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**Maidens, Mothers and Rabble Rousers:
Women's political involvement in Northern Ireland,
1790–2001**

by

Pamela Blythe McKane

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Joint Women's Studies Programme

at

**Mount Saint Vincent University
Dalhousie University
Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia**

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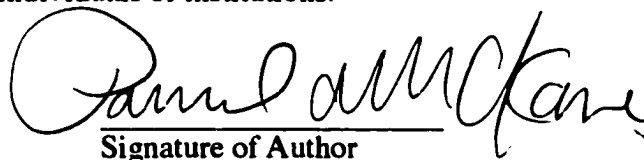
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Abstract

“Maidens, Mothers and Rabble Rousers: Women’s political involvement in Northern Ireland, 1790-2001”

by Pamela Blythe McKane
September 2001

Historically, women’s political participation in Northern Ireland has long been neglected, giving the impression that women in Northern Ireland are agentless “victims” of history, and politically irrelevant to Northern Ireland and the period of its history known as the Troubles. However, by using a broad definition of politics and political participation – one which includes activities in the private and public realms – the history of women’s political participation is uncovered, revealing that women have participated in a multitude of ways throughout the Troubles. Some women have participated as “maidens” or “mothers”, reinforcing dominant gendered norms, while others have been “rabble rousers”, challenging such norms; still others have been politically active as “maidens”, “mothers” and “rabble rousers”, reinforcing and challenging those dominant gendered norms. “Maidens, Mothers and Rabble Rousers: Women’s political involvement in Northern Ireland, 1790-2001” seeks to uncover the history of women’s political participation during the Troubles, while providing a historical context to Northern Irish women’s participation.

Dedicated to:
the women of Northern Ireland –
may you continue your proud history of political participation.

and my family,
my parents, David and Susan McKane,
my sister and brother-in-law, Jeanne McKane and Rob Murakami,
my sister Erin McKane,
my grandparents,
Bill McKane and Anne MacKenzie,
Ed and Rena Newbery,
and my Gran – Inez McKane
for their constant love and support –
there aren't words to thank you enough for that.

I would like to thank Dr. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman and Dr. Katherine Side for their time, words of encouragement and support, as well as their guidance and patience as my thesis supervisors.

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Introduction

Ireland, and Northern Ireland in particular, are said to be trapped in history. Since 1969, when British soldiers were sent in to Northern Ireland to "keep the peace" between "warring" Protestants and Catholics, Northern Ireland has been engulfed in an era of armed conflict (some would say civil war) known as the Troubles. The Troubles comprise a complex set of issues involving relations between the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom — above and beyond relations among diverse groups of people within Northern Ireland. Despite the complexity of the issues involved, however, the Troubles are often portrayed in dichotomous terms as a religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Such an interpretation of the conflict ignores the differences among women (and men) and within the Catholic and Protestant communities, not to mention the existence of racial minorities in Northern Ireland. Based on most accounts of the Troubles (Bardin, 1992; Coogan, 1996; Edwards, 1970; Hennessey, 1997; Holland, 1999; Toolis, 1996), it would appear that women have not been politically involved in this struggle at all, except as wives and mothers of "martyrs". Moreover, there is a pattern of silencing women's histories in Ireland as a whole. This pattern has continued to the present day, resulting in the history of women's political participation being effectively erased from the "official" accounts of the Troubles. Consequently, the dismissal of Northern Irish women's political involvement throughout the Troubles is no accident, nor is it an aberration. However, this does not mean that women have been passive "victims" of history, with no political agency of their own. Contrary to the dominant accounts of the Troubles, women have been active politically in a multitude of ways since 1969, taking part in the armed conflict, or acting in supportive roles as community activists and organizers in their churches and families, as well as at their places of employment.

Why has women's political participation in Northern Ireland, historically and throughout the Troubles, been ignored — and by whom? What is the history of such political participation? How has women's participation been shaped by the social construction of "womanhood" by the Irish, British, and Northern Irish states, as well as the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches? How has their participation reinforced and/or

opposed this construction? Moreover, how has anti-Irish racism on the part of the British also shaped social constructions of "womanhood" and ways in which women have participated politically and historically throughout the Troubles in Northern Ireland?

It is the aim of this thesis to uncover how women have participated politically (throughout the Troubles). To begin, I will provide an examination of the history of women's political participation in Ireland, beginning in the 1790s, in order to contextualise women's political involvement throughout the Troubles from 1969 to today. Then I will explore women's political participation in Northern Ireland beginning with the civil rights movement of the mid 1960s to the present day. I argue that women in Northern Ireland have participated extensively throughout the Troubles and that this participation has been shaped by the nature of women's political participation historically, as well as by the dominant notions of womanhood in Northern Ireland.

The study of history is vital because it provides us with a collective understanding of our past — a knowledge of where we have been and what we have achieved — which we can then use to inform our present as well as to forge a path for the future. The study of history also raises a number of methodological or historiographical issues. The methods and methodologies that guide the study of history are known as historiography. Feminist historiography informs women's history (among other "branches" of history), a relatively new "branch" of the discipline of history, dating (in North America) from the second wave of feminism of the 1960s and 1970s (Beddoe, 1998: 1, 6-7; Bridenthall & Koonz, 1977: 10; Cullen, 1994: 31, 36; Kelly-Gadol, 1976: 813; Shoemaker & Vincent, 1998: 1). Feminist historiography arose because women, mostly as scholars, needed and wanted the histories of their foremothers to be resurrected so that they would be represented in the academic discipline of history (Shoemaker & Vincent, 1998: 26). Feminist historiography started from the vantage point that women were absent from most recorded histories. Hence, the first goal of feminist historiographers was to name what was both visible and invisible — not just to fill the gaps left by other historical accounts.

One of the fundamental tenets of feminist historiography is that historical accounts are influenced by the dominant values of the time in which they are written. These

dominant values influence issues such as the following: What is deemed to be historical "knowledge"? Who holds such knowledge? What are the "appropriate" sources to be used to glean such knowledge? (Beddoe, 1998: 3; Cullen, 1994: 32; Thumim, 1995: 66; Zinsser, 1993: 18). Hence, the issue of knowledge (which is connected to the issue of historical sources) has been central within feminist historiographical discourse and critiques.

From these epistemological debates came an understanding shared by many feminist historiographers (Alexander, Angerman, Beddoe, Bridenthal & Koonz, Cullen, Degler, Kelly-Gadol, Scott, Shoemaker & Vincent, Thumim, and Zinsser) that the explanation for the absence of women from most recorded history is that women have been deemed to be historically "insignificant" or "irrelevant" (Zinsser, 1993: 18). The apparent historical "insignificance" of women was a result of the dominant historiographical conceptions of knowledge, which were largely based on who was believed to hold historical knowledge and who defined the "appropriate" historical sources of knowledge and subjects of historical research (Cullen, 1994: 32; Degler, 1975: 4, 5; Zinsser, 1993: 37). The dominant historiographical notions of knowledge and of which individuals and sources hold historical knowledge, make clear that the dominant paradigm of history "blinkered historians' vision and distorted [their] findings and interpretations" (Cullen, 1994: 32).

My work to uncover women's political involvement in Northern Ireland (historically and throughout the Troubles), is informed by feminist historiographical principles. First, I have adopted the principle of restoring women to history and history to women (Alexander, 1995: 225, 276; Cullen, 1994: 32; Kelly-Gadol, 1976: 809). My desire to contribute to the reclamation of Northern Irish women's history stems from the recognition that women in Northern Ireland have, by and large, been written out of and overlooked by Northern Irish history. By restoring women to the historical accounts of Northern Ireland and the Troubles, we can provide those involved in the contemporary women's movement in Northern Ireland with a record of the past that includes historical individuals (e.g. Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, Mary Anne McCracken, Mary Shackleton,

with whom they can identify and whom they can call upon as sources of inspiration for their own political participation through community activities, participation in the armed struggle, and many other activities (Shoemaker & Vincent, 1998: 26).

My research has also been informed by the feminist historiographical principle that there is no "objective" and universal historical "truth" (Beddoe, 1998: 1, 4; Green & Troup 1999: 3; Jenkins, 1991: 28, 32; Scott, 1988: 2); rather, history is socially created, an interpretation of events of the past. An historical account is informed by the particular perspective of the historian who writes the account, as well as by the dominant values and context of the time (Beddoe, 1998: 3; Cullen, 1994: 32; Jenkins, 1991: 12, 25 32-3, 38; Thumim, 1995: 66; Zinsser, 1993: 18). The feminist historiographical principle that there is no universal women's history has also shaped this paper. Women's (and men's) historical experiences differ based on race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, ability, age, and/or geographic location (Angerman et al, 1989: 2, 11-2; Beddoe, 1998: 4; Green & Troup, 1999: 256; Scott, 1988: 3, 7; Shoemaker & Vincent, 1998: 3, 26, 29).

These principles, that history is socially created and that historical experiences are shaped by an individual's social location, give rise to another feminist historiographical principle that has been central to my thesis research — that the writing of history is a political act. The historiographical decisions one makes about what and whom to write about, how to interpret historical events, the sources to be used in the writing of one's historical account, and the silences that exist in such accounts are all decisions that shape one's account of history (Alexander, 1995: 278; Scott, 1988: 9; Shoemaker & Vincent, 1998: 2, 6; Thumim, 1995: 64, 66; Zinsser, 1993: 17). Therefore, it is beneficial for an individual who is creating a record of history to be conscious of biases when writing an historical account. An awareness of biases can make an historian more sensitive to the potential difficulties that her/his biases can pose in the historical interpretation produced (Cullen, 1994: 32-3).

Another feminist historiographical principle that has been central to my research is the notion of the social construction of gender (Green & Troup, 1999: 253; Kelly-Gadol, 1976: 813; Zinsser, 1993: 3). My thesis examines how women in Northern Ireland are

constructed as "feminine"; how definitions of femininity in Northern Ireland have shifted over time; and how the dominant discourse of what is socially defined as "feminine" is used to funnel women into particular social roles and duties as citizens of Northern Ireland (i.e. their socially constructed primary role as "maidens" and "mothers"); and how women themselves adhere to these roles and duties, as well as challenge them as "rabble rousers". For the purposes of this research, a "maiden" describes the socially defined image of a "chaste", unmarried, young woman to which all unmarried Irish women were expected to adhere; a "mother" is defined as a woman who has children within a heterosexual, monogamous marital relationship, whose main prescribed role is within the private domain of the family, as the one who manages a household and cares for her husband and children; and a "rabble rouser" is defined as one who challenges the status quo whether it be British political and economic control of Ireland, male leaders of the the Unionist and Republican movements and the Protestant and Catholic churches, the Northern Irish and British governments, or the dominant beliefs or ideologies within their family structures.

My research has also been shaped by the feminist historiographical principle that the oppression(s) of women as women intersect with other oppression(s) that women may experience due to their race, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, ability, and age (Angerman, 1989: 20; Chaudhuri & Strobel, 1992: 4; Kelly-Gadol, 1976: 813; Shoemaker & Vincent, 1998: 26, 29; Zinsser, 1993: 29). The feminist historiographical principle of dismantling certain myths/dichotomies created by the dominant historiographical discourse (among others) — "nature versus culture, work versus family and public versus private" (Alexander, 1995: 276; Cullen, 1994: 34) - has also been integral to my thesis. I will challenge the public/private dichotomy by highlighting the fact that for many women in Northern Ireland the "public" and "private" domains are intricately connected, as Alexander (1995), Beddoe (1998), Cannavan (1997), Christiansen-Ruffman (1983), Cullen (1994), Curtin (1991), Gray & Ryan (1998), Green & Troup (1999), Innes (1994), Kelly-Gadol (1976), Urquhart (1994) and Zinsser (1993) (among others) argue. Some women in Northern Ireland do not consider the "public" and "private" spheres to be rigidly defined

and separate realms. Hence, my research explores women's activities in the "private" realm as well the "public" domain, and demonstrates the connections between these spheres.

Furthermore, my research has been influenced by the feminist historiographical notion that family structures have influenced various movements for social change and that these transformative movements for social change have also impacted family structures and socially constructed gender roles within families (Degler, 1975: 6). The feminist historiographical focus on the "private" domain challenges the dominant historiographical concept that history is solely about the study of the "political" and the "public" (as mentioned previously). The feminist historiographical focus on the "private" sphere has created a shift in the discipline of history, which has led to the acceptance of everyday individuals (not just the "greats" of history) and institutions such as the family as legitimate topics of historical inquiry.

I am concerned though, that the feminist historiographical concentration on the "private" sphere and "the family" may actually reinforce the notion that a woman's "place" is in the "private" domain of the domestic sphere and the family. Therefore, my research also explores the ways in which women participate (and have participated) in the "public" realm too. It is my hope that by exploring both the "public" and "private" realms, the connections between them will be made clear. Feminist historiographers who have critiqued the public/private dichotomy (Alexander, Beddoe and Scott, to name a few) have shown that the two realms are interconnected and that women have in fact participated in the "public" realm as well as the "private" domain (Beddoe, 1998: 4).

