catholics and British Protestants diverged.
> Religion became the major differentiating factor between the native
> population, who were almost all Roman Catholic, and the immigrants,
> who were mostly Scottish Presbyterian or Anglican.[2]

Thus, Henry's actions not only pitted England against Ireland, but also positioned the

Protestant European states against the Catholic European states in a conflict so deeply

entrenched in theology that it was sure to bring Europe to the brink of violence for many

years to come.

In the 1530s, Ireland was not yet a formal territory, but rather, a collection of

baronies and monastic settlements. The rulers of the Tudor state (Henry VIII and his

daughters, Mary I and Elizabeth I) encouraged the English to capture land in Ireland and

claim it for the English Crown. English landlords chose to act on the advice of their

monarchs and in doing so established the Plantation system in which Protestants became

the primary landowners in a territory that was dominated by a Catholic majority.

Courbage explains, "The share of Catholic-owned land, which had been virtually 100%

in 1600, had fallen to 59% by 1641, 22% in 1688 and was barely 14% in 1703."[3] The

majority of these Protestant planters set up their livelihood in the northernmost region of

Ireland known as Ulster.

Apart from the process of Anglo-Irish "planting," which guided England's

economic colonization of Ireland, there was also a series of military events that denote

the transition of Ireland's political path from English colony to English territory. The

first, the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, marked the culmination of the international dispute

over the balance of power between Protestant and Catholic nation-states in Europe. The

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[2] Youssef Courbage, "The Demographic Factor in Ireland's Movement Towards Partition (1607-1921)," *Population: An English Selection* 9, 1997: 172, http://www.jstor.org/ (accessed 7 December 2008).
[3] Courbage, "The Demographic Factor in Ireland's Movement Towards Partition (1607-1921)," 172.

Battle of the Boyne arose from the conflicting religious sentiments born out of the English Glorious Revolution, which confirmed the religious allegiance of the English monarchy to Protestantism with the ascent of William II of Orange to the British throne.[4]

The threat of finally losing Ireland to the English-Protestant power structure drew Catholic France into the conflict as well, which erupted on July 1, 1690 in the Battle of the Boyne near what is now Drogheda, Ireland. The Catholic troops of Ireland and France fought against the Protestant troops of England, the Netherlands, Denmark, the Ulster Scots and the French Huguenots. It marked the beginning of a bloody, year-long stand off between the Catholic and Protestant powers of Europe. The Protestant side was eventually victorious and the power of the Protestant Ascendancy class in Ireland greatly increased. Additionally, the English signed an Act of Union with Scotland in 1707, creating the nation-state of Great Britain and gaining the economic and political power of Scotland.

In the late 1700s, the Irish attempted to rid themselves of the English colonizers once again. Inspired by the success of the American and French revolutions, Irish rebels laid plans to conduct an uprising against the British crown with the aid of France once again. The revolt was set to take place in Dublin in 1798. The French sent a force of 15,000 soldiers aboard French naval ships for what they perceived to be an excellent opportunity to weaken the British state. However, terrible weather and a bout of sickness forced many ships to head back to France – the battle plans became useless and the leaders of the uprising were discovered, tried for treason and hanged.[5]

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[4]   Hachey, Hernon, and McCaffrey, 19.
[5]   Hachey, Hernon, Jr. and McCaffrey, 48.

The next important conflict between Great Britain and Ireland didn't occur until the early 1900s, but was one of the most politically significant events during the five-hundred year conflict. During the Easter Rising of 1916, a small group of pro-Irish independence Catholic rebels attempted to take a stand against the British military. The military stand-off between the Irish Republicans and the British Army took place in Dublin from April 24 to April 30. The Irish side was organized by the Irish Republican Brotherhood and was composed of factions from the Irish Volunteers led by Patrick Pearse and the Irish Citizen Army led by James Connolly. The British side was composed of the official British Army. The venture was suicidal – a group of roughly thirty men captured the General Post Office in Dublin and attempted to take on the entirety of British forces stationed in Ireland. The rebellion was promptly squashed by the British military. Irish participants and leaders were immediately executed. However, the British military victory and cruel treatment of their Irish prisoners provided a rallying point for the Irish people. The British hoped to send a message of non-tolerance to the Irish by executing the leaders of the rebellion, but instead, gave them a motive to rebel once more.[6]

The importance of the Easter Rising is not defined by the losses and gains of either the British or the Irish, but rather by the precedent of guerilla warfare and martyrdom for a political cause that was set by the "heroes" of the event. The Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers who took part in the Easter Rising would eventually collapse their respective organizations into the umbrella organization of the Irish Republican Army (the IRA), and would attract a following of young men and

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[6]   Hachey, Hernon, Jr. and McCaffrey, 157.

women that preferred to martyr themselves for their country and their faith than to acknowledge the authority of the British Crown and Parliament over their nation.

The reverence of martyrdom for the Irish cause established its position as a precedent for self-sacrifice during the Anglo-Irish War, which began in 1919 and lasted until 1921. This Irish War for Independence was driven by the IRA's guerilla-style tactics. Richard English quotes Lawrence McCaffrey in elaborating upon this theory: "In January 1919 … Sinn Fein's passive resistance to British authority evolved into a guerilla war of liberation. … Dressed as civilians, members of the IRA … ambushed military lorries, captured arms, assassinated suspected spies and informers and shot soldiers and policemen."[7] Tensions between each side ran so deep that military actions were conducted with little value for human life in either direction.

As bloody and cruel as the IRA's tactics were, they aided the IRA in achieving political victory. After concluding that the British economy was suffering from the amount of money and manpower that the war was costing, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George initiated treaty talks with IRA leader Michael Collins and came to an agreement that ended the war. The treaty gave Ireland the status of an autonomous dominion within the state of Great Britain, but also partitioned the six northern Irish counties of Ulster, denying Ulster this same status. This was the preferred outcome for Ulster Protestants.

The treaty was unacceptable to the more radical members of the IRA – it did not give Ireland the pure independence that that it wanted and it completely abandoned Northern Ireland. On the other hand, it was the first opportunity for peace that Ireland

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[7]   Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 161.

had seen since the beginning of the war. The conflict of opinion over whether or not to accept the treaty divided the IRA into pro-treaty and anti-treaty camps. The result of this division was a bloody, year-long civil war in which each side used the tactics that they had learned during their fight against the British to attack one another. The British supplied troops, weapons and artillery to the pro-treaty side, thus ensuring its victory.

This bloody, five-hundred year history between Catholic Ireland and Protestant Britain set the backdrop for the suffrage movement's campaign in Ireland. The concept of suffrage did not start to gain popularity on the Emerald Isle until the late 1800s, but suffrage and independence for Catholic men had been a debatable issue since Henry VIII began encouraging English landlords to capture Irish land and establish plantations. As of the early 1900s, the Irish had not yet achieved the Catholic independence that most of the population sorely wanted. This left the question of women's suffrage up in the air – was suffrage to be considered second to Irish-Catholic independence, or were the rights of women to be posited as equal to the rights of men?

The grapple between nationalist and feminist sentiments was fought on a grassroots level throughout the evolution of the social change movement in the United Kingdom and Ireland. While both British and Irish women's suffrage movements had the terminal goal of gaining the franchise for women, it became clear throughout the lobbying process that British and Irish women had different ideas about where they wanted this right to originate. Once content to receive their rights from Westminster, Irish women shifted their focus to Dublin as nationalist sentiment swept throughout Ireland in the early twentieth-century.

Chapter 2: The Division: Irish and British Suffrage Movements as Separate Entities?

Irish suffragists during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were caught in a double-bind that made it impossible for them to develop an adequate and successful political agenda for their campaign. This double-bind resulted from the complicated political climate of Ireland during the Home Rule debates of the early twentieth century. "Home Rule" meant that Ireland would still be part of the British Empire, but would have its own parliament. This option was attractive to Irish Catholics because it was the first step in achieving complete, political independence and provided the option of having a government that might look more favorably on their faith and on their lifestyle. It was also an attractive option for wealthy, Protestant landlords because this group understood that as the wealthiest and most powerful class of people in Ireland, they would be assuming leadership of the new Irish Parliament.[8]

On the one hand, Irish women had the option of allying their political movement with the Irish nationalist perspective by campaigning for a clause on women's suffrage to be attached to the Home Rule Bill. On the other hand, the Irish suffragists had the choice of allying with the British suffrage movement and ignoring the prospect of Home Rule for Ireland by campaigning with the mentality that suffrage for women should precede Home Rule for Ireland.

The Irish suffragists were faced with the difficult decision of placing their Irish nationalism above their femininity or their femininity above their Irish nationalism. Either choice would have resulted in negative repercussions for the movement depending upon the future result of the Home Rule question. If the women chose to ally with the

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[8] Ben Walsh, "The End of the British Empire in Ireland," British Empire, Kew, The British National Archives, http://www.learningcurve.gov.uk/empire/g3/cs4/background.htm (accessed March 21, 2009).

nationalists, they risked isolating the Ulster suffragists and losing the franchise should the

Home Rule bill fail. However, if they allied with the British, they risked losing the favor

of the Irish politicians which would have been disastrous should the Home Rule bill pass.

Much of the failure associated with the Irish Suffrage Movement between the end of the

nineteenth century and World War I was not a result of poor political planning on the part

of the Irish suffragists, but of the overshadowing politics of the Home Rule debate.

In 1906, a woman's position in Great Britain was that of a non-citizen. The most

important consequence of a woman's inability to call herself a subject of the crown of the

United Kingdom was her lack of ability to vote or to take part in any sort of official

political gathering or procedure. Women were not only barred from politics through

policy, they were also physically barred from even observing a session of Parliament.

The 1906 edition of *Dod's Parliamentary Companion* explains the existence and

metaphorical importance of the bar that obstructed the view of Parliament from the

building's ladies' gallery: "Ladies are excluded from the House of Commons, but there is

a gallery above that of the reporters from which, concealed by a grating in the front, they

are allowed an imperfect view of the House."[9] A woman's view of politics was

imperfect from her seat in the ladies' gallery, yet was made even more imperfect by her

inability to participate, even on the most mundane level of being able to vote.

Irish suffragists were constantly faced with the demand to identify themselves

throughout their campaign to gain the right to vote. Margaret Ward explains the

complicated, political nature of this identification crisis:

> Within this polarized situation there were two obvious paths of
> intervention for women anxious to make their own political claim: either

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[9]   Claire Eustance, *Protests from Behind the Grille: Gender and the Transformation of Parliament, 1867 – 1918* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 107.

to put pressure exclusively upon the faction they identified with politically – home rulers or unionists – in order to ensure women's enfranchisement would be included within any constitutional settlement; or to campaign wholeheartedly for one faction, in the expectation that once the crisis had been resolved, their victorious allies would reward their zeal.[10]

Ward emphasizes that Irish suffragists had to make a political decision during their campaign for the vote. She also delineates that it was possible for women to assume a passive role in the campaign for suffrage, but that doing this still required taking a stance on Home Rule. An Irish woman could passively support suffrage by individually aligning herself with either the Irish nationalists or the British and Ulster Unionists on the question of Home Rule. The idealistic notion behind taking a passive role was that simply by proving themselves capable of taking part in the complex political debate of Home Rule, women would prove their capacity for understanding politics and would subsequently be given the right to vote once the side that they had aligned with was able to achieve its political aspirations.

Whether a woman desiring the right to vote wanted to take an active or a passive role in the struggle, she had to assume some sort of a political stance on Home Rule. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to claim that the question of women's suffrage in Ireland was inextricably tied to the Home Rule movement and Ireland's fight for independence from Great Britain. As Margaret Ward attests, the suffrage question cannot be viewed in a "historical vacuum" and will always be influenced by the national political climate: "Feminism cannot be viewed in isolation from other political considerations."[11] Therefore, in order to understand the pre-World War I failure of the suffrage movement,

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[10]   Margaret Ward, "'Suffrage First, Above All Else!' An Account of the Irish Suffrage Movement," *Feminist Review* 10 (Spring 1982): 22.
[11]   Margaret Ward, "Conflicting Interests: The British and Irish Suffrage Movements," *Feminist Review* 50 (Summer 1995): 127.

it makes sense to study the Irish and British approach to achieving suffrage by recognizing that each movement had separate political aspirations that were related to their stance on the question of Home Rule for Ireland.

The British suffrage movement was led by the Women's Social and Political Union, an organization formed in 1903 as an alternative to a pre-existing, failed suffrage group known as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. The WSPU, as it came to be called, was headed by Emmeline Pankhurst and her two daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, who came to be very well known in the women's suffrage community for their extreme devotion to the cause.[12] The Pankhursts' WSPU was a more militant group than its numerous predecessors, evoking members to engage in violent acts such as committing arson against the postal service, conducting violent rallies outside of Parliament and throwing stones at the Prime Minister's residence, 10 Downing Street. According to Elizabeth Crawford, "The WSPU's militant tactics evoked sympathy among the younger Irish political activists."[13] Violence seemed to be the common thread of political understanding between young Irish and British women and as the WSPU moved its policy planning towards a more militant agenda, it won the hearts and minds of Irish suffragists.

At this stage of the suffrage movement, the ideologies of the Irish and the British suffragists seemed to fall in line with one another. There even seemed to be solidarity among the nationalities rooted in a common understanding that all suffragists were women and all of these women were British citizens, united under the banner of equality.

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[12]   John Simkin, "Women's Social and Political Union," Spartacus Educational. http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Wwspu.htm (accessed March 21, 2009).
[13]   Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland.* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 260.

This solidarity, Crawford claims, can be observed in a lecture delivered by a Dublin

suffragist, Anne Robertson, in reference to the British suffrage movement:

> In her lecture Anne Robertson's cultural stance may be deduced from her
> use of the term 'English' to mean 'British,' and 'British' definitely
> encompassed 'Irish.' This was not a usage that would have been
> condoned by later campaigners. … In addition, Anne Robinson dwelt at
> length on the specific disability suffered by widowed mothers, whether
> Catholic or Protestant.[14]

Robertson's egalitarian tone represented a hope that all British women would

unite in the struggle for the vote no matter whether they considered themselves to

be British, Irish, Catholic or Protestant.

However, this egalitarian hope did not last. Without the knowledge or consent of

the WSPU, a bureaucratic decision was made by Westminster in 1907 which gave

English, Scottish and Welsh women the privilege of sitting on regional, government

councils, but excluded Irish women. This decision may appear to be relatively

unimportant from the outset; however, it caused a divide among the national suffrage

movements of Great Britain and Ireland that had lasting consequences. Crawford

supports the notion that the decision to leave Irish women out of regional councils

resulted in the severing of ties between British and Irish suffrage movements.[15]

Westminster's decision to exclude Irish women from regional councils provided

Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, an Irish feminist leader in Dublin, with ammunition to form

a separate Irish suffrage society. In 1908, Sheehy-Skeffington founded the Irish

Women's Franchise League, the IWFL, which sought to recognize the uniqueness of the

Irish woman within the realm of the suffrage debate. Crawford notes, "Margaret

Cousins, who … was one of the co-founders, recorded: 'Hanna asked us and some other

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[14]   Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, 254.
[15]   Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, 260.

friends to join in working out a scheme for a militant suffrage society suitable to the different political situation of Ireland.'"[16] Sheehy-Skeffington demanded the franchise for women, but dually demanded independence for Ireland. The IWFL was not the first women's organization to be formed in Dublin, and its existence caused much anxiety within the Irish feminist movement. Many men and women in Ireland felt that the Irish Republican movement was much more important than the women's suffrage movement and believed that organizations such as the IWFL represented a distraction from the greater cause of Irish freedom from Great Britain. The Irish women not only had to contend with the anti-suffrage political sentiment of the greater United Kingdom, but also encountered the added burden of combatting anti-Irish legislation that blocked the road to equal rights for women.

The IWFL's creation marked the beginning of an irreconcilable divide between the British and Irish suffrage movements. The divide became wider once the Home Rule debate was introduced into the political mix. After the 1910 elections, Herbert Asquith, Prime Minister of Great Britain, needed the support of the Irish Nationalist Party in order to allow his Liberal government to maintain power. John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Nationalist Party, agreed to support Asquith's government provided that Asquith gave him something in return – Home Rule for Ireland. Therefore, the possibility of Irish Home Rule started to look less like a dream and more like a reality during the years after 1911. The balancing act between the Liberal Party and the Irish Nationalist Party had a severing effect on the British and Irish women's suffrage movement.[17]

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[16]   Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, 260.
[17]   Ward, "Conflicting Interests," 131.