Many feminist historiographers (Alexander, Beddoe, and Scott) have also illustrated how the public/private split is a historical and social construction — one that has not existed across all times and in all cultures. Consequently, it is inaccurate to argue that all women have been relegated to the "private" realm, and that the public/private dichotomy is "natural"; rather, it has been constructed historically to meet the needs of the white, male capitalist class (Alexander, 1995: 276; Beddoe, 1998: 4; Scott, 1988: 7, 26). My research examines the historical and social construction of the public/private dichotomy in Northern Ireland and how it has served the needs of particular groups in Northern Ireland. Middle-

class male Protestants have held much of the political and economic power in the province, and electoral laws and the practice of gerrymandering¹ have allowed them to maintain that power. This was summed up well by the province's first Prime Minister, when he declared the Northern Irish government (Stormont) to be a "Protestant parliament for a Protestant people" (Coogan, 1996: 49). Moreover, access to education and labour law in Northern Ireland has privileged middle-class, male Protestants in the entrepreneurial and managerial sectors of industry. Women's work in the "private" sphere has been crucial to men's activities in the "public" sphere, but has remained invisible.

Discussions about the public/private split inevitably bring forth a dialogue about the space in which particular activities such as politics and political participation occur (i.e. in the private domain, in the public sphere, or in both). My research project, therefore, is also informed by the feminist challenge to the dominant historiographical definitions of "politics" and "political participation". The dominant historiographical discourse conceives of "political participation" and "politics" as consisting exclusively of the activities of government, the civil service, and the political parties (Bridenthall & Koonz, 1977: 3). Relatively few women have been politically active in these domains, since politics has been defined as a male, public space in Northern Ireland. Therefore, women's political participation during the Troubles has been ignored and considered "irrelevant" and not "political", and Northern Irish women have been portrayed as politically apathetic. This paper joins various feminist historiographers in calling for a more expansive definition of "politics" and "political participation" (Bridenthall & Koonz, 1977: 3; Christiansen-Ruffman, 1983, 1995; Scott, 1988: 26; Thumim, 1995: 63). Bridenthall and Koonz define "politics" and "political participation" in this way: "Politics more broadly and correctly defined...extends beyond the activity of a few dazzling personalities or the agreements made by a handful of leaders. It is a complex set of conflictual power relations between classes, regions, and religious systems struggling for control over scarce resources" (Bridenthall & Koonz, 1977: 3-4). As this quotation reveals, women do participate

¹ Gerrymandering is the practice of "manipulat[ing] the boundaries of (a constituency etc.) so as to give undue influence to some party or class". (*The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. 1998)

politically, most frequently at the family and local levels, and that the rigidly defined "public" and "private" domains are not the historical realities of most women. Rather, for most women, the "public" and "private" realms are interconnected and virtually impossible to separate from each other (Bridenthal & Koonz, 1977: 5). Thus, taking the previous quote further, politics encompasses realms beyond an elite group of leaders of political parties and various social movements. The definition of politics and political participation which is employed in this paper conceives of politics and political participation as including activities in the private realm of family, as well as involvement in philanthropic, volunteer and community work, and participation in party politics and the civil service. This definition of politics and political participation recognizes the connections between the "private" and the "public" realms, and therefore, highlights that these two realms are not binary opposites and separate from one another, as they are often portrayed; rather, they are intricately connected and mutually reinforcing spheres. According to this definition of political participation activities in both the "private" and "public" domains are political — expressions of one's beliefs and values. This does not mean, however, that every act is a political act. Political participation as defined in this paper is an expression of one's beliefs and values for the purpose of inspiring or motivating others to support one's beliefs and values. Following from this definition, activities such as raising children, community and grass-roots work, philanthropic work, and party political involvement, including behind-the-scenes work could be considered forms of political participation.

This definition highlights that women participate politically in voluntary and philanthropic organizations and capacities, as well as through the values they instil in their children. The work women have taken on in the private realm (providing support to male relatives, managing a household, caring for children in some contexts) is also political work, since by carrying out this work, women freed men to carry out their political activities in the "public" realm.

These feminist historiographical principles have provided me with an understanding of the political nature of writing history, as well as a recognition of the importance of restoring Northern Irish women to historical accounts of the Troubles and to Northern Irish

history in general. The notion that the writing of history is political forces me, as the creator of a historical account of women's political participation during the Troubles, to consider my motivations for constructing that historical record. I must first understand my motivations for constructing a history of women's political participation in the Troubles and my interpretation of Northern Irish history more broadly, because my motivations and historical interpretation shape the decisions I make about the sources I use, the places I search for sources, what I consider to be "appropriate" sources of historical "knowledge", and the way I construct my historical account.

Feminist historiographical principles have also informed my choice of sources. I want to make sure that I reflect the diversity of women's political involvement in and experiences of the Troubles in order to challenge the dichotomous thinking of much of the history recorded about Northern Ireland and the Troubles — that it is strictly a religious conflict between Protestants/Unionists² and Catholics/Republicans.³ Furthermore, feminist historiographical principles have influenced my decision to use sources from numerous academic disciplines and perspectives (political science, economics, sociology, and cultural studies) thereby producing a more broadly based historical account than a recorded history that simply assesses Northern Ireland's economic or political history (for instance) as it relates to women's political participation and experiences of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

In addition, in order to further develop my historical interpretation, where possible,

² Ulster Unionists are pro-British and ultra-Protestants who support the partition of Ireland and the maintenance of Northern Ireland's political ties to the rest of the United Kingdom. In the late 1800s and early 1900s Unionists strongly opposed Home Rule and pledged Ulster's loyalty to the British Crown; thus, its supporters are also known as Loyalists. Unionists or Loyalists are those who are members of Unionist political parties or organizations such as the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Progressive Ulster Unionist Party (PUUP), Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). Those who support the ideology put forth by such parties and organizations are unionists or loyalists (Sales, 1997: xi).

³ Irish Republicans advocate a united, sovereign Ireland. Republicanism is largely, but not solely, supported by Roman Catholics. Republicans are those who are members of political parties or organizations such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA or Provos), Sinn Féin, and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), while republicans are those who support the aims of the Republican movement (Sales, 1997: x).

I have used and sought out primary sources in order to ascertain the views of the actual women involved in the various modes of political participation and events which I am exploring. I aim to challenge the dominant myth that women did not have the skills, desire, and/or knowledge of politics to participate in the same ways that men have. Thus, many of the sources I have used for my research, which has been based on secondary sources, show just how politically adept many women have been throughout Northern Irish history and the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Additionally, sources that examine the "non-traditional" ways women have been active politically in Northern Ireland are useful to my research. Such sources illustrate that women did, in fact, participate in the armed struggle as bearers of arms, as well as in ways that have been socially constructed as more "appropriate" for women to be politically active. The use of primary and secondary sources that reflect the experiences of rural, urban, working-class, middle-class, and peasant women, as well as both Protestant and Catholic women, allows me to further illustrate the diverse ways in which Northern Irish women have participated politically in the past. These sources also permit me to examine how women in Northern Ireland have not only reinforced, but also challenged, the dominant representations of Northern Irish women. Unfortunately, there is very little material available on the experiences of racial, ethnic, and/or religious minorities in Northern Ireland, as well as the experiences of lesbians. Seeking out such sources and using them in my research was an attempt to reflect the diversity of women in Northern Ireland and to avoid the dichotomous thinking of Protestant versus Catholic, Loyalist versus Republican and British versus Irish, which is so prevalent in historical records and other literature on Northern Ireland. Consequently, as Zinsser found, what emerges from my sources is that women in Northern Ireland were/are not politically and historically apathetic figures, as they are frequently historically portrayed (Zinsser, 1993: 34-5).

One of the major dilemmas I have faced in my thesis research, given that my research is text-based, is how to give voice to women's historical experiences while at the same time contributing my own analysis and teasing out the analyses of other historians in accounts of the Troubles and other periods of history in Northern Ireland. I have decided to

seek out, where possible, multiple accounts of particular events or periods of history, thereby expanding my understanding of the event or period in time.

I have also encountered the difficulty of conducting historical research about women in Northern Ireland without being physically present in the country. This has been problematic, because I do not have access to the primary sources in Canada that I would have access to if I were in Northern Ireland. Since primary sources are so crucial to historical research, I have struggled with how "accurate" and "legitimate" my research will be, according to others in the academy. My concern about the "accuracy" or "legitimacy" of my historical account has been somewhat assuaged by the feminist historiographical principle that all history is constructed, and therefore, there is no historical "Truth" which I can strive to uncover or to create. I realise that I am creating an interpretation of history, not disseminating "the Truth", per se. Hence, while I am careful to avoid stereotypes I am also mindful of not falling into the trap of presenting my historical account as "the Truth". Furthermore, because my research is my interpretation, I feel that my contribution will be to provide an interpretation of women's political participation throughout the history of Northern Ireland, but particularly during the Troubles, which is based on a broad range of sources.

Moreover, I must be up-front about my biases and how they have (or may have) influenced my historical interpretation. I am part Northern Irish, I am Protestant, and I am a woman. These components of my identity inevitably colour the way I have interpreted historical events in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, my identity may be seen by many in Northern Ireland to have shaped my interpretation of women's political participation in Northern Ireland. Many people in Northern Ireland may refute my interpretation of the Troubles because I have not lived in Northern Ireland for any extended period of time. Hence, some people may claim that I do not understand the issues of Northern Irish society. The fact that I did not grow up there, according to many, would explain my "neutrality". Consequently, I realise that no account of such a politically polarised and divided society can satisfy everyone, and that it would be paralyzing for me as a researcher to try to do so. This does not mean that I abrogate my responsibilities for my historical

interpretation. Nor does it mean that I have not taken stringent measures to ensure the accuracy of the sources which I have used. I must be certain that my sources are "legitimate" (i.e. written when and by whom the author is claimed to be) and that the "facts" presented are "accurate", and I take full responsibility for the views expressed in my historical account of the Troubles.

I did not anticipate the dilemma of just how new women's history is to the study of Irish history. This realisation has made me even more determined to do my research, as my thesis will be a further contribution to the subject of women's history in Northern Ireland, which is only beginning to emerge. My research project is a contribution to the reclamation of the history of women's political activities throughout the Troubles in Northern Ireland and a correction to the literature on the Troubles, which focuses on male experiences and prominent male figures in Northern Ireland.

It is important to challenge the dominant historical accounts of the Troubles by uncovering women's experiences and political participation throughout the Troubles, particularly now, when various groups of women in Northern Ireland are demanding that their voices be heard at the present round of peace talks (Fearon, 1999). The documentation of women's political participation throughout the Troubles and other periods of Northern Ireland's history serves to justify many Northern Irish women's assertions. Many women in Northern Ireland argue that they have long been ignored and deserve a place at the negotiating table, due to their political participation throughout the Troubles and also because women comprise over half of the Northern Irish population. Furthermore, the uncovering of women's political involvement throughout the Troubles, and Northern Irish history more broadly, undermines some very prominent dichotomies in Northern Irish society, such as Protestant/Catholic, Unionist/Republican and British/Irish. For example, women's participation highlights that not all Catholic women support the Republican cause, nor do all Protestant women support the Unionist movement. There are Protestant women who are not Unionist supporters and favour an independent Northern Irish state that is not part of the United Kingdom, while some Catholic women argue against the reunification of Ireland. In addition, not all Protestant women identify themselves as British, and there are

some Catholic women who do not claim an Irish identity. Moreover, there are women who do not accept the dominant notion of womanhood in Northern Ireland and who challenge such notions, acting as "rabble rousers". All of these women challenge the dominant dichotomies within the Northern Irish state.

Women have a long history of political participation in Northern Ireland, although women's history has long been marginalized from most accounts of Northern Irish history. It is my hope that my research, informed by feminist historiographical principles, will contribute to the restoration of women to accounts of Northern Irish history and the Troubles. I also hope that women in Northern Ireland can draw on their reclaimed history and historical predecessors as inspiration for their political activities and use their history to justify and gain support for contemporary women's demands to be included in the present round of peace talks, which are being held to negotiate and construct a "new" Northern Ireland free of sectarian violence and divisiveness — a democratic Northern Ireland/Ireland that is inclusive and accepting of difference.

Chapter One

Silenced no longer: The history of women's political participation in Northern Ireland, 1790–1969

participation that recognizes the connections between the social and the political and considers community work, activities in one's workplace, and involvement in social movements and party politics to be political participation (Sarvasy & Siim, 1994: 253).

This understanding of politics and political participation allows one to examine the spheres in which women most commonly and frequently operate (Bridenthall & Koonz, 1977: 2; Christiansen-Ruffman, 1983, 1995; Norris, 1991: 60-1) and, therefore, it better illustrates the variety of ways women have been politically active throughout Irish history.

Consequently, it is this notion of politics and political participation espoused by these feminists, and others that will be employed in this study, since it provides a more adequate and richer understanding of the nature of women's political participation than definitions of politics that consider political activity to occur only in the formal, institutional realm.

This chapter will examine the history of women's political participation in Ireland. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an assessment of the entire history of women's political participation in Northern Ireland. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on more recent history; I will examine the various ways women have participated politically in Ireland from 1798 up to the partition of the country in 1922, as this era had a substantial impact on the period in Northern Ireland known as "the Troubles".⁴ I will argue that contrary to many historical accounts and silences, women have a long history of political participation in Ireland. This is the legacy the women of Northern Ireland have inherited and which has informed, as well as constrained, their political involvement throughout the Troubles. I will be referring to "Ireland" in this chapter, because Northern Ireland only became a separate political entity in 1922, and this chapter addresses the period prior to the partition of Ireland. However, I will focus on women's activities in Ulster.⁵ First, I will explore how the racialization of the Irish and the social and historical constructions of womanhood have been flashpoints that have inspired many women to participate

⁴ "The Troubles" encompass the period in Northern Ireland from the arrival of British troops in the province in 1969 to the present day.