This severing effect resulted from a series of events and circumstances that occurred between the WSPU and the IWFL. First, the WSPU reacted negatively when the question of Home Rule for Ireland started to look like a real possibility – they condemned Home Rule and they dually criticized the idea of attaching the suffrage movement to Home Rule. Second, as Ward explains, they demanded that Irish women place the greater fight for suffrage above nationalistic, political claims: "Christabel Pankhurst's announcement was that the WSPU declared war upon the Irish party. WSPU strategy now was to declare 'no votes for women – no home rule.'"[18] This tactic was easily accessible to Northern Irish women who supported Union and, thus, caused a second divide in the Irish suffrage movement, isolating Northern Irish suffragists from suffragists in greater Ireland. As a result, the movement in Northern Ireland became a violent compilation of differing feminist and nationalist ideologies. In fact, the most violent women's suffrage campaigns took place in Antrim and Down, counties located in Northern Ireland.[19]

The WSPU understood that the prospect of Home Rule for Ireland had caused a division within the suffrage movement. However, the organization simply refused to accept the IWFL's claims that the division was necessary in order to recognize that the political situation of Irish and British women was different. Christabel Pankhurst is cited explaining that the politics of Home Rule should not impact the Irish suffrage question and that the women of Ireland should continue to ally themselves with the WSPU: "We have come to the conclusion that so far as the WSPU is concerned, there ought not to be a

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[18]   Ward, "Conflicting Interests," 131.
[19]   Ward, "Conflicting Interests," 128.

distinction between the English movement and the Irish movement."[20] However, the

IWFL was not ready to accept the British suffrage league's claims that Irish nationalism

was trivial compared to the greater suffrage question. Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington

disagreed with Pankhurst and affirmed that nationalism could not be separated from the

question of women's suffrage within Ireland, as the question of equality and freedom for

Irish women was connected to both an Irish and a feminist identity. Pankhurst simply did

not understand this connection and could not reason with it.

As a result of the WSPU's continued presence in Northern Ireland and Northern

Ireland's determination to remain a part of the union, the IWFL was unable to establish a

stable existence in the North. The WSPU continued to push its apolitical, anti-nationalist

agenda throughout the counties of Ulster, and the IWFL, Ward notes, was fully aware of

this strategy; "Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington admitted that in Belfast they were regarded as

being 'tainted with nationalism' and although she maintained links with Northern

women, the IWFL had little presence there."[21] Each suffrage group was moving in a

different direction, and the success of the individual suffrage groups was contingent upon

the political success or failure of their male counterparts. As the Home Rule movement

failed to gain acceptance in Northern Ireland, the IWFL, a uniquely Irish suffrage group,

failed to gain acceptance amongst the women of Northern Ireland. The Ulster Irish did

not want to identify with a group that based its claims to suffrage around the principles of

Irish nationalism.

The start of World War I in 1914 complicated the suffrage movement even

further. The British suffragists immediately dropped their agenda in order to assist with

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[20]   Quoted in Ward, "Conflicting Interests," 137.
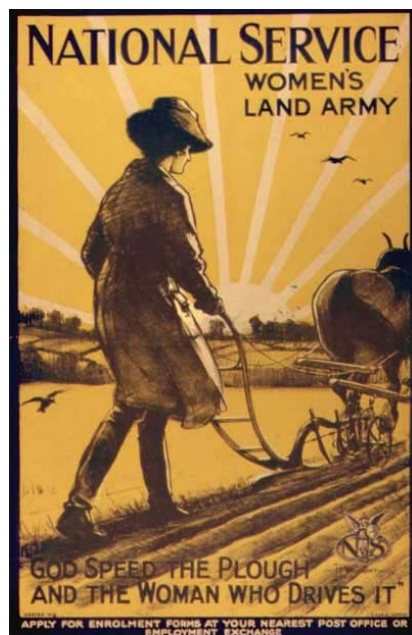[21]   Ward, "Conflicting Interests," 139.

the war cause. The Irish suffragists, on the other hand, aligned their policies with more

radical nationalist groups and chose to view the war as an imperialist tool of the British

state designed to control and coerce the actions of the Irish people. While the Nationalist

Party was content to "shelf" the implementation of Home Rule until after the Great War,

the suffragists wanted immediate action in terms of their own political demands.

Therefore, the IWFL continued its pursuit to gain the right to vote and subsequently

linked this cause with a protest of the war. The IWFL's propaganda magazine, *The Irish

Citizen*, published the group's official position: "Votes for Women Now! Damn Your

War!"[22]

     The British released a propaganda campaign targeting Irish women as well in an

attempt to inspire a sense of camaraderie and to counter the campaign of the IWFL.
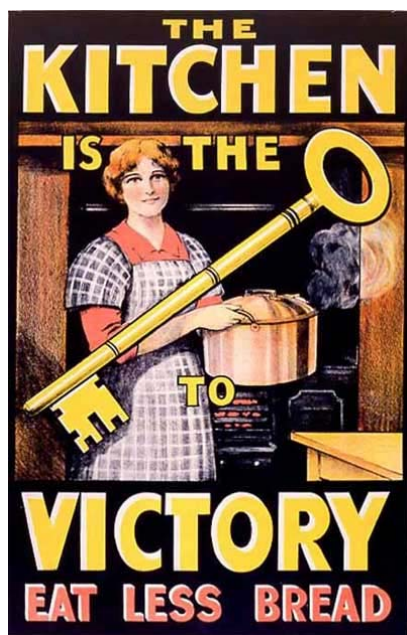
A poster bearing the slogan "eat less bread" implored a red-headed Irish woman to join in

the war effort by cooking more carefully. See Illustration 1. Another poster targeted any

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[22]   Ward, "Conflicting Interests," 143.

[23]   Michael Duffy, Propaganda Posters – United Kingdom (Online: First World War, 2007), http://www.firstworld war.com/posters/uk.htm (accessed March 21, 2009).

[24]   Duffy, Propaganda Posters – United Kingdom.

female British citizen and asked all women to take up the plough that her soldier

husband/brother/father had left behind for the purpose of feeding her fellow British

citizens throughout the war. See Illustration 2. The British government asked women to

fill the roles of men while male citizens were off at war, yet, continued to deny women

the right to vote during the course of the war.

It is apparent that the British failure to understand the Irish women's claims to

nationalism throughout the struggle to gain the franchise not only split the British and the

Irish, but also split the Northern and Southern Irish. As Margaret Ward explains:

> The evidence presented … of the relationship between the Irish Women's
> Franchise League and the Women's Social and Political Union is that
> British intervention in Irish affairs was motivated purely from British-
> inspired concerns and proved to be disastrous for the Irish, accentuating
> divisions which Irish women had hoped to modify.[25]

The British government continued in the footsteps of the WSPU by imploring Irish

women to take part in World War I. In doing so, the government proved that it, like the

WSPU, did not understand that the Irish feminist cause was inextricably tied to the

Nationalist Party's politics. Thus, the failure of the Irish Suffrage Movement during the

pre-World War I era was the result of its ties to the Home Rule Movement. Since Home

Rule for Ireland was not implemented before WWI, the suffrage movement in Ireland

also failed to come to fruition.

Irish women did not achieve equal status in Ireland until many years after WWI.

The Declaration of the Irish Republic of 1916 provided the first instance in which the

contributions of Irish women to civil society were recognized and affirmed by Irish

political leaders. The Declaration affirmed the equal rights of all Irish men and women in

the political process:

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[25]   Ward, "Conflicting Interests," 145.

> The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of
> every Irishman and Irish woman. The Republic guarantees religious and
> civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities of all its citizens, and
> declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole
> nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally,
> and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government,
> which have divided a minority in the past.[26]

However, while the Irish nationalists declared their support for women's equality within the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, women did not yet have the right to vote as the Irish Republic had not yet become a legitimate, independent nation. Shortly after the Declaration was signed, the Republican movement took significant losses after the Easter Rising of 1916 which proved to have disastrous repercussions in the Irish fight for independence.

Irish women did not gain the legal right to vote until the United Kingdom allowed all women over the age of thirty to vote in 1918 with the passage of the Representation of the People Act. This act did not provide for a distinction between Irish women and British women as the British government still considered Ireland to be a part of Great Britain. The United Kingdom's decision represented a step forward for feminism on the British Isles, but a step backwards for Irish nationalism. The IWFL was not satisfied – it wanted to gain full suffrage for all Irish women and a legitimate, independent Irish government. This did not happen until 1922, with the inception of the Irish Free State.

Irish women did fair better than British women in the suffrage movement. Westminster did not give equal voting rights to British women until 1928. Thus, the IWFL's independent Irish women's movement proved to achieve its goals six years before the WSPU's British Unionist women's movement.

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[26]   "Proclamation of the Irish Republic," April 24, 1916, copy on
http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/irishproclamation1916.htm (accessed March 21, 2009).

Chapter 3: Identity and the Irish Republican Woman

Even though the IWFL was successful in gaining the franchise for women in Ireland, it was not without extreme opposition from more traditional Irish society; "The Church opposed feminism and women's suffrage as a challenge to the central role of women in domestic life. Irish politicians opposed suffrage because it challenged the primacy of men in the home, the marketplace, and the corridors of power."[27] Opposition to the women's suffrage movement in Ireland could be found amongst political leaders, but also drifted to the rest of society through accessible mediums such as newspapers and plays.

William Butler Yeats epitomizes the idealization of the Irish Republican woman in his one-act play, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, which tells the story of an old woman who turns into a young beauty when Irish men die for their country. The play was published in October 1902, three years before the official establishment of Sinn Fein, but during the heart of the Irish Republican Brotherhood's rise to power.

Yeats's play paints an accurate picture of Ireland in 1798, before the Irish Rebellion against the British. The play begins with a modest Catholic family anxiously awaiting the marriage of their eldest son, Michael. The mother and father are depicted fussing about their new soon-to-be daughter-in-law's dowry when their conversation is interrupted by a commotion coming from outside their cottage. An old woman appears on their doorstep, alongside Michael. Michael and the old woman enter the house; the latter seems to be in a trance-like state. She talks about Ireland's past battles and about the brave young men who died for Ireland's sake. She refuses to take any money or any

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[27]   Richard B. Finnegan and Edward T. McCarron, *Ireland: Historical Echoes, Contemporary Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 160.

food from the father and tells Michael that if he gives her what she wants, then he will not be marrying tomorrow. She gets up and leaves and Michael walks outside with her.

The family's youngest son, Patrick, brings news that French ships have finally appeared off the shores of Ireland. He also mentions that a beautiful young woman walked past him as he ran home to give his parents the news about the French. Michael's fiancé runs up to the cottage to talk to him about the impending war. Michael, however, walks away, leaving his family and bride-to-be in the dust behind him. He is about to go sacrifice his life for the old woman turned beauty, Cathleen Ni Houlihan.[28]

The old woman in the story is the legendary Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the old woman that suddenly becomes young and vibrant whenever young men give their lives to defend Ireland. She is the definition of an Irish heroine because she represents all that an Irish woman is supposed to be – beautiful, patient, nationalistic and encouraging. Her age transformation symbolizes the idea that the country has the potential to be reborn and made vibrant should the young Irish men go fight against the British.

Cathleen Ni Houlihan is a heroine – she is a symbol of a revolutionary woman from the late 1700s. Her story became popular in the 1900s as opinion in Ireland became more and more anti-British. Yeats's play publicized the role that women were supposed to play during the conflict between the British and the Irish – one of encouragement and sacrifice. He chose to reference the 1798 uprising because of its parallels to the Irish political and military situation in the early 1900s – one of miserable dependence. Yeats's casting of the Cathleen Ni Houlihan archetype had a lasting effect on the Irish populace.

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[28] William Butler Yeats, *Plays in Prose and Verse, Written for an Irish Theatre, and Generally with the Help of a Friend, by W. B. Yeats* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), 1 - 9.

It is interesting to note that this archetype was not only perpetuated by men, but by the women of Ireland as well. The Irish nationalist women's newspaper, *Bean na hÉireann*, published an ad for cloth that promised to make its owner look like the epitomized Cathleen Ni Houlihan: "Dripsey! The 'Kathleen Ni Houlihan' are lovelier than ever! The prices lower than ever! By wearing Dripsey Dress cloths the sensible women of Ireland have DOUBLED the Dripsey Mills in two years."[29] Alongside advertisements for dress cloths and cherry-flavored cold medicines are calls for Irishwomen who are true republicans to restore Ireland to her native heritage and strive to be Cathleen Ni Houlihan.

Yet another example of women arguing against suffrage in *Bean na hÉireann* is an argument published by Maedo Caomanac, which attempts to compare the Irish woman's suffrage movement with the French woman's suffrage movement:

> Madame Oddo Deflau, one of the militant feminists of France …
> answered my question as to the apparent contradiction in the ability of
> French women and their long endurance and their legal disabilities. 'Why
> it is precisely their ability that is the cause,' she exclaimed; 'they do not
> suffer as much as one would think. … 'By their personal characters
> French women have succeeded, in spite of the laws, to make themselves
> not only the rulers of their homes but the helpers, often the guides, of their
> husbands.[30]

Caomanac, like many other women in Dublin at the time, believed that the agency that women commanded in their home was more important than the political agency that they would earn by gaining the right to vote.

The theme of female self-sacrifice during the 1798 uprising is inscribed in Ireland's history by other writers as well. Terence MacSwiney, former Mayor of the City

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[29] "Dripsey Mills Ad," *Bean na hÉireann*, January 1909, vol. 1 no. 3. National Library of Ireland.
[30] Maedo Caomanac, "The Woman's Movement in France," *Bean na hÉireann*, January 1909: vol. 1 no. 3. National Library of Ireland.

of Cork, dedicated a chapter in his book, *Principles of Freedom*, to the subject of

nationalist womanhood. MacSwiney adopted Yeats's archetype and transitioned it from

fiction to history by depicting the "beautiful" patriotism of the wife of Wolfe Tone, the

leader of the 1798 rebellion. MacSwiney described the actions of Tone's wife as she

stoically wishes him luck on his trip to France to solicit aid for the rebellion:

> When, in the beginning of his enterprise, he is in America, preparing to go
> to France on his great mission, he is troubled by the thought of his
> defenceless ones. In the crisis how does his wife act? Does she wind
> clinging arms around him, telling him with tears, of their children and his
> early vows, and beseeching him to think of his love and forget his
> country? No; let the diary speak: "My wife especially, whose courage and
> whose zeal for my honour and interests were not in the least abated by all
> her past sufferings, supplicated me to let no consideration of her or our
> children stand for a moment in the way of my engagements to our friends
> and my duty to my country.[31]

MacSwiney enforced Yeats's belief that women best served their country during its time

of need if they encouraged their male counterparts to go to war. He also went on to

describe the ideal countenance of a Republican woman, as demonstrated by the

countenance of Mrs. Tone: "how through all her misfortunes we watch her with

wonderful dignity, delicacy, courage, and devotion quick to see what her trust demanded

and never failing to answer the call, till her task is done."[32] Thus, the ideal Republican

woman not only willingly sends her husband, brother and son off to a battle that he is

sure to lose, but also, is a delicate and dignified creature throughout the entire process.

MacSwiney ended his analysis of the ideal, Republican woman by declaring that

women in the early twentieth century should strive to emulate the examples of the wife of

Wolfe Tone and Cathleen Ni Houlihan, not the examples of the suffragists: "She must

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[31]   Terence J. MacSwiney, *Principles of Freedom* (1921). *Project Gutenberg*
http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/13132 (accessed June 17, 2008).

[32]   MacSwiney, *Principles of Freedom.*

understand that greater than the need of the suffrage is the more urgent need of making her fellow-woman spirited and self-reliant, ready rather to anticipate a danger than to evade it."[33] MacSwiney, like other Irish political leaders of the period, believed that the suffrage movement was a feminist ploy to "evade" the dangers of the impending rebellion, as he made clear in *Principles of Freedom.*

       While some women continued to cling to this definition of the Irish heroine as political tension on the Emerald Isle began to grow in the early 1900s, many women completely rejected it and chose to mold a new sort of Irish heroine. "Women in the Irish nationalist tradition have played many different roles," Margaret Ward explains, "at times acquiescent and passive, at times highly radical and deeply critical of restrictions based upon gender."[34] The "new Irish heroine" was not passive, but instead, looked to the nationalist movement as an opportunity for women to assert their own right to be free and independent alongside with Ireland's right to be free and independent.

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[33]   MacSwiney, *Principles of Freedom.*

[34]   Margaret Ward, "National liberation movements and the question of women's liberation: the Irish experience," in C. Midgely, ed. *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 108.

Chapter 4: The Catholic Church and Nationalism

The Irish nationalist tradition dripped with inconsistencies in regards to its Catholic-Nationalist policies. First, Ireland was never a purely Catholic nation. Many of the myths and traditions of Irish culture actually revolve around its pre-Christian heritage and the worship of a mother-goddess. In fact, the Celtic cross that is associated with the Catholic Church in Ireland is actually a synthesis of Christianity and the ancient, Celtic faith. The Celtic cross combines the symbolic cross that represents the crucifixion of Jesus Christ with a symbolic circle that represents the worship of the sun god, the highest god in the polytheistic, ancient Celtic religion. See first image below.

This cross, which became a symbol of the Celtic revival in Victorian Ireland in the 1860s, represented more than just subservience to the Vatican. It also represented a renewed desire to connect Ireland's present with its unique ancient past. The Celtic Cross gained even more prominence in 1884 when Michael Cusack of County Clare created the Gaelic Athletic Association GAA and used the Celtic Cross as its founding symbol. See second image above. The purpose of the GAA was to promote the use and resurgence of the Irish language through sport, music, storytelling, dancing and other traditionally Irish activities. Cusack noticed the surging popularity of the Celtic cross and used it to create a marketing strategy for his new Irish cultural organization. The GAA gained popularity

very quickly throughout Ireland and Irish people began associating the Celtic Cross with

the Irish language, sport and musical traditions. In this way, Irish cultural leaders began

to tie Irish identity into the history of Ireland's polytheistic and monotheistic religious

past.