⁵ Ulster is the name of one of the historic provinces of Ireland. After 1922, Ulster became associated with Northern Ireland (which contains much of the historic province of Ulster). The name has also been used since 1922 by extreme Protestant Unionists to express their anti-Catholic and pro-British political ideology.

politically, but have also acted as barriers to women's political activities. Then I will turn to an examination of women's political involvement, starting with the Rebellion of 1798, then moving to the Young Ireland movement, the Ladies' Land League, and women's philanthropic work in the Victorian era. I will also explore women's participation in the Gaelic Revival cause, the Unionist cause, the Easter Rising of 1916, and women's suffrage movement.

Frameworks of Race and Gender

The racialization of the Irish

The British racialization of the Irish is closely connected to dominant notions of the Irish "nation" and Irish "womanhood", which have shaped the ways women have participated politically. During the Elizabethan era (the time at which the planters arrived in Ulster), anti-Irish racism already existed in the minds of the planters "...as cultural baggage" (Rolston, 1993: 16).⁶ Such racism justified the planters' "rights" to the land and England's claims to Ireland. The Irish (according to the dominant Elizabethan "planter" logic) were a "savage", "pagan", and "evil" race, and thus force was required to control them (Rolston, 1993: 16). This portrayal of the Irish justified in the minds of the planters and the English state the force used in dealing with the "natives" because they (the Irish)

⁶ Since the 1530s, when Henry VIII established the Church of England and split from the Roman Catholic Church, England was one of the few Protestant countries in Europe. Henry VIII, jealous of Spain's power, wanted to build an empire which would rival that of Spain. Ireland was the first step in building Henry's dreamed-of empire. In this empire-building project and challenge to the Pope's power by breaking with the Roman Catholic Church, the English Crown felt besieged from within and outside its borders by powerful Catholic forces wanting to restore the Catholic denomination as the State religion of England. Increasing the Protestant population was an important way to ensure the survival of Protestantism as the dominant faith in England. Moreover, increasing the Protestant population in Ireland, England's new colony, was a vital way to ensure Ireland's loyalty to the English Crown. Such divisions between Catholics and Protestants increased under the reign of Queen Mary (1553-1558), daughter of Henry VIII, who restored the Catholic faith as the State religion and set about eliminating Protestant opposition to her reign by killing thousands of Protestants. When Mary's sister became Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), after Mary's death in 1558, Elizabeth restored the Church of England to "official" State religion and tried to increase the Protestant population in her realm due to threats to her reign from the Catholic King of Spain throughout Elizabeth's legendary battles with the Spanish Armada. Elizabeth sent Protestant "planters" to Ireland, since she feared that its majority Catholic population might result in Ireland forming an alliance with Spain or France in any conflicts England might have with those powers (Aronson, 1995a: 52-3; Aronson, 1995b: 46, 48; Hayes-McCoy, 1995: 174-5).

"...were a lower order of humanity who 'live like beasts, void of law and all good order...[and are] brutish in their customs'" (Rolston, 1993: 16-7). The racialization of the Irish continued into the Victorian era in Great Britain, with it being stated by the British powers-that-be that the Irish "...in the mass, are almost uncivilised. Like children they require governing with the hand of power. They *require* authority and will *bear* it (emphasis in original)" (Waters, 1995: 99). Sir John Forbes declared that "...the very character of the Irish as a people...[was] more or less incompatible with social progress" (Waters, 1995: 104). Charles Wood, Chancellor, summed up the British stereotypes of the Irish in the 1840s during the Great Famine when he deplored "...the gross exaggeration of everything in that country [Ireland]...the state of destitution...and...the universal disposition to do as little as possible for themselves, and to throw as much upon the Government as possible" (Waters, 1995: 101).

This pitting of the British against the Irish was central to the shaping of the political and cultural situation in Ulster that contributed to the emergence of the Troubles. Yet, the ways the Irish have been (and are) racialized and discriminated against by and within British society have been obscured, since "whiteness" has been constructed within British society as a marker of national belonging; therefore, "...being the same 'colour' can be equated with 'same nation' implying 'no problem' with discrimination" (Hickman & Walter, 1995: 8). Due to a lack of visible difference in skin colour between the English and the Irish, other markers were required in order to highlight the "racial" differences between the "Irish" and the "English" (McClintock, 1995: 52). Consequently, focusing on the physical and cultural characteristics of the Irish was key to the racializing process. The Irish were portrayed as "ape-like" in appearance, with "large lips, receding foreheads, unkempt hair..." and "barbaric" accents and housekeeping practices (Gray, 1993: 28, 29; McClintock, 1995: 53).

British anti-Irish racism was closely tied to anti-Catholicism in Britain. One of the major British nationalist myths was that of the Irish Catholic "Other" (Waters, 1995: 106). This construction of the "Other" connected the notion of the "inferior colonized subject" and the Roman Catholic "Other", which was a creation of sixteenth-century English

nationalism (Hickman & Walter, 1995: 9). "The 'imagined community' of the British was a Protestant community" (Hickman & Walter, 1995: 9). Irish Catholics were portrayed as socially and politically dangerous to Protestant Britain (Hickman & Walter, 1995: 9; Waters, 1995: 106). It is this concept of the Irish that has influenced British government policy regarding Ireland and its people for centuries in terms of dividing Catholics and Protestants in Ireland from each other and establishing a hierarchy in which Protestants in Ireland held more land, power, and wealth than Catholics (Hickman & Walter, 1995: 9). The Irish (read Catholics) were portrayed as lazy drunks who lived in "slovenly" conditions with huge families (McClintock, 1995: 53). They were also characterized as violent, untrustworthy liars (Waters, 1995: 98). Relatedly, once Protestantism reigned supreme in Northern Ireland, the gendered notion of Protestantism as "manly" and "modern" imbued Northern Ireland with a patriarchal ideology that marginalized women and their roles within Northern Irish society (Hickman & Walter, 1995: 9; Waters, 1995: 98).

Images of Irish womanhood

The notion of Irish women as protectors of Ireland and Irish culture, as well as the Catholic faith, is based in Ireland's colonial history and the racialization of the Irish (Brozyna, 1994; McClintock, 1995). Colonial powers frequently portray women of the colonized and colonizing cultures as binary opposites, essentialising women of the colonizing culture as "chaste", "pure", and "good" wives and mothers, while women of the colonized culture are characterized as "impure", "backward", and "bad" wives and mothers — selfish, neglectful of their children, and unfaithful to their husbands (Brozyna, 1994: 170; Innes, 1994: 11; McClintock, 1995: 359). Anti-colonial forces also often adopt gendered notions of women as the "bearers" and "guardians" of their culture as a means by which to preserve their culture threatened by colonization (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989: 7; Yuval-Davis, 1998: 23). This gendered role was also supported by patriarchal and hierarchical Protestant and Catholic churches and the Northern Irish state (when it evolved), which all convey the "Christian" message that women's primary role is in the

home as a wife and mother; it also further side-lined both Protestant and Catholic women in terms of the existing dominant definitions of political participation (Brozyna, 1994: 155).

Women have been portrayed within the Irish Republican and Ulster Unionist causes as the bearers and conveyors of culture through their prescribed role in the private realm as wives and mothers. A woman's role was to produce the next generation biologically, as well as socially, by instilling in her children patriotic values and a knowledge of their nation's culture and history (Gray & Ryan, 1998: 123; Porter, 1998a: 43). Furthermore, it meant that as the keepers and conveyors of a culture under siege by a colonial power, women were deemed to be in need of protection; protecting women was seen as tantamount to protecting the culture. Not only was this dominant view of womanhood imposed on women, but there were women who supported it (participating in the manner of "maidens" and "mothers"), as well as challenged it (active as "rabble rousers"); still others both reinforced and challenged the dominant gendered norms, often participating in supportive, behind-the-scenes manners that were socially acceptable in order to achieve their goals and to have their activities accepted rather than challenged or marginalized or ostracised (Gray & Ryan, 1998: 124). Yet, despite women's participation in the Republican movement which achieved independence for Ireland, women's efforts and involvement were not acknowledged or honoured, since women were excluded from the negotiations that resulted in the partition of and new constitutions for Northern Ireland and what would become the Republic of Ireland (Gray & Ryan, 1998: 125).

Gendered roles within Irish Republicanism and Ulster Unionism have been predicated on notions of space and what space is appropriately occupied by which gender. In the dominant Republican and Unionist schools of thought, space has been divided into binary and opposing arenas: public/private; male/female. This dichotomy of "male" public space and "female" private space is conveyed and supported by the images used by both the Catholic and Protestant churches and the Republican and Unionist movements (Dowler: 1998; Lyons: 1996). The Catholic Church and Republican forces have used the symbol of Mother Ireland to convey their conceptions of Irish womanhood (ie. chastity and purity) (Dowler, 1998: 8; Lyons, 1996: 121). Hence, they have worked together to define the

"proper" role for Irish women to play within the Irish Republican movement and Catholic communities - that of "maidens" and "mothers" (Dowler, 1998: 8; Lyons, 1996: 115). In the words of Miller et al., "such a potent icon [the "mother"] implies that any woman who ventures beyond the hallowed, private terrain of home and family is in some way deviant: either because she has been misled by manipulative men; or else suffers from some sort of derangement rendering her mad, bad and dangerous to know" (Miller et al, 1996: 2); in other words, she is a "rabble rouser".

Within republican and Catholic communities, the images of "maiden" and "mother" have been the primary symbols of republican and Catholic womanhood. Historically, the image of the Virgin Mary has shifted to serve the ideological needs of the Church and dominant Republican movement. In the seventeenth century, Mary as "protector" of Ireland (Lyons, 1996: 114), was dominant, but after the Great Famine, the dominant representative image of Irish womanhood used by the Church and Republican movement shifted from the Virgin to the *Mater Dolorosa* — the mother mourning the loss of her son (Lyons, 1996: 114). The image of Mary as a mother in mourning had always existed within the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland (and elsewhere), but it became more prevalent as a notion of Irish womanhood (although not the sole notion of Irish womanhood) in the nineteenth century when the Irish needed a way to comprehend a "punishing God" and reasons for Ireland's suffering throughout the Great Famine and English colonial rule (Lyons, 1996: 115). The Irish woman's place was not on the barricades, but in the home, producing and raising republican children (especially sons) and instilling in them a sense of their duties as republican men and women, as well as mourning their heroic, fallen sons (Dowler, 1998: 5-6, 10; Lyons, 1996: 115).

The mother in mourning was portrayed as the ideal of Irish womanhood because such a woman had produced a son (or sons) who had died for the nation — the ultimate patriotic "duty" and sacrifice of motherhood (Lyons, 1996: 116). As such, mothers in mourning frequently became symbols of the Republican cause within their communities (Benton, 1995: 161; Lyons, 1996: 116). In this way, the Catholic Church and Republican movement worked (and continue to work) together to convey this image of Irish Catholic

womanhood, which remains a dominant image within Irish Catholicism and Republicanism, as illustrated in the present-day Republican wall murals.

The image of the mother in mourning was just as powerful within the Ulster Unionist cause as it was in the Republican cause because women's primary role, as conveyed by Ulster Unionism, was also motherhood (Urquhart, 1994: 96). Hence, the image of the Protestant mother was used by Protestant denominations and powers-that-be to shape the socially sanctioned roles for Protestant women within Protestant communities and the Unionist cause as being that of behind-the-scenes supporters and workers as "maidens" and "mothers", managing households and caring for their husbands and children (Urquhart, 1994: 94). Some unionist women have participated in the Unionist cause in the manner of "maidens" and "mothers", while others have been involved as "rabble rousers". Many unionist women also, it appeared simultaneously in some cases, both reinforced and opposed the dominant socially constructed images of and roles for women within the Unionist movement. They extolled women's primary role as wives and mothers, while at the same time argued that this all-important role of women made it imperative that women be politically involved in the public realm. This challenged the very notion of womanhood that dominated Unionist ideology, by demanding that the voices of women within the Ulster Women's Unionist Council⁷ (UWUC) not be marginalized.

Women's political participation in Ireland has been shaped, in part, by the English racialization of the Irish and the notions of womanhood that have dominated Ireland historically. Some women embraced the dominant notions of womanhood through their political activities, while others challenged such norms; still others believed that working within the bounds of social norms for women was the most effective means by which to achieve their aims. I will now turn to an examination of such participation from the 1790s to 1922 when Ireland was partitioned.

⁷ The UWUC, created in the early twentieth century, was (and is) an auxiliary of the Ulster Unionist Party, the primary organization through which women are involved in the Unionist cause.

The history of women's political participation

The women of 1798

The late 1700s was a time of great turbulence in Ireland. Many people, inspired by the success of the French and American Revolutions, dreamed of an independent Ireland governed by the guiding principles of the French and American republics: equality, liberty and "brotherhood". One particular group of individuals organized to bring about such a revolution in Ireland, calling themselves the United Irishmen. In 1798 they instigated a rebellion to achieve their dream of a sovereign Irish republic. In the spirit of equality, liberty and "brotherhood", the supporters of the Rebellion of 1798 came from Catholic and Protestant segments of the population, as well as from across class divisions.

Women's involvement in the Rebellion of 1798 was shaped by the notions of gendered roles within Irish society. Some women accepted the dominant gendered roles and participated in ways that reinforced such roles as "maidens" and "mothers", while other women challenged such gendered norms as "rabble rousers". Still, many other women were active in the Rebellion of 1798 in ways that both reinforced and challenged the dominant gendered roles in Ireland (Whelan, 1998: 4).

The Rebellion of 1798 was predominantly centred in the Ulster Presbyterian districts of the counties of Antrim and Down, contradicting the idea that Irish nationalism has always been solely the domain of Catholics in Ireland. The United Irish, the movement that instigated the Rebellion of 1798, believed that the Anglo-Irish government was corrupt and controlled by the British. The movement was also influenced by the French and American Revolutions. The United Irish leadership and its supporters called for constitutional reforms in Ireland that would protect the Irish against government corruption and allow the Irish to elect their own representatives (Curtin, 1991: 134). The notion of Ireland advocated by the United Irish in the Rebellion of 1798 was a democratic, secular republic in which both Catholics and Protestants, the landed gentry and the working class, the "native" and the "settler", would possess equally the rights, obligations, and privileges of citizenship (Curtin, 1991: 133). Hence, the United Irish movement separated the rights

of citizenship from the ownership of property and according to some historians included everyone in the definition of citizenship, although there were varying degrees of citizenship, which were tied to wealth and gender (Curtin, 1998: 27).

In response to the Rebellion of 1798, the British government waged a counter-revolutionary campaign against the United Irish movement, which was initiated by Loyalist forces⁸ of the Orange Order⁹ and government-sponsored, gentry-led yeomanry corps. This British government-supported campaign gave credence to the United Irish claims that the Loyalists were waging a war against the people (Curtin, 1991: 135).

The images of citizenship portrayed within the United Irish movement were gendered. Women had prescribed roles within the movement as activists within the United Irish cause and representatives of a downtrodden country (personified most commonly as a beautiful maiden in need of male protection), while men were expected to be the liberators and protectors of the nation (Curtin, 1998: 31). Female citizenship was closely tied to notions of republican "motherhood", which meant sacrificing male loved ones to the patriotic cause (Curtin, 1991: 137; Curtin, 1998: 31-2). "The Patriot Mother", a ballad written in the 1790s, expresses just this view. In the ballad a mother urges her son to choose an honourable death and die while fighting for Ireland rather than betray the United Irish movement. She tells him that she cannot love a traitor — not even her own son (Curtin, 1991: 137-8). The message of such ballads was that women could participate in the Republican "cause" by extolling Republican virtues and inspiring their menfolk to defend Ireland (Curtin, 1991: 137); women were not equal, in that they could not bear arms in support of the United Ireland movement, but "mothers" and "maidens" were engaged in the cause nonetheless, by urging their male relatives to participate in the United Irish movement as bearers of arms and to give up their lives for the cause, if necessary. Along this line of reasoning, "virtuous women must be prepared to sacrifice their sons, their

⁸ Loyalists supported (and still support) an ultra-Protestant ideology and the maintenance of Ireland's political affiliation with England. Later, Loyalists were the driving force behind the partition of Ireland and the creation of Northern Ireland, which remained a part of the United Kingdom.

⁹ The Orange Order was (and still is) a powerful ultra-Protestant Loyalist organization.

husbands and their brothers to the public good. Women must breed, nurture, and finally relinquish good republican men" (Curtin, 1991: 137). Hence, although women may not have been considered equal within the United Irish cause, women were engaged in the movement as mothers, instilling patriotism in their children, and as wives, sisters and girlfriends supporting and encouraging their male loved ones in their activities in support of the United Irish movement.

Second only to the fallen patriot in Republican regard was the depiction of the widow. The republican widow was held in high regard for sacrificing a happy home life with her husband in support of the cause and was a reminder of those who had given their lives to the nation and hence, the duty that successive generations had not to allow such deaths to have been in vain (Curtin, 1998: 26). Matilda Tone was perhaps the most honoured widow of the United Irish movement. Her husband, Theobald Wolfe Tone, was one of the leaders of the United Irish movement and was sentenced to death for his involvement (Curtin, 1998: 26). Matilda conveyed all the characteristics of republican womanhood: "...a woman who sacrificed a 'normal' domesticity and her husband to the patriotic cause" (Curtin, 1998: 26). As a result, she was portrayed as the "model" republican woman: loyal, loving, and a supportive wife and mother. By managing the Tone household, Matilda allowed her husband to carry out his role in the United Irish cause (Curtin, 1998: 37, 45). Her primary incursion into the public realm was to protect her children and the reputation of her late husband (Curtin, 1998: 34). After her husband's death, she devoted herself to bringing up her son "...to be a living memorial to his father..." and to protecting and shaping the memory of her husband (Curtin, 1998: 41). Matilda collaborated with her son William in writing a "true and accurate account" of Tone's career and the evolution of his political thinking in response to a particular account of her life in exile after her husband's death, which she felt damaged Wolfe Tone's memory and reputation (Curtin, 1998: 37, 43). She was not credited as one of the authors of that account, although together, Matilda and her son represented Wolfe Tone "...as a selfless patriot and willing martyr to his country — elevating him to first rank of United Irish leaders" (Curtin, 1998: 44). The high esteem in which Matilda Tone was held as a

patriot widow and mother endowed her work in the public sphere with authority. Thus, while Matilda did not publish any writings under her own name or take up arms, she was no less politically active than her husband (Curtin, 1998: 46).

Matilda Tone did not oppose the gendered division of labour within the United Irish movement, nor was she the only republican woman to participate politically in a supportive, behind-the-scenes manner. Many other mothers, wives and sisters also contributed to men's activities in Republican public life by taking on the socially constructed role of republican womanhood as "maidens" and "mothers" (Curtin, 1998: 45). This was important in that, "virtuous republican masculinity, the realisation of which drove the men of [17]98...was both defined and complemented, by the construction of virtuous republican femininity, in which there was perhaps no more notable collaborator and exemplar than Matilda Tone" (Curtin, 1998: 46). Therefore, such women participated in the social and historical constructions of masculinity and femininity that were implicit in Republican rhetoric and mobilisation (Curtin, 1998: 45). Matilda Tone's (and other women's) contributions to the "public" careers of male relatives highlights the connections "...and symbiotic nature of these so-called separate [public and private] spheres" (Curtin, 1998: 45-6), since popular movements led by men required the supportive roles carried out by many women (Curtin, 1998: 45-6).

Another personification of Ireland in poetry, literature, art and ballads — Hibernia or Erin (a mythical "maiden" who encouraged her male admirers to carry out their patriotic duties to defend her, Ireland) — was limiting to women, just as the "Mother Ireland" image was, since such images were meant to be guidelines for their own behaviour (Thuente, 1998: 13-4). Nevertheless, Hibernia/Erin was an image of a woman who was active in the public realm, in the capacity of rallying support for the male-led movement of the United Irish.

The image of "the maniac" (also a "maiden") was another popular female personification of Ireland used by the United Irish (Thuente, 1998: 20). There are numerous interpretations of a popular story of the tragic maniacal figure known as either Mary LeMore or Ellen O'Moore. Ellen or Mary becomes distraught after witnessing British

soldiers killing her father or brother and being raped by those same soldiers. After that trauma, she wanders the country forever lamenting the murder of her loved one and her "deflowering" or "ruin" and warns all women against the British soldiers (Thuente, 1998: 20).

Through the use of the images of "Mother Ireland", Erin, Hibernia and the "maniac" in drawings, ballads, poetry, and literature, a woman's socially constructed role within the United Irish movement was conveyed as an indirect role. Female participation in the cause was limited to encouraging their male relatives to do the "real" work, which was the armed defence of Ireland (Curtin, 1991: 137; Whelan, 1998: 83, 102, 107, 108, 118, 122, 123, 134, 135).

Other women participated as "rabble rousers", challenging the dominant gendered norms imbued in the United Irish movement's notions of the "maiden" and "mother" (Curtin, 1991: 138). The gulf between the "ideal" republican woman (the "maiden" or "mother") and her role in the "cause", and the reality of many women's political involvement as "rabble rousers" can be clearly seen in the examples of a multitude of women who actively participated in the Rising of 1798, as English informers, participants in battles, or witnesses for the defence or prosecution in numerous court cases of those charged with treason for their alleged participation in the United Irish movement (Bartlett, 1998; Curtin, 1991: 138; O'Donnell, 1998).

Some women, such as Betsy Gray, were even directly involved in battles as bearers of arms (Curtin, 1991: 134; Kinsella, 1998). Not much is known about Betsy Gray's origins and family background, but it is known that she was from North County Down and that she was killed with her brother and fiance by British soldiers. Many ballads and numerous legends were created about Betsy. She was renowned for her beauty and leading the insurgents at Ballynahinch on a white horse dressed in a green petticoat and brandishing a sword. At her death she became known as "Ulster's Joan of Arc" (Kinsella, 1998: 194; Stewart, 1995: 226-9). Other women, such as Bridget 'Croppy Biddy' Dolan, achieved notoriety by becoming informers for the British, identifying many United Irish soldiers. Bridget Dolan was the subject of many ballads and the object of much derision for her

"traitorous" acts (O'Donnell: 1998). It was in this way that she paid the price for her activities.

Despite the barriers women encountered in becoming involved in the United Irish cause, a diverse group, from working class women to women of the middle-class and landed gentry, participated in the United Irish cause and Rebellion in various ways. It was women who kept the movement going when the male leaders of the United Irish were imprisoned by acting as messengers and providing shelter, food, clothing, and weapons to the rebels; still other women also lobbied on behalf of their loved ones who had been jailed, sentenced to death, or deported for their part in the Rebellion of 1798 (Bartlett, 1998; Burgess, 1998; Curtin, 1991: 134; O'Donnell, 1998; Gray, 1998; Kinsella, 1998; Whelan, 1998: 36).

Women appear to have both reinforced dominant gender norms and challenged them. Mary Anne McCracken was one such woman. As the owner of a business, an uncommon activity for women in Ireland at that time, she challenged the accepted gender norms (Curtin, 1991: 141). Mary Anne also asserted her views about women's equality and the path the United Irish movement was taking, which often conflicted with those of the male United Irish leadership. However, she also appeared to participate in traditionally "feminine", supportive ways. She was an ardent republican from Belfast, and a fierce supporter of the United Irish cause of which her brother, Henry Joy, was a leader (Curtin, 1991: 138). Mary Anne supported her brother's activities to the point of securing legal assistance for him during his trial for his involvement in the Rebellion, and attending his trial with him (Gray, 1998: 56; Stewart, 1995: 242-5). Moreover, it appears from Mary Anne's correspondence with Henry Joy that she was even involved in concealing arms for her brother (Gray, 1998: 54).

Nevertheless, Mary Anne also asserted her own political agency and did not refrain from challenging her brother on the United Irish movement's silence regarding women's suffrage, something for which she strongly advocated (Curtin, 1991: 138). In 1797, Mary Anne wrote to her brother Henry Joy,

Is it not almost time for the clouds of error and prejudice to disperse and that the female part of the Creation as well as the male should throw off the fetters with which they have been so long mentally bound?...There can be no argument produced in favour of the slavery of women that has not been used in favour of general slavery...I therefore hope that it is reserved for the Irish nation to strike out something new and to shew [sic] an example of candour, generosity, and justice superior to any that have gone before them (cited in Curtin, 1991: 138).

Mary Anne's commitment to the equal involvement of both genders in the United Irish organization was further demonstrated by her refusal to join a society of United Irish women that had existed since 1796 because she did not approve of separate women's societies. Mary Anne felt that women should be admitted to the main organizations on equal terms with men, declaring that "...there can be no other reason for having them [women] separate but keeping the women in the dark and certainly it is equally ungenerous and uncandid to make tools of them [women] without confiding in them" (cited in Gray, 1998: 53).

Women's political participation in the United Irish movement and the Rebellion of 1798 was often complex and multi-dimensional, and it affected Irish society in a variety of ways. Such participation was informed by the socially constructed gendered divisions of labour within Irish society in general, and the United Irish organization in particular, but it was also shaped by opposition to it. Many women provided support and encouragement to their male relatives as "maidens" and "mothers", but there were also many women who participated in the uprising in their own right and who asserted their own opinions within the United Irish cause as "rabble rousers". Those women who challenged the dominant gender norms began to pave the way for socially acceptable roles for women within Irish and Ulster societies beyond that of wife and mother. This choice did not come without hardships for many of those women. They faced ostracism and attacks on their character due to the nature of their involvement. Women who conformed to the dominant gender norms (or appeared to) — "maidens" and "mothers" — were portrayed as role models of Irish womanhood to which every Irish girl and woman should aspire. The activities of such women served to quell the fears of many that women were becoming too assertive and

independent. Moreover, such participation behind the scenes and in homes was essential to the United Irish cause, since without the labour and contributions of many women, it would have been very difficult for men in leadership positions in the United Irish organization to carry out their activities. Furthermore, the socially sanctioned feminine modes of participation served to define those socially acceptable, masculine modes of political involvement.

The Young Ireland movement of the 1840s

Such modes of female political participation were echoed in the Young Ireland movement, an Irish republican movement that was active throughout the 1840s, inspired by nationalist movements in continental Europe, such as "Young Italy", and the discourses of the Enlightenment and Romanticism (Cannavan, 1997: 212-3). In 1847 the Young Irish attempted yet another rebellion against British rule. Within this movement there were women who accepted and abided by the socially accepted "norms" of female behaviour as "maidens" and "mothers". There were also women who directly challenged the accepted gendered norms — "rabble rousers". In addition, there were women who appeared to both reinforce and directly challenge these accepted gendered norms through their political activities. Hence, the ways in which women participated in the Young Ireland movement further underscores the diversity of Irish women's political beliefs and activities.