> The impact of this upsurge in nationalism was tremendous;
>
> Although not formally involved in the 1916 Rising, the Gaelic Athletic
> Association contributed significantly by producing a generation of young
> men with a sense of national identity, an extreme nationalist ethos, and a
> hostility towards the government, state institutions, and the forces of law
> and order.[35]

The purpose of the GAA was to promote a sense of Irish identity, but its symbolic

associations with both the Celtic and Catholic faiths gave its members a spiritual mission

as well – promote the faith in Ireland and be rid of ties to all other faiths.

Apart from Ireland's Celtic past, the role played by Protestants in weaving the

fabric of Ireland's national identity is often subsumed in the folds of Catholicism. Many

Protestants, specifically the Anglo-Irish, have played an important role in establishing

Ireland's separatist movement. In fact, the separatist movement in Ireland originated

with the Anglo-Irish and not with the Catholic-Irish. As Richard Kearney explains, "The

founding fathers of the separatist Irish tradition were Protestant rather than Catholic …

due to the Protestants' near-monopoly of higher education in Ireland up to the twentieth

century."[36]

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[35] "Michael Cusack, Maurice Davin and the Gaelic Athletic Association," *The 1916 Rising: Personalities and Perspectives*, The National Library of Ireland, Website, http://www.nli.ie/1916/pdf/3.4.1.pdf (accessed 15 March 2009).

[36] Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 7.

In fact, according to Kearney, the Catholic hierarchy was not allied with Irish nationalism when it first appeared in Ireland in the late 1700s mainly "because it feared the nationalist-republican ideas being imported into Ireland from the French Revolution were anti-Catholic."[37] In fact, the fear of French-tinged "republican-ness" caused the Irish Catholic hierarchy to seek shelter under the protective roof of Westminster during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There would be no abandonment of the Vatican for the Irish during their quest for a nationalist identity, and it did not become apparent to the Irish that separatism and Catholicism could go hand-in-hand until the Gaelic revival movement in the late 1800s.

However, elements of Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes's approach to national sovereignty began to appear in Ireland when in 1905Arthur Griffith founded the pro-Ireland political party, Sinn Fein and introduced "The Sinn Fein Policy." Sieyes's nationalist philosophies defined the ideals of French Revolutionary republicanism. Much of Griffith's foundational ideas for Sinn Fein and the Irish nationalist movement share uncanny characteristics with Sieyes's foundational ideas for the French Republican movement. For instance, Sieyes insisted that a government that effectively supported the individual liberty of its people must be a dual-monarchy. Sieyes believed that severing the monarchy from the people would leave the government leaderless. Michael Sonenscher observes this; "a government made up of a body but no head, representing a society made up of a body but no head … was not a particularly viable formula for identifying how the decisions involved in managing change might be made."[38]

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[37]   Richard Kearney, 7.
[38]   Michael Sonenscher, *Sieyes: Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003), xix.

Sonenscher continues his analysis of Sieyes's political formula by directing

attention to Sieyes's strong belief that a dual-monarchy could atone for both the sins of a

pure monarchical system and those of a pure, democratic republic:

> Republics standardly elected their rulers, but sometimes paid a price for
> doing so, in political dissension and executive weakness. Monarchies
> standardly inherited their rulers, but sometimes paid a price for doing so,
> in complicated systems of administration and the absence of any obvious
> mechanism for legitimating legislation. One major strand of eighteenth-
> century thought centered upon the question of how far the two systems of
> rule could be combined.[39]

Even with the fear of "anti-religious Frenchness" hanging over his head, Arthur Griffith

drew on Sieyes's political philosophy in establishing Sinn Fein and the dogma that would

accompany it:

> In 1904 Griffith published a pamphlet on the 1848 Hungarian Revolution
> entitled *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland* in which he
> set out his ideas on Irish independence under a dual monarchy, like that of
> Austria-Hungary. In 1905 Griffith expounded the policy, which
> emphasised the idea of national self-reliance. He set up a movement under
> the name Sinn Féin meaning 'ourselves'.[40]

The Gaelic meaning of the name Sinn Fein, "ourselves," resonates with Sieyes's entire

political theory – that the purpose of government is to emphasize individual liberty.

Griffith used Sieyes's philosophy to establish the individual liberty of the Gaelic-Irish.

Griffith did not establish Sinn Fein to be a Catholic-Nationalist organization. In

fact, his original model for Sinn Fein represented Sieyes's republican model more than

the pro-Catholicism political party into which it later evolved. Arthur Griffith was never

able to achieve the dual-monarchy that he hoped for because the fear of "anti-religious

French influence" was too great to overcome. However, by establishing a republican

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[39] Michael Sonenscher, xx.

[40] Tomás O'Riordan, "Arthur Griffith," The Pursuit of Sovereignty and the Impact of Partition, 1912
- 1949, University College Cork, Ireland, http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Arthur_Griffith (accessed 2 March 2009).

movement in a country that was very conscious of its Catholic majority, he laid the

groundwork for the Church to begin linking nationalism with Catholicism.

Kearney argues that the Easter Rising of 1916 provided the rallying call for the

Catholic Church to begin linking *Catholicness* with *Irishness*:

> After the fall of Parnell and 1916, however, it became clear to the Church
> that the soul of the Irish nation was up for grabs and that the need for a
> unifying collective identity for the newly emerging state could best be
> provided by a form of Catholic nationalism which allowed (in Joyce's
> words) 'Christ and Caesar go hand in hand.[41]

In 1916, Sinn Fein evolved from being a Sieyes-based working group to a Catholic-

Nationalist political party. Sinn Fein was not the only group in Ireland experiencing

change in this period - The entire political and social landscape of Ireland shifted

dramatically after the 1916 Rising; "The Irish revolution of 1916 – 1921, the supreme

political upheaval of the present generation, has had powerful repercussions on all phases

of Irish life, and not the least the religious."[42] Thus, it can be asserted that the Easter

Rising and the increased popularity of Sinn Fein supplied the proper backdrop for the

Church to begin linking Catholicism with Irishness.

How was the linkage between Ireland and Catholicism continuously brought to

the eyes of the Irish people during the war for independence? Father Kenney explained

that the church used what it already had at its disposal to draw upon a sentiment of

Catholic nationalism in Ireland – the monuments and crosses of Ireland's Catholic past.

> Thus the Catholic who stands on the streets of Ballycastle has, almost
> within a stone's throw of him, visible monuments of the history of his
> Church in every age. So it is throughout Ireland. Each step one takes is
> planted on historic, indeed on holy, ground. In any survey of Catholicism
> in Ireland, first consideration must be given to the pervading presence …

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[41]   Kearney, 7-8.

[42]   James F. Kenney, "The Catholic Church in Contemporary Ireland," *The Catholic Historical Review* 18, no. 2 (July 1932): 162.

of Catholic history. … By reason even of purely secular, though non-material, influences the Irishman cannot but be loyal to the faith of his fathers.[43]

The Church re-described locations and monuments with a new religious zeal that had not necessarily existed prior to the Easter Rising. As demonstrated by Father Kenney, the church used Ireland's past to create a sense of connectedness with the present: if fathers and grandfathers had died in the fight for Catholic Ireland, was it not the duty of the generation of the early 1900s to do the same? In this way, the church connected the secular past with the religious present.

As Sinn Fein's hold on Ireland increased, the Catholic Church took advantage of this political climate and became an extraordinarily powerful force in the everyday lives of Irish people. The traditional mindset of the church discouraged the Irish women's movement from making significant strides towards achieving the right to vote. Margaret Fine-Davis elaborates on the Church's influence on the political role of women: "A further factor, not to be underestimated, is the strong influence of the Catholic Church, to which 95% of the population belongs. Even among Catholic countries in general, in Ireland the Church has had a particularly strong influence on the formation and maintenance of traditional values surrounding women's roles."[44]

In order to address the subject of the church's influence on the suffrage movement, two key questions must be asked. One, what did society imagine an Irish-Catholic woman to be during the pre-revolutionary era, two, how did she imagine herself?

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[43]   Kenney, 161.
[44]   Margret Fine-Davis, "Attitudes toward the Role of Women as Part of a Larger Belief System," *Political Psychology* 10, no. 2 (Jun., 1989): 287-308.

The works of Yeats and MacSwiney clearly reveal that the society surrounding the Irish separatist movement imagined that the Irish separatist woman promoted Irish nationalism by extolling the virtues of femininity – she encouraged men to fight and prioritized the struggle over her desire for love and companionship. Beyond this, she was not actually expected to contribute to the Anglo-Irish War; nationalist society only expected her to hold herself back from protesting it.