Both Protestant and Catholic women were involved in the Young Ireland movement. The Protestant women from the northeast of Ireland (what would become Northern Ireland) who participated in the movement were not only challenging their class upbringing as predominantly middle-class women supporting the working-class and peasants, but also their religious upbringing, which generally was suspicious of Catholicism and what an independent Ireland would mean for Protestants as a religious minority within the country as a whole (Anton, 1994: 83-4). But whatever their means of participation, women's presence in the Young Ireland movement, especially as writers and public speakers, was of great importance to the movement.

Fifteen to twenty women, some from Ulster, are known to have been involved in

the Young Ireland movement as writers for *The Nation*, the newspaper established by the Young Irelanders (Anton, 1993: 34; Cannavan, 1997: 214). What is interesting is that the women who contributed to the cause as writers did so as independent women (although most of them used pseudonyms),¹⁰ possibly as a way to protect themselves from attacks and harassment and also perhaps to protect their families from such attacks. Many of the women who took on public-speaking roles frequently did so as wives, mothers or sisters carrying on their husbands', sons' or brothers' cause (Anton, 1994). Jenny Mitchel, Henrietta Mitchel Martin, Margaret Hughes Callan and Susan Hughes (sisters), and Elizabeth Willoughby Treacy were all Protestants from Ulster and involved in the Young Ireland cause (Anton, 1993: 35, 71, 77, 83; Anton, 1994: 60).

Henrietta Mitchel Martin (sister of John Mitchel) and Susan Hughes both participated politically in ways that reinforced accepted norms of female behaviour by supporting their husbands' activities within the Young Ireland cause and not taking on roles in their own right (Anton, 1994: 71). Susan supported her husband Charles Gavan Duffy in his leadership position within the Young Ireland movement (Anton, 1994: 60, 75). Before her marriage to John Martin, Henrietta was active in the movement in her own right as a writer for the *United Irishman*; however, after her marriage, she devoted her energy to encouraging her husband in his involvement in the Young Ireland movement and the Home Rule campaign. When her husband died, Henrietta travelled widely speaking in support of the Republican cause, but on behalf of her late husband and *his* work, not her own (Anton, 1994: 71). Possibly, many of these women focused on their husband's work because they were aware that invoking their husbands' names would increase their legitimacy and bring them some of the male patriarchal privilege that would attract continued support and attention to the Young Ireland movement. Whatever the reason, women's appearance on the public speaking circuit commemorating their husbands contributed to the gradually increasing role for women within the public domain.

Many women challenged the dominant gender norms both through their vocation as

¹⁰ 'Mary', 'Eva' and 'Speranza' were the most prolific of these writers. 'Maria' and 'Wilhelm' were also women writers for *The Nation* (Anton, 1993: 34; Cannavan, 1997: 214).

writers and by what they wrote as "rabble rousers". These women writers demonstrate that women took a keen interest in the political situation of their country. For instance, Margaret Hughes Callan (sister of Susan Hughes) was the editor of a collection of works by Irish writers, *The Casket of Irish Pearls*, in which she implored the Irish to read works by Irish writers. This, she asserted, would teach the Irish about their history, culture, and literature, and would increase the pride and self-respect of the Irish people. Illustrating that many women did indeed have an interest in and understanding of what is traditionally thought of as the political realm, Margaret declared,

Forswear for ever divisions of sects and parties, and become in heart and soul "united Irishmen." Thus will you render harmless the arms our enemies have heretofore so skilfully turned against us, and frustrate that policy of disunion, which they have so long and so justly reckoned upon. Had our fathers listened, in their day, to this holy preaching of mutual love and mutual charity, instead of to the promptings of an insane bigotry, stimulated by artful foes, how changed the destiny might not they have left to us, their children (Anton, 1994: 73).

For Margaret Hughes Callan, Irish unity was the only path to Irish self-government and education was the key to ending the bigotry that prevented Irish unification (Anton, 1994: 74, 75). She believed that nationalism was a unifying force that could bring together all classes and denominations, and she continued her political involvement in the United Irish movement by working on the editorial staff of *The Nation* newspaper (Anton, 1994: 74-6).

Elizabeth Willoughby Treacy also challenged the prevailing gender norms of her time through her writing. She was from a Protestant land-owning family in Ballymena and wrote for *The Nation* under the pseudonym 'Finola' (Anton, 1994: 60, 76). Her poems focused on the social circumstances and poverty in which many Irish lived. A central theme of her poetry was the living conditions of many women and girls, often depicting their experiences in low-paying jobs and workhouses. Finola's poetry also expressed her desire for the unification of Ireland, her horror at the social injustices she witnessed and her support for "the desire of the Northern Catholics to see Ireland raised from her degraded state" (Anton, 1994: 77-9).

'Speranza'¹¹ (Anne Francesca Elgee), 'Eva' (Mary Eva Kelly) and 'Mary' (Ellen Mary Patrick Downing) were also important writers for *The Nation* and the Young Ireland cause (Anton, 1993: 34-5; Cannavan, 1997: 214). All three advocated women's participation in the armed Republican cause. In a poem entitled "The die is cast", Speranza makes clear her support for militant Republicanism when she declares:

We must be free! In the name of your trampled, insulted, degraded country;...lift up your right hand to heaven and swear by your undying soul, by your hopes of immortality, never to lay down your arms, never to cease hostilities, till you regenerate and save this fallen land (Anton, 1993: 35).

Eva also challenged the dominant Republican notions of womanhood and femininity by calling on Irish women to take up arms along with men when she declared that:

No woman, no more than a man, is exempt from aiming at all the perfection of which the human soul is capable. What is virtue in man is virtue also in woman. Virtue is of no sex...It is not unfeminine to take sword or gun, if sword or gun are required...Plead not in this hour the miserable excuse — 'I am a woman...' (Anton, 1993: 36).

Additionally, Mary appealed to women to take up arms by dismissing those dominant Republican notions of womanhood and femininity. She wrote that "...A horror of bloodletting appears to be regarded as *the* feminine virtue in Ireland...It were more womanly to choose great blood-letting and small pain rather than avarice of blood and prodigality of suffering...Do you believe famine to be milder than the sword?" (Anton, 1993: 36). Speranza, Eva and Mary clearly demonstrate that some women (the "rabble rousers"), had an interest in conventional politics and the "national" question and felt an obligation and a desire to be directly involved in the Young Ireland cause (Anton, 1993: 35; Cannavan, 1997: 214).

There were also women whose activities did not openly oppose the dominant gender roles ("maidens" and "mothers"). Jenny Mitchel's involvement at times appeared to

¹¹ 'Speranza', also known as Lady Wilde, was a member of the aristocratic Anglo-Irish class in Ireland and was the mother of the renowned Irish author Oscar Wilde (Anton, 1993: 35; Cannavan, 1997: 214).

reinforce existing gendered norms, while at other times, seemed to directly challenge them (Anton, 1994: 60). She was married to John Mitchel, a central figure in the Young Ireland cause. He depended greatly on Jenny to manage the household affairs, which allowed him to devote his time to *The Nation*. Jenny, however, also attended Young Ireland meetings and made their home a centre for the Young Ireland movement by hosting many dinners for Young Irelanders at which politics and issues concerning the Young Ireland movement were discussed (Anton, 1993: 35; Anton, 1994: 67). Jenny's mother-in law and sisters-in-law (Mary, Matilda, Mary, and Henrietta) attended many of these dinners and were a great support to her in the running of the Mitchel house. In addition to overseeing their domestic affairs, Jenny read newspapers and maintained files of clippings, which her husband used in his writings. She also wrote for, edited and was involved in the day-to-day operations of the *United Irishmen*, another Young Ireland paper (Anton, 1993: 35; Anton, 1994: 60, 67, 68). Thus, Jenny Mitchel contributed to the Young Ireland cause in ways that at times reinforced and at other times challenged the dominant gender norms — a "maiden" and a "rabble rouser".

Jenny Mitchel's activities illustrate the connections between the "private" and "public" spheres. Her management of the household allowed her husband to carry out his public activities. Moreover, the dinners she hosted provided space for Young Ireland policy to be debated and crafted. Furthermore, the time she spent reading articles and maintaining files of newspaper clippings supported her husband's job as a newspaper publisher. In addition, she wrote for and contributed to editing the *United Irishmen*. These activities can be seen as political using the broader definition of political participation employed in this paper, which does not simply focus on involvement in party politics and the civil service, but considers activities such as managing a household, and behind-the-scenes support as examples of political participation too. Jenny was involved in a wide range of activities in support of the Young Ireland movement; thus, she was active and participating politically when she hosted dinners, clipped newspaper articles, and contributed the publishing and editing of the paper *United Ireland*.

After the arrest of many of the male Young Ireland leadership, it was predominantly

women who kept the communication going within the Young Ireland cause and also obtained financial assistance for the organization and those Young Irelanders who were incarcerated. In addition, by 1884 Margaret Hughes Callan and Speranza were running *The Nation*, due to the arrest of so many male Young Irelanders and the fact that many other men of the Young Ireland movement were "on the run" in order to avoid arrest (Anton, 1993: 37; Anton, 1994: 61, 75-6). This was important work, since the continued publication of the paper was vital to maintaining public knowledge of and support for the Young Ireland cause (Anton, 1993: 37).

Women were deemed to be an important component of the Young Ireland cause in other ways too. They were expected to transmit the nationalist message via the education of their children and personal relations (Anton, 1994: 62). It was not, however, only middle- and upper-class women who participated in the Young Ireland cause. There are recorded instances of rural, working-class and peasant women's participation in militant Young Ireland actions, such as at Ballingarry where women and children constituted the majority of those gathered in support of the Young Ireland movement in 1848 and in which at least one woman, Miss Eliza Power, was arrested (Cannavan, 1997: 218, 220). Women also formed the majority of those who protested the deportation of John Mitchel to Van Diemen's Land (present-day Tasmania) in 1848 (Cannavan, 1997: 218, 220). The impetus for such women's involvement may have been the suffering of their families throughout the famines of the mid-1840s in Ireland. According to the dominant gendered role, women, as wives, mothers and daughters, were responsible for the care and nurture of their families. Many women extended this gendered role of care-giver and nurturer to the public defence of their homes, means of livelihood for their families, and their communities (Anton, 1994; Cannavan, 1997).

Nevertheless, not all of the male Young Ireland leadership appreciated women's contributions. There were heated debates among male and female Young Irelanders about what the nature of women's involvement should be within the Young Ireland movement. The Young Ireland cause was greatly influenced by ideals of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Hence, the debates about whether women should or could participate in the

Republican cause often involved the issues of gender equality versus difference and whether the duties of citizenship should be based on sameness or difference between men and women. There were many who felt that women's "proper" role was as mothers and wives, educating the next generation with patriotic ideals (Anton, 1993: 37; Cannavan, 1997: 214).

This notion of maternal care for child and nation pervaded as the dominant notion of the "proper" role for female citizens and republicans within the Young Ireland movement (Anton, 1993: 37; Cannavan, 1997: 216). For example, in an unsigned article entitled "The Mission of Women", it was proposed that female Young Irelanders should follow an "ethics of care", which not only involved being the intellectual and moral educators of their children, but also instilling patriotic values in their children (Cannavan, 1997: 214). The author argued that men and women should share equally the patriotic duties of citizenship, but that these duties should be performed in different spheres: "The man will act in the public sphere, but the world says that 'women are not to *meddle* in politics'; and if by this is meant meddling *publicly*, the world is right. This is not a woman's sphere...a woman's sphere is her home" (Cannavan, 1997: 214). There was also an increasing number of women writers for *The Nation*, who came to believe in and advocate for gender equality and equal citizenship rights and responsibilities for both sexes as central to the nationalist goals for an independent, united Ireland (Cannavan, 1997: 212): the right of women to participate in public fora, the right to vote and work outside the home, and the right to take part in the armed Republican struggle for Irish independence (Cannavan, 1997: 216-7).

That is not to say, however, that women did not receive support for their involvement in the movement from some male Young Irelanders (Cannavan, 1997: 217). Many of their supporters justified women's participation in the cause by appealing to those very same gendered roles and characteristics that were dominant in Ireland and the Young Ireland movement. Many who encouraged and supported women's involvement in the Young Irelanders argued that the caring nature of women meant that they should participate in the public sphere, since it was only women who could bring caring and nurturing capacities ("feminine" qualities) to the public realm.

It is interesting to note that the variety of ways women participated in the Young Ireland movement continue to be ways women are involved politically in Northern Ireland today — in the background providing support, publicly carrying on the work of male relatives, and as writers, activists, and militants in their own right. Moreover, they echoed the ways women were active in the United Irish cause in 1798 as behind the scenes supporters, writers and independent participants, as well as bearers-of-arms. Many women (the "rabble rousers") challenged the status quo of socially defined gender roles by asserting their rights as women to take on a public role within the nationalist struggle of the day, and to participate in debates about the rights and duties of citizenship (Cannavan, 1997: 219), while others participated in many of the same debates, but in ways that reinforced dominant gender norms as "maidens", "wives" and "mothers". The female "rabble rousers" demanded access to education for women and a platform for women's voices to be heard. They also advocated for equal opportunities for both sexes within a new, independent and united Ireland (Cannavan, 1997: 219). The participation of this broad spectrum of women in the Young Ireland cause was important, since it supported the Young Ireland movement's claim that it embraced all creeds and classes. Moreover, the variety of ways women were involved illustrated the diversity of women's activities and perspectives, as well as the importance of women's participation in the Young Ireland cause.

The Land League movement (1879-1882)

After decades of suffering in Ireland after several famines in the 1840s, the Land League movement (1879-1882) emerged as an Irish nationalist cause, the main objective of which was land reform as a means to achieve Irish independence.¹²

¹² The Land Leaguers advocated the return of the ownership of land to the Irish from the landed gentry (Anglo-Irish aristocracy) (TeBrake, 1992: 63). As a result of the colonization of Ireland by England since the Middle Ages, the majority of the land in Ireland was owned by absentee landlords in England or Scotland (members of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy) who rarely, if ever, visited their estates in Ireland. This provision of land ownership in Ireland contributed to the impoverishment of the Irish, most especially Catholics, as most of the land, particularly the best arable land, was owned by the Anglo-Irish Protestant aristocracy (Clarke, 1995: 191-2). Thus, an organized social movement, the Land League, emerged to achieve land reforms and return the land to the Irish tenant farmers from the absentee landlords.

Women's participation in the Land League represented a dramatic shift in women's political participation in Ireland: with the creation of the Ladies' Land League, women assumed direct control of a nationalist cause for the first time (TeBrake, 1992: 63). This provided women, at least those in leadership positions, with a higher profile than they normally had, and it allowed many women involved in the Ladies' Land League to foster skills they could use in various spheres of their lives. Consequently, many women gained increased confidence as a result of their involvement, and support among women for gender equality was bolstered.

Although the Ladies' Land League (1881-82) was the first time in Irish history that women were given complete control of a political organization (Luddy, 1995: 264, 266; Ward, 1995c: 4), women were not given control of the Land League movement voluntarily, but out of necessity. The male leaders of the Land League knew that they would be arrested, and therefore, women would have to keep the movement going (Luddy, 1995: 265; Ward, 1995c: 4). It was decided that women should assume control of the movement, since it was believed that they would be less likely to be arrested (Ward, 1995c: 4). Thus, although the male leadership failed to consult the women of the organization about this matter, when the British government outlawed the Land League and imprisoned its male leaders, it was announced that the Ladies' Land League would take over the management of the Land League, which it did in October 1881 with Anna Parnell at the helm (Kenneally, 1986: 6-7; Luddy, 1995: 263; Ward, 1995c: 13).

From the beginning, women, and peasant women particularly, participated in Land League actions as protesters against evictions; they were the instigators, in many cases, as well as supporters of such protests and boycotts (TeBrake, 1992: 63, 73, 77-8). Their participation in and support of the cause contributed greatly to the effectiveness of the Land League's tactics (i.e. protests and boycotts) because such women held central positions within their communities and were, therefore, able to garner much support for the protests and boycotts of the Land League (TeBrake, 1992: 73, 77-8, 80). Most peasant women did not qualify for membership in the Land League due to land ownership or tenancy qualifications, which required that one had to be a tenant farmer in possession of the family

farm; many peasant women did not meet these criteria unless they were widowed (TeBrake, 1992: 66). Nevertheless, many peasant women supported the actions of the Land League movement since it was vital to these women, economically and personally, to protect their homes (their farms), which were also their sources of livelihood (TeBrake, 1992: 67, 74). Thus, when the Ladies' Land League (1881-1882) was formed, peasant women could (and did in great numbers) become part of that organization too (TeBrake, 1992: 66, 69).

Peasant women were instrumental in the Ladies' Land League protests against many evictions, frequently comprising the majority of the protesters. In one protest, women made up half of the crowd of 800 peasants (TeBrake, 1992: 74-5). In addition, women were the main speakers at public gatherings and meetings held by the Ladies' Land League (TeBrake, 1992: 70). This was a considerable change for women, especially many rural women, who had not previously had a public role or visibility (TeBrake, 1992: 70). The women who spoke at these meetings exhibited an in-depth understanding of politics and economics. They spoke about the economic concerns of peasants and opposed the existing landlord and land ownership system in Ireland, which they believed was the cause of the stark poverty that many faced in Ireland (TeBrake, 1992: 71). Various peasant women made connections between their economic and social situations and British governance of Ireland. For instance, the women of the Maryborough branch of the Ladies' Land League spoke out "against the oppression and misgovernment of our country...and against the coercion act, which the British government, with its usual policy is forging for our country" (TeBrake, 1992: 71).

In composition, the Ladies' Land League followed a familiar pattern: the women who gained leadership positions within the movement (i.e. Delia, Anna and Fanny Parnell) were more often than not related to the male leadership as mothers, sisters, cousins, or wives (TeBrake, 1992: 70; Ward, 1995c: 4, 6, 10, 12, 15). This followed the pattern that began with the United Irish and Young Ireland movements and has continued to this day, in the context of contemporary political representation, although this does not necessarily reflect which men or women were most active in the movement. Relatedly, the Ladies'

Land League was also following the familiar routine of women maintaining a nationalist and national movement after the arrest of the male leadership.

The women of the Ladies' Land League not only coordinated the Land League actions, they also spoke at public events to rally support for their activities, raised and administered the funds of the Land League movement, and produced *United Ireland*, the Land League paper (Luddy, 1995: 266, 267; Ward, 1995c: 22). The production of *United Ireland* was not without its risks for the women who worked on it. One woman reported that:

...the difficulty of printing and circulating the paper was enormous...it was found necessary to have the paper printed in a different centre weekly. Beginning in Liverpool, and moving...as far as Paris. After a few weeks of this, we started to print and circulate it from its own office at 32 Lower Abbey Street, and while the DMP [Dublin Metropolitan Police] were watching and seizing all suspicious-looking matter on the quays, we were taking away the illegal production, concealed in our clothing, and distributing it all over Ireland from our private addresses (Luddy, 1995: 267-8).

There were difficulties and potential dangers, but the women were not deterred by them; rather, they found ways to diminish those dangers as much as possible. Some women even relished the excitement of the potential dangers their activities posed. These were not "blushing violets" or "maidens", as Irish women were so often characterized, but "rabble rousers" who were deeply concerned and active citizens.

Women of all classes and creeds were criticized by many for their participation in and support of the Land League. Such criticisms of female Land Leaguers were based on claims that their activities and protests were "unfeminine" (Luddy, 1995: 263; TeBrake, 1992: 71; Ward, 1995c: 23) which, according to the dominant definition of the time in both the Protestant and Catholic communities, meant chaste, modest, subservient, and concerned only with the domestic realm (Kenneally, 1986: 4, 7; Luddy, 1995: 262-3; TeBrake, 1992: 71). The *Belfast News-Letter*, a Protestant paper, stated that Land League activities were a "...distasteful spectacle of women making a harangue from a public platform" and declared that "sensible people in the North of Ireland dislike to see woman

out of the place she is gifted to occupy, and at no time is woman further from her natural position than when she appears upon a political platform" (Ward, 1995c: 23). Also, one Archbishop McCabe declared that:

...the daughters of our Catholic people, be they matrons or virgins, are called forth, under flimsy pretext of charity, to take their stand in the noisy streets of life...They are asked to forget the modesty of their sex and the high dignity of their womanhood by leaders who seem reckless of consequences, and who by that recklessness have brought misery on many families...Very Rev. dear fathers, set your face against this dishonouring attempt, and do not tolerate in your societies the women who so far disavows her birthright of modesty as to parade herself before the public gaze in a character so unworthy as a Child of Mary (Luddy, 1995: 263).

The women Land Leaguers did have supporters, however. Croke, Archbishop of Cashel, was one (Luddy, 1995: 262; Ward, 1995c: 23). Such support of women's participation in the Land League activities and leadership was also often based on the dominant notions of "feminine" roles of the time. Supporters of the women Land Leaguers (and many Ladies' Land Leaguers themselves) argued that women's participation in the Land League movement was an extension of their "womanly" concern for the domestic sphere because they were protecting their families from eviction (Luddy, 1995: 266; TeBrake, 1992: 71). This reasoning also posited that the Land League activities undertaken by women were an extension of "womanly" concern and care for others, since the Ladies' Land League provided assistance to those who were evicted and jailed (Luddy, 1995: 266; TeBrake, 1992: 71). The Ladies' Land League raised funds in order to provide monetary aid to and finance the provision of "huts" for those who had been evicted or were under threat of eviction (TeBrake, 1992: 69). The "private" and "public" spheres were intricately connected in this line of thinking, which brought the "nurturing" and "care-giving" characteristics of the private domain into the public realm.

In December 1881 the British government declared the Ladies' Land League illegal (Ward, 1995c: 27), although that did not stop their activities, nor did it lessen the popular support of the organization. By the beginning of 1882 the Ladies' Land League had over 500 branches (Ward, 1995c: 25). When the organization was outlawed, the leadership of

the Ladies' Land League arranged very successful meetings of protest across Ireland (Luddy, 1995: 268; Ward, 1995c: 27). One unnamed member of the Ladies' Land League declared that, "...our work went on as if no proclamation had appeared" (Luddy, 1995: 268). Police harassment of the Ladies' Land League increased after the the organization was outlawed, yet its members continued their work (Ward, 1995c: 24). Margaret Moore was one Ladies' Land League member who refused to be deterred by such police harassment. She declared to one constable, showing great confidence and skill as a public speaker,

I defy you to interfere with me. I know the law much better than you do. (applause) You and the like of you try to trample people in country places and you must be taught your position. I will speak to those ladies as long as I like; the law which took men's arms could not touch the women's tongues. (laughter) If I am acting illegally I shall take the consequences; but I warn you, you are liable to prosecution as a trespasser in this room (applause) (cited in Ward, 1995c: 24).

The Ladies' Land League was the first opportunity for women to lead a cause directly, and this allowed them to develop and exercise leadership skills and confidence and afforded women a greater public profile than they generally received (TeBrake, 1992: 69, 72, 80). The Ladies' Land League had made a success of managing the Land League movement, but unfortunately it also became a victim of that success. It had run the movement so effectively that when the male leadership of the Land League was released from prison, many of the male leaders felt threatened by the power and successes the Ladies' Land League had achieved (Ward, 1995c: 5). Charles Stewart Parnell (brother of Anna and Fanny and son of Delia Parnell, the founders of the Ladies' Land League) was particularly displeased with the militancy of the Ladies' Land League and the fact that it had defied the orders of the jailed male Land League leadership to end a particular campaign of protest, thus signifying the Ladies' Land League's autonomy (Ward, 1995c: 12, 21, 30). Hence, upon his release from prison, Charles Parnell demanded that the Ladies' Land League be disbanded or he would leave public life (Ward, 1995c: 32). Consequently, the Ladies' Land League was dismantled in 1882 without much protest, although Anna Parnell

was so hurt by her brother's actions that she never spoke to him again (Porter, 1998a: 47; Ward, 1995c: 5).

Women's philanthropic work

Philanthropy, which reached its height during the Victorian era, was another vital way Irish women were political agents and actors. The Belfast Ladies' Clothing Society was established in 1809 and distributed free or inexpensive clothing to the poor (Luddy, 1988: 303). From 1800-1900 women founded or played a crucial role in at least two hundred societies in Ireland (Luddy, 1988: 301). Women's philanthropic activities were a part of the gradually increasing number of socially acceptable public roles women could assume. They carried out philanthropic and voluntary work in workhouses and prisons, as well as in anti-slavery and temperance organizations (Luddy, 1988: 302-3). Women also founded orphanages and training programs for orphans and working-class people, especially women and girls, as a way to provide such individuals with a means by which to support themselves (Preston, 1993: 78-9). Women involved in charitable work were also found at all levels of administration in many organizations (Luddy: 1988; Preston; 1993; Walsh; 1997) as well as actively raising funds and carrying out the challenging task of "rescue work" (Walsh, 1997: 28).

In addition, this charitable work was deemed "acceptable" for women because it was seen as an extension of their domestic duties (i.e. caring for others and working with children), and therefore it did not threaten the dominant power structures of Irish society (Preston, 1993: 74). Moreover, such philanthropic work required skills deemed "feminine", such as compassion, cooking, sewing, and educating children (Preston, 1993: 75). Thus, women were believed to be the best suited to carry out such philanthropic work (Preston, 1993: 75). Furthermore, the attributes of "respectable" Victorian upper- and middle-class women (i.e. being moral, upstanding citizens) were expected to be modelled by the women who conducted this charitable work as a way out of the situations in which orphans, prostitutes, the working poor, and unemployed found themselves (Preston, 1993: 75, 84).

While middle- and upper-class Victorian women carried out a variety of charitable work (Luddy, 1988: 301, 303; Preston, 1993: 75, 83, 85; Walsh, 1997: 27), and for many, such charity work was like a religious calling or "duty" (Luddy, 1988: 303), most women carrying out philanthropic work in the nineteenth century did not push for meaningful social change (Luddy, 1988: 302, 304; Preston, 1993: 75-6). In some cases this may have been because women feared that to challenge the status quo too overtly would result in their work becoming increasingly less effective, due to opposition they might face. For instance, many middle- and upper-class women who worked with prostitutes and orphans did not question the power structures of a socioeconomic system that resulted in so many women and children requiring assistance (Preston, 1993: 75-6). However, there were some individual women — "rabble rousers" and "maidens" or "mothers" — who lobbied for reforms in terms of prison management, temperance, and the abolition of slavery, as well as for laws to protect children (Luddy, 1988: 304). This work in the "public" realm challenged the dominant gendered norm of woman's role being in the "private" realm; it also reinforced such gendered norms of women as nurturers and caregivers, since many women involved in philanthropic work justified their philanthropic work by calling on a woman's role as a wife and mother (the one who looked after the needs of her family) and extending the role of "mother" (the "nurturer") to the broader community in which they lived — not just their immediate families (Luddy, 1988; Preston, 1993). Such activities can be defined as political, because their primary goal was to alleviate suffering and most likely had the effect of reducing social violence and criminal activities by responding to some of the needs of the poor in Ireland at the time.