This attitude put activist women in a precarious position. Any action taken that could be perceived as contributing to the war effort might also be viewed as overstepping the strict boundaries of gender roles. Therefore, with a few very notable exceptions, most nationalist women were not able to contribute to the war effort in a particularly meaningful way.

This challenge created severe problems for Irish women citizens as the War for Independence drew to a close and the first constitution of Ireland was drawn up. The male writers of the constitution did not feel as if women had earned the right to the same sort of Irish citizenship that they had earned. Women had not fought alongside their male counterparts and, therefore, did not deserve the same rights as men. This attitude is detailed in the language of the First Irish Constitution of 1937, which reinforces the idea that women belong in the home and outside of politics:

> In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.[45]

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[45] Department of the Taoiseach, "Constitution of Ireland," published online November 2004, http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/html%20files/Constitution%20of%20Ireland%20(Eng)Nov2004.htm (accessed 2 March 2009).

This clause did not, by any means, demand that women stay in the home. However, it did set a precedent for establishing government programs to keep women outside the realms of business, law, politics and academia. It also perpetuated the idea that women primarily belonged in the home. This was particularly upsetting to the suffragists and female activists who had energetically contributed to the Anglo-Irish War and felt they deserved a status beyond that of homemaker.

However, the constitution went into further detail about the limits of women's capabilities in the new Irish state. Section 45.2 stated how "the inadequate strength of women and the tender age of children shall not be abused, and women or children shall not be forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their sex, age or strength."[46] The constitution did not specify which occupations women did not have the strength to occupy, and left the question open-ended, for employers, fathers and husbands to decide.

The anti-feminist language of the Constitution of 1937 shocked the feminist community in Dublin. The Proclamation of 1916 had been filled with phrases promising all Irish people equal access to the rights, privileges and duties associated with independent citizenship. In doing so, it extolled the virtues of women in the fight for Irish nationalism. However, as has already been noted, there was a dramatic shift in the landscape of nationalist sentiment once the drama of the Easter Rising concluded. After the guns were fired and the heroes were made, there was no longer room for the suffragists – the battle for nationalism was redefined as a battle for Catholicism. This sentiment was not lost in the Constitution of 1937. Articles 44.1, 44.2 and 44.3 designate the "special position" of religion in the new Irish State. Article 44.2 stated, "The State

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[46] Department of the Taoiseach, "Constitution of 1937."

recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens."[47]

Many Irish women truly felt betrayed by this new constitution. Mary Kettle, chairwoman of the Irish Women Graduates' Association and sister of Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, declared that "the omission of the principle of equal rights and opportunities enunciated in the Proclamation of 1916 and confirmed in Article 3 of the Constitution of the Saorstat Éireann was … sinister and retrogressive."[48] However, the voices of women such as Mary Kettle were subsumed by the all-encompassing Catholic-inspired legislation prohibiting divorce and suggesting that women remain in the home. Ironically, Eamon De Valera, the first President of the Republic of Ireland and one of the main writers of the Constitution of 1937, was educated by Kettle's uncle, Father Eugene Sheehy.

The absence of concern for women's political agency in the Irish Constitution of 1937 can be studied as a type of trauma, using the historical theories of Jenny Edkins, scholar of historical trauma. Edkins approaches trauma studies by exploring trauma's role in the relationship between the self and the other. She begins by noting that the self is not a unified whole. Instead, she claims, it is actually an entity composed of contradictory pieces. Edkins states that a person's perceived sense of self is the result of believing that that the pieces of their self form a unified whole and that this wholeness justifies their position within their social order: "Our existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a very profound sense, on the

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[47]   Department of the Taoiseach, "Constitution of 1937."
[48]   Peter Beresford Ellis, "De Valera's Betrayal of the Women of 1916," *The Irish Democrat*, Newspaper, http://www.irishdemocrat.co.uk/features/de-valeras-betrayal/ (accessed 2 March 2009).

continuance of the social order that gives our existence meaning and dignity."[49] In the

case of women in Ireland, many Irish women believed themselves to be an integral part

of the "whole" of the Irish nation-state. Some Irish women played active roles in the

Easter Rising of 1916, held leadership positions on the Sinn Fein executive council and

sacrificed alongside Irish men during the several hundred years of rebellion leading up to

Irish independence. However, the majority of Irish women believed that by acting

unselfishly and sending their loved ones off to fight, they were also playing an important

role in the formation of the Irish nation-state. Additionally, since much of the conflict

was posited in ethnic terms, many Irish women felt that being a citizen of Ireland was a

natural right belonging to all people who were ethnically Irish. However, the 1937

Constitution posits citizenship as a right belonging only to men. Thus, women had been

drawn into what they believed to be a cultural dispute, and then told that they were not

fully part of the culture after the fighting was over.

Yet, Irish men demonstrated an unfaltering belief that Irish women were not part

of the "cohesive whole" that won the Irish War for Independence by barring them from

gaining political rights in the Irish Constitution of 1937. This lack of acknowledgement

prevented Irish women from achieving the "sense of dignity" that was supposed to be an

integral piece of being part of a social order, as described by Jenny Edkins. How did

Irish women achieve "meaning" in their identity when the nation of Ireland was so

unwilling to afford them the sense of dignity that would envelope them into the

wholeness of Irish nationalism?

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[49]   Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

Edkins' theory becomes more complex when she goes on to explain that the sense of wholeness that people feel within society is a product of social constructions. Trauma occurs when it is brought to a person's attention that their perceived unified identity does not exist, "By situating ourselves as citizens of a state or political authority or as members of a family, we reproduce the social institution at the same time as assuming our own identity as part of it. As we have seen, in what we call a traumatic event this group betrays us."[50] Irish women reproduced the social institution of the Church-State alliance and were betrayed when the constitution left them out of the political process.

The hypothesis posited by this thesis is that Irish women used religion to atone for the gap between being an "Other" and being part of the cohesive "whole." Since "Catholicness" was bound to "Irishness" by 1916, women had to become as Catholic as possible in order to make up for their perceived lack of Irishness. It was in the realm of possibility for women in the early 1900s to become very religious – it was not in the realm of possibility to become militant or political. Therefore, by over-extending themselves into the world of religiosity, there was a sense among Irish women that they were moving towards the "whole."

However, when women lobbied for the vote, they were pushed even farther away from the "whole" of Irish society. Finnegan and McCarron argue that the Catholic Church labeled social change as "anti-Catholic" and therefore, "anti-Irish;" "The conservatism of Irish Catholicism has had the historical impact of diminishing attempts to generate social reform. … The leftist movements that did spring up were battered by the conservatism of Irish society and condemnation by the Catholic Hierarchy."[51] By

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[50] Edkins, 8.
[51] Finnegan and McCarron, 203.

disobeying the social norms that defined the uniqueness of Irish society, women destroyed their chances of ever being a part of it. Irish women suffragists were caught in a double-bind; the Constitution of 1937 proved to them that they were not part of the cohesive "whole," yet lobbying for social change and equality pushed them even farther away from the "whole."

Religiosity also provided a means for the "betrayal" described by Edkins. The theology of the Catholic Church taught that women were inferior to men and should subordinate themselves accordingly. Therefore, the "betrayal" was more acceptable because theology provided for its spiritual justification. Additionally, since Irishness and Catholicness were intertwined, by the time the Constitution was written, most Irish women were probably expecting a subordination clause that would recreate the hierarchy of the church within the hierarchy of the government.

Edkins theory begs the question, was it possible for Catholic women in early twentieth century Ireland to remain true to their faith while also seeking the right to vote? History overwhelming proves that this was not possible. The best example of the difficulty between supporting feminist thought and following the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church can be observed in the study of Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, the Susan B. Anthony of Ireland.

Margaret Ward, historian of Irish and British feminism, approaches the question of Catholicism's relationship with feminism by studying Dublin at the turn of the twentieth century, and by focusing her research on the subject of Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, arguably the most notable Irish feminist in the Irish woman's suffrage movement. Ward describes early twentieth century Dublin as a city brimming with new

patterns of intellect and beliefs about Ireland's place in the world. She argues that there was more to Dublin at the beginning of this era than pubs and poverty – there was a middle class that had little financial stability to lean on, but was a great mass of intellect waiting on the edge of its seat to be accessed.

Fin-de-siecle Dublin was much like fin-de-siecle Vienna. Dublin did not have Freud, but it possessed its own intelligentsia. The members of this group included the likes of James Joyce, renowned Irish writer, and Arthur Griffith, the creator of the Sinn Fein movement. These bright minds spent their days considering the best possible course of action for their second-class country – socialism, dual monarchism, Catholic nationalism, and unionism were often discussed in the debating societies of University College, Dublin as well as in the parlors of middle class patrons.

The young Hannah Sheehy (who did not become Sheehy-Skeffington until she married Francis Skeffington in 1903) found herself in the middle of an intellectual circle composed of Catholic MPs, professors and other Dublin-bourgeoisie as her parents hosted weekly "teas" where many of the intelligentsia came together under one roof to discuss ways to merge their desire for an independent Ireland with the trendiest political philosophies of the day. Hannah's father, David Sheehy, was an ex-Fenian and a Westminster MP of the Irish Parliamentary Party. As a result of his political title, his devoutly Catholic views and his association with a pro-Ireland party, David Sheehy had a small degree of prominence amongst the Dublin middle-class. His social status attracted all types of Catholic, Dublin elite to the Sheehy family's once-a-week parlor gatherings. The Sheehy parlor could very well have been the first place in which Arthur Griffith discussed his idea for the creation of Sinn Fein. This could also have been the place in

which James Joyce received commentary on his latest manuscript. There is very little record of these weekly meetings, but with such guests, it is sure that conversations were filled with talk of politics and nationalism.

Ward argues that this circle of intellects was likely the place where Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington "found her voice" and learned that it was possible to step outside the epitomized mold for a twentieth-century Irish-Catholic woman. She was able to leave the comfort of conformity because conformity never managed to embrace her in its folds – after all, James Joyce, the rebel-writer, had been a close friend of the family and attended their weekly teas. Joyce earned infamy in Ireland by rejecting his Roman Catholic roots and living with a woman with whom he was not married. His presence in the Sheehy household surely had an influence on an impressionable young woman who was on the verge of discovering her own insignificance at the moment in which Joyce was rejecting the church. Hannah Sheehy was never a member of a circle of happy conformists; therefore, it is no surprise that she continued to surround herself with suffragists, nationalists and Irish rebels throughout her educated adulthood.[52]

Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington outgrew her childhood and emerged in Dublin society as a leader for college-educated women. She founded the Womens' Graduate Association in 1901 after obtaining both her bachelors and masters degree in modern languages and studying briefly at women's colleges in France and Germany. She obtained a teaching position in Dublin and contributed controversial articles on feminism and nationalism to two nationalist journals – *The Nation* and *Bean na hÉireann*, the

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[52]   Margaret Ward, *Hanna Sheehy Skeffinton: A Life* (Cork: Attic Press, 1997).

[53] She writes eloquently and emphatically in *Bean na hÉireann* on the subject of the suffrage movement's relationship with the nationalist movement. In *Bean na hÉireann*, she adamantly emphasizes the common goals between the suffrage movement and the nationalist movement: "No right thinking Irelander should put the freedom of a sex before the freedom of a nation, or the freedom of a nation before the freedom of a sex."[54] She is clear in her view that separatism and independence for Ireland should not trump suffrage for women. Ireland deserved both rights and both had to come to Ireland at the same time.

The newspaper in which Hannah Sheehy Skeffington frequently published throughout the early 1900s, *Bean na hÉireann*, provided a platform for Irish women to discuss concerns unique to women about nationalism and separatism. The newspaper was published by the very first Irish women's nationalist group, Inghinidhe na hÉireann, which was founded by Maud Gonne in 1900. Gonne was a member of the same intellectual circle as Hannah Sheehy Skeffington – she was a close personal friend of William Butler Yeats, indeed, some of Yeats's friends even speculated that Yeats based many of his fictional, female characters on her.

Inghinidhe na hÉireann attempted to merge Catholicness with its political agenda for Irish women upon its inception: "Inghinidhe na hÉireann … was solely for women and adopted Saint Brigid as patron. Its agenda was political, social and feminist: it opposed the Irish Parliamentary Party and Home Rule … but supported … the concepts

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[53]   Tomás O'Riordan, "Hannah Sheehy Skeffington," Movements for Political and Social Reform, 1870 - 1914, University College Cork, Ireland, http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Hanna_Sheehy-Skeffington (accessed 15 March 2009).
[54]   Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, "Free Women in a Free Nation," *Bean na hÉireann*, 1909, vol. 1, no. 4, National Library of Ireland.

of self reliance preached by Sinn Fein … and women's suffrage."[55] The purpose of

Maud Gonne's group was to promote the role of women in achieving nationalist goals.

However, Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, among others, felt that Inghinidhe na hÉireann

placed too much emphasis on promoting nationalism and not enough on promoting

suffrage at the same time.

Sheehy Skeffington had a valid point. Inghinidhe na hÉireann's largest recorded

success involved a children's rally, and is detailed in the group's first annual report,

written by Maud Gonne:

> On the occasion of Queen Victoria's last visit to Ireland, the flunkeys …
> tried to make use of the innocent children, and in the English Queen's
> name, invited all the School Children of Ireland to attend a demonstration
> in Phoenix Park. … To the credit of our brave little ones let it be said, they
> resisted the inducement of cakes, sweets, and oranges held out by the jingo
> proselytizers. … Inghinidhe na hÉireann, proud of the sturdy resistance of
> the little Dublin Children, resolved to reward them for their patriotism,
> and at once opened a subscription and organized the "Patriotic Children's
> Treat," which was held at Clonturk Park, Dublin, on Sunday July 1st,
> 1900. 30,000 children marched in procession.[56]

Inghinidhe na hÉireann's first major rally was a success – Queen Victoria's event with

the children of Ireland was largely ruined and the people of Dublin came together to

reward the children for their protest immediately after. However, the event did not

showcase the political aptitude of the group – instead, it reemphasized social norms

relegating women to the realm of children instead of the realm of politics.

This is not to criticize the event, for it was a huge success for Maud Gonne and

Inghinidhe na hÉireann; however, it also proved to women like Sheehy-Skeffington that

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[55] "Maud Gonne MacBride and Inghinidhe na hÉireann," *The 1916 Rising: Personalities and Perspectives*, 1901, The National Library of Ireland, Website, http://www.nli.ie/1916/pdf/3.2.3.pdf (accessed 15 March 2009).
[56] Maud Gonne, *Inghinidhe na hÉireann: First Annual Report* (Dublin: O'Brien and Ards, 1901), National Library of Ireland.

Maud Gonne was perhaps unwilling to push the limits of Irish society's understanding of the role of women. The children's protest was Inghinidhe na hÉireann's first and last big success in Dublin. In 1914, Inghinidhe na hÉireann was absorbed into Cumann na mBann, the women's auxiliary wing of the Irish Volunteers, and women were relegated to performing traditional "women's duties" for the group.[57]

In 1908, along with Margaret Cousins, Sheehy-Skeffington founded the Irish Women's Franchise League. The reasons for creating this group in opposition to the Women's Social and Political Union in Great Britain have already been discussed. But it is also important to note that this group was created in response to its members' unwillingness to be absorbed into Cumann na mBann and the Volunteers. Sheehy Skeffington wanted to engage in policy, not just in support services. Unlike Inghinidhe na hÉireann, the IWFL did not have a patron saint and did not look to the church for guidance in conducting its activities. Sheehy-Skeffington led her organization down a more political and militant path. She describes the group's activities:

> We held parades, processions, pageants ... We had colours (orange and green), a Votes for Women badge, slogans; we made use with feminine ingenuity of many good publicity devices and stunts ... and became a picturesque element in Irish life ... women speakers who could hold their own ... meeting hecklers on their own ground, being good-humoured and capable of keeping their temper under bombardments of rotten eggs, over-ripe tomatoes, bags of flour, stinking chemicals, gradually earned respect and due attention.[58]

It is important to note Sheehy-Skeffington's recognition that the IWFL was not heeding Dublin society's definition of gender roles – Sheehy-Skeffington did not discuss dish washing and sewing for the Volunteers. IWFL members had a much more colorful

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[57]   "Maud Gonne MacBride and Inghinidhe na hÉireann."
[58]   Hannah Sheehy Skeffinton, quoted in Rosemary Cullen Owens, *Smashing times*: *a History of the Irish Women's Suffrage Movement, 1889-1922* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1984), 66.

agenda and, as noted by Sheey-Skeffington, began their campaign to win over the hearts

and minds of Dublin society amidst significant backlash. In fact, Sheehy Skeffington

was involved in several violent protests for the cause:

> She was imprisoned for five days in 1912 for breaking several window
> panes of the War Office in protest at the exclusion of women from the
> franchise in the Third Home Rule Bill. She was a close associate of the
> labour leader James Connolly. During the Dublin 1913 lock-out, she
> worked in the soup kitchen set up in Liberty Hall, the Dublin headquarters
> of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. She was jailed again,
> this time for assaulting a policeman, while attempting to leaflet the
> Conservative leader, Bonar Law, in Dublin. She went on hunger strike and
> was released after five days.[59]

Clearly, Sheehy-Skeffington did not care if Dublin society believed her to be "un-lady

like."