This charitable work carried out by women was very important for women since it "...legitimized these traditional areas [nursing, teaching and domestic work] as public occupations for women, and thus, brought about a quiet revolution in the employment opportunities being made available to women" (Luddy, 1988: 304). Moreover, women involved in charity work promoted the rights of Irish women to be active social agents and aimed to make the poor self-supporting, as well as provide the poor (women in particular) with employment, relief, and vocational training, because such services were not provided

in other segments of society (Luddy, 1988: 305).

Furthermore, it was through such philanthropic work that many women learned and developed leadership, administrative, fundraising, and public-speaking skills which would serve them in later political actions, such as the suffrage or republican and unionist movements (Luddy, 1988: 304-5). The philanthropic work of women also led to a larger presence of women in the "public" realm which gradually resulted in an increased number of opportunities for women in that domain (Luddy, 1988: 304-5). In addition, the charitable work of women tended to blur the boundaries of the "private" and "public" realms, publicly highlighting the effects that gambling and drinking had on the family unit and advocating that women, as wives and mothers, had a public role to play curbing these social "ills".

Much of the philanthropic work women performed was done under the guise of the responsibility women had for issues in the domestic sphere and their "caring" and "nurturing" natures as "maidens" and "mothers" (Luddy, 1988: 304). For instance, women involved in the temperance campaign justified their involvement in temperance work as a woman's issue because excessive drinking drained family finances and abstinence would increase family resources. Such work also called on women to assert their moral "superiority" and assist men in combating their "weakness" for drink (Luddy, 1988: 303). Despite the nature of the work, the line of socially "acceptable" work which women could carry out was not breached. The charitable work women did most frequently focused on issues concerning family and children. Moreover, many female philanthropists encouraged the training of the women they were helping in the traditional "feminine" occupations of nursing, teaching, and domestic work (Luddy, 1989: 304; Walsh, 1997). These activities brought women into the public realm in a socially "acceptable" way and managed to illustrate the interconnectedness of the private and public spheres, as many women's political activities throughout the Troubles have also done by connecting issues of poverty, alcoholism, and "criminal activities" (prostitution) with women's roles as mothers and nurturers. Thus, while it could be argued that many of the women who carried out philanthropic work did not challenge the accepted social norms of gendered roles, it is also

true that such work provided women with increased leadership experience and confidence and was a part of the gradual broadening of "acceptable" roles for women in Ireland.

The Gaelic Revival movement (1890s-1920s)

Another Irish nationalist movement in which women participated was the Gaelic Revival movement. The Gaelic Revival movement was active from the 1890s to the 1920s and advocated a renaissance of Irish culture (music, language, literature, and history) as the means through which Irish sovereignty could be won. Women were involved in the movement through a variety of organizations, such as the newspaper *Shan Van Vocht*, the Gaelic League, and *Inghinidhe na hEireann*, an Irish nationalist women's organization.

Shan Van Vocht (1896-1899)

Women's involvement in the production of *Shan Van Vocht*, an Irish nationalist newspaper published from 1896 to 1899, was one way women participated in the Gaelic Revival nationalist movement. Women were instrumental in the production of *Shan Van Vocht*, which was a unique paper for its time because it was published in Belfast, not Dublin, and was edited by two women: Alice Milligan (a Protestant) and Ethna Carbery (a Catholic), whose real name was Anna Johnson (Harp, 1989: 42; Luddy, 1995: 297; Ward, 1995c: 45-6). Both women were from Ulster (Harp, 1989: 42), which made them a powerful example of the "two solitudes" (Protestants and Catholics of Ulster) working together. The fact that these two women played such an important role in the life of the paper illustrates that there were members of the population of what was to become Northern Ireland (including the Protestant population) who did not approve of the partition of Ireland. Furthermore, it highlights the fact that women were actively involved as anti-partition advocates ("rabble rousers") and were not apathetic political figures, as Irish women are often historically portrayed.

Shan Van Vocht expressed republican sentiments through its editorials, articles, and poetry (Harp, 1989: 42). The motto adopted by *Shan Van Vocht* was from a ballad of the uprising of 1798: "Yes Ireland shall be free/ From the centre to the sea/ And hurrah for

liberty, / Says the *Shan Van Vocht*" (Luddy, 1995: 297). This motto aptly expressed the political ideology of the paper. Even the name reflected the paper's republican sentiments: The *Shan Van Vocht* or "the Poor Old Woman", was one of the dominant nationalist symbols in Ireland (Harp, 1989: 43; Luddy, 1995: 297; Ward, 1995b: 8-9). In addition, the title is an example of Irish women drawing on Irish female imagery to convey their message and is evidence of a growing women's political culture. *Shan Van Vocht* was the first Irish paper to convey the idea of *sinn fein* ("ourselves alone") as the vehicle through which Irish independence could be achieved, when it published Douglas Hyde's poem, "Waiting for Help" in both the original Gaelic and its English translation (Harp, 1989: 47-8).

The paper highlighted various dimensions of the Gaelic Revival nationalist movement (Harp, 1989: 43, 47). Hurling and Gaelic football were promoted in the pages of *Shan Van Vocht* as crucial components of Irish culture and as a way for men to keep fit so that they would be able to defend Ireland against aggressors (Harp, 1989: 49). The Gaelic language was of a similar nationalistic importance, because of its role in creating a nation that was distinct from the anglicized culture that was then present in Ireland — the result of Ireland's colonial experience (Harp, 1989: 50).

Poetry was a fundamental tool of Irish nationalism in the late nineteenth century. It was said by Lionel Johnson that, "Poetry and Patriotism are each other's guardian angels, and therefore inseparable" (Harp, 1989: 44). The poetry in *Shan Van Vocht* was devoted to promoting the nationalist cause and attempted to fuse the past, present, and future in order to recall the "glorious" heroes of Irish history (i.e. "the old woman" or *shan van vocht* figure, Cuchulainn, Oisín and Queen Maeve) and to remind the Irish of their "duty" to uphold the memories of such heroic figures (Harp, 1989: 47). Through their poetry and editorial responsibilities at *Shan Van Vocht*, Alice Milligan and Ethna Carbery were part of this nationalist movement. Alice and Ethna were both very gifted poets whose talents were recognized by prominent contemporaries, such as W. B. Yeats (Harp, 1989: 42, 44; Ward, 1995c: 46). Much of their poetry was dedicated to the nationalist cause and did "...not seek to escape into the past but rather use[d] it to find situations whose pathos and poignancy

parallel[led] those of persons or the nation at the end of the nineteenth century" (Harp, 1989: 46). The editors of *Shan Van Vocht* also implored Irish housewives to buy Irish-made goods, and thereby contribute to the self-sufficiency of the country (Harp, 1989: 48). Thus, through *Shan Van Vocht*, the traditional gendered role of women as housewives, mothers and consumers was recognized as socially, culturally, and economically important. Furthermore, a women's political culture was being created and nurtured. In an editorial in *Shan Van Vocht*, Alice Milligan expressed her views about the politically important role Irish women had in terms of bringing up their children. She wrote:

To them [Irish women] is entrusted the moulding of the minds of the growing generations of the Irish race, and they should exercise their influence, so that old quarrels would pass away with the makers of them, and so that those who are to work for Ireland in the new era should be able to do so untrammelled by old feuds and hatreds (Ward, 1995b: 10).

The publication of *Shan Van Vocht* ceased in 1899, due to a lack of financial support, the consequence of the editors' decision not to become involved in the divisive political wrangling the major political parties in Ireland at that time (Harp, 1989: 51; Ward, 1995c: 47). Ethna Carbery died in 1901, but Alice Milligan remained prominent in the Republican movement as an organizer in the Gaelic League and supporter of militant republicanism (Harp, 1989: 51; Ward, 1995b: 7). These two influential women simultaneously reinforced and challenged the dominant gendered roles in Ireland. As editors and public speakers they challenged the housewife/mother role to which Irish women were supposed to aspire. Within the pages of *Shan Van Vocht*, however, they reinforced, and valued women's roles as housewives, mothers, and consumers, while at the same time providing prominence to women as heroic and mythic figures, and served as role models of the "two solitudes" working together.

The Gaelic League (1893-1921)

The Gaelic League, founded in 1893 and active until 1921 (McCartney, 1995: 295), was an organization committed to the revival of the Irish language which had been

outlawed under English colonial rule. The Gaelic League was a vehicle through which many women participated in a manner which was acceptable to the gendered norms of the time as "maidens" and "mothers". Mary Butler, a member of the executive of the Gaelic League, proposed "Some Suggestions as to How Irishwomen May Help the Irish Language Movement". She encouraged women to be Irish "...in fact as well as in name" (Luddy, 1995: 299-300) by creating Irish domestic, educational and social spheres (see Appendix 1). Thus, women's most important contribution to the Gaelic League's aims was in the private realm: raising their children to have a knowledge of Irish Gaelic and an appreciation of Irish culture. Moreover, Irish women's power as consumers was recognized, and they were implored to "buy Irish" and avoid imported goods — particularly British goods (see Appendix 1).

Thus, the Gaelic League reinforced traditional female modes of participation in the "private" sphere, yet encouraged and highlighted ways women could be politically active, within that sphere, although such activities were not always recognized as such. The Gaelic League also provided women with a forum in which to develop leadership skills, and brought prominence to particular activities in which many women were engaged.

Inghinidhe na hEireann (1900-1914)

Inghinidhe na hEireann, or Daughters of Ireland, was a nationalist and feminist women's organization created in 1900 and operating until 1914 which also encouraged women's participation in the Gaelic Revival nationalist movement. *Inghinidhe na hEireann* rose from a group of women's desire to remain involved in the Irish nationalist cause. These women had organized a very successful party, the Patriotic Children's Treat, for those who had refused to attend the children's celebrations in honour of Queen Victoria's visit to Ireland in 1900. They were barred from joining other nationalist organizations because they were women; therefore, they decided to form a nationalist women's organization known as *Inghinidhe na hEireann* (Ward, 1995c: 48, 50). The objectives of *Inghinidhe na hEireann*, and the rules and guidelines for membership, laid out the ways women could participate politically, even though such activities were not recognized as

"political". Like the Gaelic League, *Inghinidhe na hEireann*'s purpose was the promotion of the Irish language, culture, and industry and to raise funds to further those goals (Luddy, 1995: 242) (see Appendix 2). Membership required that the women pledge loyalty and support to one another, adopt a Gaelic name by which they would be known within the organization, and pledge themselves to promoting the Irish language "...by every means in her power..." (Luddy, 1995: 300-1). In addition, members of *Inghinidhe na hEireann* promised to support Irish industry by using "...as far as possible Irish made goods in her household and dress" (Luddy, 1995: 300-1).

Inghinidhe na hEireann was also concerned with issues traditionally considered to be "political" in nature. All of its members were required to accept the principle of sovereignty for Ireland (Luddy, 1995: 301) and actively oppose the implementation of Home Rule legislation, as well as support the use of physical force and the participation of women as combatants to achieve Irish independence (Ward, 1995b: 30-2; Ward, 1995c: 69, 70). *Inghinidhe na hEireann* asserted that the answer to the national question and women's subordination in Ireland was increased numbers of women in the existing Republican organizations. This, its members argued, would strengthen the organization and enhance women's status, thus achieving Irish independence through the activities of the Irish people, not through government legislation. Consequently, *Inghinidhe na hEireann* worked to develop Irish women's self-reliance by promoting women's participation in the nationalist movement (Ward, 1995c: 70).

Bean na hEireann (Women of Ireland) was the official paper of *Inghinidhe na hEireann* and was the first paper produced in Ireland that was devoted to women (Ward, 1995b: 24; Ward, 1995c: 67). It began publication in 1908 and supported militant Irish republicanism (Luddy, 1995: 242, 301; Ward, 1995c: 67). Helena Moloney, an actress in the Abbey Theatre and editor of *Bean na hEireann*, explained why she considered the paper to be so important: "The *United Irishman*, starting as a physical force, separatist journal, had gradually changed its policy to one of reactionary social and dual-kingdom ideas...We wanted a paper to counter-act this. We wanted it to be a women's paper, advocating militancy [and] separatism..." (Ward, 1995c: 67). Thus, this paper was "political" and so

was the work of editing it and writing for it. Sydney Gifford Czira, a contributor to *Bean na hEireann* declared that, "We carried on a sort of bloodless guerrilla war against the British Empire" (Ward, 1995b: 25). Countess Markievicz contributed a regular column to the paper entitled, "The Woman with the Garden", which imparted nationalist messages by means of supposedly innocuous gardening tips. She advised that, "a good nationalist should look upon slugs in the garden much in the same way as she looks upon the English in Ireland" (Ward, 1995c: 69). Thus, the women of *Inghinidhe na hEireann* participated in the Gaelic Revival movement as "maidens" or "mothers" and "rabble rousers", both reinforcing dominant gender norms and also challenging such norms. *Bean na hEireann* supported the franchise for women, but not in the existing parliament, which they considered to be a "puppet" of England (Ward, 1995b: 28). The paper was popular due to the quality of writing and analysis of national and social issues and was distributed throughout Ireland (Ward, 1995b: 24).