It is also important to note that Sheehy-Skeffington completely abandoned the

Catholic Church during the course of her work with the IWFL. In 1932, well after the

franchise was won and full independence for Ireland was beginning to become a reality,

she discussed Ireland's relationship with the Vatican and explained in disgust that Ireland

was "rapidly becoming a catholic statelet under Rome's grip – censorship and the like,

with a very narrow provincial outlook, plus a self-satisfied smugness. Result of a failure

in revolution really. I have no belief in de Valera…essentially conservative and church-

bound, anti-feminist, bourgeois and the rest."[60] In addition to this expression of disgust,

Sheehy-Skeffington also refused to baptize her son, Owen Sheehy-Skeffington.

Additionally, she sent him to the non-denominational Sandford Park School in Dublin,

thus avoiding the Catholic educational system all together.

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[59]   Tomás O'Riordan, "Hannah Sheehy Skeffington."
[60]   Hanna Sheehy Skeffington to Esther Roper, n.d. Sheehy Skeffington Papers, MS 24,134, National Library of Ireland.

The character of Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington and her personal decision to leave the folds of the Church speaks to the difficulty of maintaining religious values while conducting a feminist movement in twentieth-century Ireland. However, the success of the IWFL in comparison to the lack of progress reached by Inghinidhe na hÉireann and Cumann na mBann proves that the circumstances surrounding women in twentieth century Dublin demanded that women put aside their religious and social understandings of their position in society if they wanted to achieve suffrage. However, in a society that defined its need for independence by its unique relationship to the Vatican, this was no easy feat. Once the suffragists had achieved the right to vote and independence for Ireland had been won, there were still many barriers to independence for women in the new, Catholic Ireland.

Conclusion

Thus far, this thesis has conceptualized the feminist movement in twentieth century Ireland in terms of political agency and in particular, the right to vote. However, the Roman Catholic Church's unique relationship to the nationalist/feminist debate adds a second layer to the "woman question" in twentieth century Ireland – the role of the female body in creating a Catholic nationalist state.

The purest teachings of the Catholic Church preach against the practice of premarital sexual relations as well as the usage of birth control, even for married couples. Part of the fight for the creation of a Catholic, nationalist state was the transition of Catholic beliefs from religious doctrine into state law. Upon the inception of the Irish nation state in 1937, doctrine was put into practice and birth control became illegal in Ireland. Apart from relegating women to the home and making it nearly impossible for women to work, the Constitution of 1937 also took away their bodily agency. Why was this necessary? Cynthia Enloe suggests that an alternative motivation besides supreme religiosity may have been at work. She claims that the ban of birth control was related to a much larger strategy for militarizing mothers:

> Militarizing motherhood often starts with conceptualizing the womb as a recruiting station. Government officials who have adopted a pro-natalist policy – using state resources to press women (especially those women of 'trusted' ethnic or racial groups) to have more children – frequently have cast that policy in militarized terms. That is, a woman who has more children - sons, preferably - is a woman who is contributing to 'national security.'[61]

Thus, Enloe proposes that the birth control policy implemented in Ireland was part of a larger, "national security" strategy to create more potential members of the military.

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[61]   Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000), 248.

According to Enloe, women who constantly give birth are "the greatest patriots" because they are constantly creating new patriots. Thus, the only patriotic contribution that a woman could make to such a society was the creation of a new patriot.

In fact, according to Sarah Benton, motherhood was the only calling for women during the foundation of independent Ireland. Benton's observations regarding the role of women in Ireland during the independence movement resonates with Yeats' description of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the idyllic Irish woman patriot:

> Like the Boers, whose war against the mighty British Empire had a profound effect on Irish nationalism, women survive in legend as the suffering and bereaved mothers. It was not the sexual partners of men who were dispossessed by the British, but the mothers. … Women's claim is thus, in legend, to be protected and revered as mothers; not to be making the nation in their own right.[62]

Women gave birth to the heroes, but were never heroes themselves.

Additionally, according to Catholic doctrine, if they refused this role and decided to reject the teachings of the Church and use birth control in their marriages, their souls were condemned. Women were simply trapped – society and the church expected them to have lots of children and their only options for avoiding a lifetime of pregnancy were to leave the country, join a convent or remain single.

Research by the American Sociological Review conducted in Ireland and Northern Ireland during the 1970s attests to this theory. As can be seen in the chart below, dramatic shifts occurred in Irish reproduction during the twentieth century. In 1936/1937, the average number of children aged 0 – 4 compared to the average number of women between the ages of 20 – 44 was 53/100. After the new constitution was implemented in 1937, the number of children compared to the number of children

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[62] Sarah Benton, "Women Disarmed: The Militarization of Politics in Ireland 1913 - 1921," *Feminist Review* 50 (Summer 1995): 161.

compared to women able to give birth was 61/100, as can be seen from the data collected

in 1946. This is an increase of eight children for every one hundred women capable of

reproducing. See chart below.

Table 2. Child/Woman Ratios by Religion, Northern Ireland, 1937 to 1961; Republic of Ireland, 1926 to 1961

Religion and Year	Number of Children Aged 0-4 Years per:					
	100 Women Aged 20-44 Years		N.I. as a Percentage of R.I.	100 Ever-Married[a] Women Aged 20-44 Years		N.I. as a Percentage of R.I.
	N.I.	R.I.		N.I.	R.I.	
Catholic:						
1926	..[b]	61	...[b]	...[b]	...[b]	...[b]
1936/1937[c]	56	53	106	119	...[b]	...[b]
1946/1951[d]	69	61	113	131	121	108
1961	85	76	112	137	126	109
Non-Catholic:						
1926	..[b]	39	...[b]	...[b]	...[b]	...[b]
1936/1937[c]	42	33	127	76	...[b]	...[b]
1946/1951[d]	46	43	107	69	78	88
1961	55	49	112	74	75	99

[a]Total women in age group less single women.

[b]Not available.

[c]1936--Republic of Ireland; 1937--Northern Ireland.

[d]1946--Republic of Ireland; 1951--Northern Ireland.

SOURCES: Calculated from: Northern Ireland, 1937:12-13, 1951:19-20, 1961a:23-24; Ireland, 1926:99, 1936:103, 1946b:32, 34, 1961b:36, 38.   [63]

Kennedy does not use his study to claim that the increased power of the Church

was the only reason why reproduction increased so dramatically. However, he does

suggest that the Catholic Church's policy on birth control and its new, legal authority in

the Irish state played a large role in increasing the Irish-Catholic population.[64]

Additionally, it should be noted that Ireland's neutrality during WWII prevented it from

being highly effected by the baby-boomer phenomenon.[65]

Thus, even though women in Ireland obtained the franchise and were able to see

an independent Irish state secured, their lives were not necessarily made easier. After all

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[63]   Robert E. Kennedy, Jr., "Minority Group Status and Fertility: The Irish," American Sociological Review, 38 (February 1973): 86.

[64]   Kennedy, Jr., 86.

[65]   John Biggs-Davison and George Chowdharay-Best, *The Cross of Saint Patrick - The Catholic Unionist Tradition in Ireland* (Buckinghamshire: The Kensal Press, 1984), 360.

of the fighting was over, the Catholic Church's new found power in Ireland influenced the creation of a constitution that limited the roles that women were able to play in the government and in their own homes. They had the right to vote, but were theologically bound to vote for their own subordination.

Women such as Maud Gonne and Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington created social and political groups in an attempt to ensure that Irish women were not left behind during the formation of the Irish nation state. However, promises that were made to women in the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic were not kept. This is clearly demonstrated by the anti-feminist nature of the Constitution of 1937. Feminist groups that adopted Catholic-leaning policies such as Maud Gonne's Inghinidhe na hÉireann proved to be an abysmal failure from both a feminist and a political perspective. This is demonstrated by Inghinidhe na hÉireann's absorption into the women's auxiliary corps of the Irish Volunteers, the group's relegation to performing trivial household tasks for the Volunteers, and the group's inability to achieve its feminist agenda.

Feminist groups without religious associations such as Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington's Irish Women's Franchise League proved to be more successful than Inghinidhe na hÉireann. It was the IWFL's militant suffrage society that actually earned the franchise for women in Ireland by conducting its campaign amidst an atmosphere of hate and violence. The IWFL did not bend to Irish society's understanding of social norms and gender roles. Additionally, Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington and the IWFL did not heed the spiritual advice being given to them by the Catholic Church. The IWFL succeeded because of its unreligious, feminist agenda and Inghinidhe na hÉireann failed due to its inability to disconnect itself from social and religious norms. However, the

successes of the IWFL in securing the franchise did not translate into equality for the women of Ireland. Although they won the battle for the vote, the Church won the war for control over legislation in early twentieth-century Ireland, influencing policy makers to keep women in the home and away from government and private enterprise.

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