The organization provided free weekly classes for children in Irish language, history and music. These classes were very popular, not least due to the fact that *Inghinidhe na hEireann* was able to call on the services of very talented and well-known figures as teachers (Luddy, 1995: 301; Ward, 1995b: 19; Ward, 1995c: 52). In addition, through such classes, *Inghinidhe na hEireann* provided employment opportunities for women as teachers. The organization was also involved in the reinstitution of Irish theatre and supported various female actors, who created and produced *tableaux vivants* which conveyed Irish nationalism by portraying Irish heroines, thus reclaiming them from the margins of Ireland's history (Ward, 1995c: 55). A professional theatre company was established as a result of the staging of these *tableaux*, which became the world-renowned Abbey Theatre (Ward, 1995c: 57).

Inghinidhe na hEireann also implemented a school meals program for children. This particular work was a reaction to the poverty that existed in Ireland at that time and the lack of a government response to it. The program was successful in raising awareness about the plight of many children and in shaming politicians into extending the Provision of Meals Act to Ireland, thus allowing local authorities (through government funding) to provide

school meals to children (Ward, 1995c: 80-1). In this way, members of *Inghinidhe na hEireann* were also involved in the traditional realm of concern for "maidens" and "mothers" — the education and welfare of children.

Inghinidhe na hEireann opened up a political space for women, since the organization's existence ensured that women were represented at public gatherings concerned with Irish independence (Ward, 1995c: 86). Moreover, *Inghinidhe na hEireann* provided a generation of Irish women with confidence in their abilities as political activists (Ward, 1995c: 86). In addition, by concentrating its energies on the "national" question, *Inghinidhe na hEireann* challenged the notion that women were interested only in domestic issues. At the same time, the organization used domestic issues such as gardening to convey political messages. Hence, *Inghinidhe na hEireann* was key to the political participation of Irish women, both in the sphere of Irish independence and also in the realm of reclaiming Irish culture, music, language, and history. Through participation in the organization, women developed leadership skills and combined a "feminine" concern for the well-being of others with a concern for the well-being of Ireland, as well as a feminist concern for the welfare of Irish women.

The revival of Irish culture through the promotion of the Irish language via the Gaelic League, Irish sports via the Gaelic Athletic Association, and Irish history via the literary revival of historical events and figures was an important act of resistance by the Irish, in terms of reclaiming a culture that had been outlawed by the British. Women participated in the Gaelic Revival movement in a variety of ways as "maidens" or "mothers" and "rabble rousers" through the Gaelic League, *Inghinidhe na hEireann*, and *Shan Van Vocht*. Through these organizations, women created and maintained outlets to express their political sentiments and contributed to the republican cause. Moreover, the participation of women within these organizations increased the profile of women in the public domain. Such participation also highlighted the interconnectedness of the socially constructed public and private spheres, which paved the way for future generations of women activists, philanthropists, playwrights and actors.

Republicanism, Unionism, feminism and the suffrage movement (1900-1924)

1900-1924 was a period of great turmoil in Ireland, a time when Home Rule was contested, women's suffrage demanded, and independence fought for in the Easter Rising of 1916. Irish women were active in all of these movements: some participated in the militant/armed Republican struggle (for example the Easter Uprising of 1916); others aligned themselves with the non-violent Republican movement; still others supported Irish independence but believed that as women, they must maintain a separate "cause" that would work to protect and advance "women's rights" within an independent, united Ireland. In addition, many women supported the Unionist cause and opposed Home Rule (Ward, 1993: 22-3). Some of these women reinforced dominant gender roles through their participation as "maidens" and "mothers". Other women opposed such roles through their involvement as "rabble rousers" and still others seemed to both reinforce and oppose the dominant gender roles through their activities.

Republicanism and First-Wave Feminism

There was (and still is) a diversity of views among Irish republican women. This diversity led to divisions among women and tensions between feminists and the broader Republican movement resulting, in part, from the resentment among these different factions. Many of the women who believed that they had to work separately from the broader Republican cause to fight for their rights as women felt as though the women who espoused militant Republicanism had sold out their sex for the Republican cause, while many militant republican women argued that those women who, in their view, put women's suffrage ahead of the Republican struggle had sold out their country for their rights as women (Hearne, 1997: 31; Ward, 1995b: Ward, 1993: 22-3).

These tensions between feminists and republicans were further exacerbated by the fact that promises of suffrage for women were not kept after Irish independence was achieved. It became clear that after the 1916 Easter Rising and the Civil War that followed, women's participation in and support of both of these armed struggles was not going to

translate into women's suffrage in either the new Irish Free State or Northern Ireland (Ward, 1993: 29-30; Wilford, 1996: 43). This caused many Irish feminists and republican women to become disillusioned with the dominant Republican cause (Ward, 1993: 29-30; Wilford, 1996: 43).

The militarization of politics in Ireland in the 1900s was detrimental to women's political involvement in the armed and non-militant struggles for Irish independence because women were formally excluded from the armed struggle. This militarization of politics was a result of differing points of view among Irish republicans about British-Irish relations and perhaps a response to the emergence of women's political and feminist movements. "Irishness" was equated with "martial spirit" (Benton, 1995). "The hurley stick was...the symbol of man's throne, and of his gun in drills" (Benton, 1995: 153). As a result, there was a lack of acknowledgement of any form of women's political participation. Connected to this militarization of politics was the militarization of Republican and Loyalist forces (Benton, 1995: 152). In addition, the increased militarization of politics in Ireland meant that citizenship took on a martial tone and was defined as a willingness to take up arms in defence of Ireland. Hence, Irish Republicanism placed an emphasis on martyrs and the patriotic "duty" of a citizen to lay down "his" life for Ireland (Benton, 1995: 155). In the words of Patrick Pearse, one of the martyrs of 1916, "bloodshed is a cleansing and a sanctifying thing and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood" (Benton, 1995: 155). Republicanism was defined as male because of the call to arms and the notion of "brotherhood" through which loyalty to the nation was believed to be instilled (Benton, 1995: 156).

This connection of nationalism with a "brotherhood" historically marginalized the role of women and feminism as a social force in Ireland (Benton, 1995: 150). Women were not deemed to be part of the "brotherhood" of bearers of arms. Their loyalty to the nation could not be assured because their first loyalty was to their family — especially their menfolk (Benton, 1995: 148, 156, 157, 161, 162, 169). This increasingly martial nature of politics in Ireland during the 1890s and 1910s was accompanied by an evermore dominant notion that the public sphere was "male space". Women were placed "...firmly in the roles

of auxiliaries, grievors, and those who kept the home fires burning while the men were on the run..." (Benton, 1995: 170). Consequently, women were barred from joining the Ulster Volunteer Force which was established to defend Ulster and oppose Home Rule (Benton, 1995: 154). In response to this, some women created an auxiliary known as *Cumann na mBan* (Irish Women's Council) in 1914 which played a crucial, yet predominantly supportive role, during the Easter Rising of 1916 and existed until 1923 (Benton, 1995: 148-9; McKillen, 1982: 53; Ward, 1993: 39, 40). Also, when the Ulster Unionist Council's male membership signed a document entitled, "Solemn League and Covenant", in which they pledged themselves to preserve Ireland's ties with Britain, women were forbidden from signing it. Not to be put off by such exclusion, Unionist women drew up their own pledge in support of the commitments made by their male counterparts (Benton, 1995: 154).

Suffragists

The issue of women's suffrage in Ireland was closely tied to the constitutional issue of Ireland's political relationship with Great Britain. Some suffragists argued that women's suffrage should be lobbied for at the Westminster parliament, while others believed that suffrage for Irish women must wait until Ireland was independent because to lobby the Westminster parliament in London was tantamount to recognizing Westminster as the legitimate government of Ireland. Hence the suffrage issue divided suffragists who supported Home Rule and those who did not. Moreover, suffrage alienated many women who supported the dominant republican and unionist causes, since many believed that suffragists had betrayed the republican and unionist causes, putting their concerns as women ahead of the concerns of their nation. This also resulted in divisions within the suffrage cause. There were suffragists who advocated that they join forces with their British sisters, while others felt that to do so would reinforce the colonial relationship which they argued still existed between Ireland and Great Britain, with those in the British suffrage movement controlling the Irish suffrage movement as well. The paper the *Irish Citizen* played an important role in connecting these feminist, nationalist, and pacifist

issues, as well as situating them within the debates in Ireland at the time and was edited for most of its existence by Francis and Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington (Hearne, 1992: 1). The paper played a crucial role in promoting the Irish suffrage movement as well as that of the non-violent attainment of Irish independence.

Many argue that due to the political marginalization of women resulting from the opposition of the women's movement to the Home Rule Treaty — which proposed the partition of Ireland — the women's movement was defeated by the Republican cause (Benton, 1995: 166-7, 170). Furthermore, such women's opposition to Home Rule had the effect of decreasing the level of support for suffrage and women's organizations within Ireland (Benton, 1995: 166, 168). Compounding these difficulties of political marginalization and declining support was the fact that many women abandoned the suffrage organizations during World War I in order to assist the nation by supporting the war effort. It was difficult to combine fighting for rights as woman with fighting for national independence, and those women who continued to fight for women's suffrage (in common with those who did not support the war effort) were branded as traitors to their country (Benton, 1995: 169). Women also played an important role throughout the Civil War of 1920-22. Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, Maud Gonne MacBride and Mrs. Despard were sent as Peace Emissaries and negotiators between the Republican forces (who were against the treaty, which would provide Home Rule but divide the country), and those who had negotiated the Home Rule Treaty (Ward, 1995b: 23).

The most militant suffrage activities occurred in the north of Ireland, in counties Antrim and Down (Ward, 1995a: 128). There were Unionist suffragists ("rabble rousers") in the north such as L.A.M. Priestly, who argued that party politics must be put aside as long as the public, formal, political sphere was dominated by men. She rejected pledging allegiance to "the Nation" while such activities would support the war effort in any capacity she deemed to be unacceptable (Hearne, 1992: 7). She was a pacifist, a Unionist and a feminist who encouraged women to develop their own social and political platforms (Hearne, 1992: 4). For Priestly, votes for women was "the irreducible minimum of power whereby the self-respecting individual, man or woman, can effectively shape, direct or

change political policy, or legislative measures" (Hearne, 1992: 7). Mrs. Chambers, from the Belfast Suffrage Society, also advocated the importance of women's suffrage and not putting aside suffrage work for the sake of national unity. She stated, "We women have put off the matter of woman's suffrage too often already" (Kelly, 1996: 35). These ideas were the early precursors for the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition¹³ in that these women put aside partisan differences and worked together to improve the lives of women in Northern Ireland. Moreover, the suffragists advocated that women must set their own agendas and policy platforms.

Women held differing views regarding Republicanism and militarism, as well as diverse opinions about Irish republican and unionist women and feminism (Hearne, 1992: 1). Identities were (and are) often constructed in dichotomous terms by the powers-that-be in Northern Irish society: unionist or republican; suffragist or republican; suffragist or unionist; militant or pacifist. This made it difficult for those who did not fit neatly into a particular category (i.e. a Protestant republican; a pro-British Catholic; a feminist republican or unionist).

Notions of Irish women continued to be constructed by the hegemonic forces in Ireland and the Republican and Unionist causes as wives and mothers. This had an impact on the role women were expected to play in Irish society. An element of the Irish suffrage movement sought to justify women's involvement in "public" spaces based on this role (Hearne, 1992: 1, 9-10). The image of "citizen mother" or "civic motherhood" played an important part in the dominant Republican and Unionist ideologies, conveying the message that a woman's role as a mother was extremely important to the Republican and Unionist causes (Hearne, 1997: 31; Meaney, 1993: 236). According to such a discourse, mothers were considered to be the educators of the next generation and the instillers of patriotic values in the nation's children (Hearne, 1997: 31), much as they had been in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This role was presented, according to such a discourse, as a source of power for women. "In this construction women's moral and educational

¹³ The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (1995-present) is a non-partisan, all-women's political party whose aim is to voice the concerns and issues they consider to be the most pressing for women in Northern Ireland.

influence in the family was seen to have power 'to brace nations and make them great' or 'to weaken them to their fall'" (Hearne, 1997: 31). Relatedly, Mary Hayden wrote in the *Irish Citizen* that "the home is a training ground for men who, in future years, will sway the destinies of village, town, and country, and to a great extent they will be, for good or bad, what their mothers make them" (Hearne, 1997: 32).

The Ulster Women's Unionist Council

Women also participated in the Unionist movement in the traditionally "feminine" manner as "maidens" and "mothers", passively supporting the dominant Unionist position. However, many Unionist women were also "rabble rousers", challenging the dominant Unionist position, which excluded women from many roles within the cause. Some Unionist women advocated for a role for feminism within Ulster Unionism (Hearne, 1992: 3-5, 7).

Unionist women were involved in protests against Home Rule in 1886 and 1893 (Urquhart, 1994a: 95) and in the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (UWUC),¹⁴ which was set up in 1911 as the vehicle through which women could participate within the Unionist cause in an "acceptable" way (Urquhart, 1994a: 93; Wilford, 1996: 42-4). Through their political participation and work in the UWUC, women provided an example of the "model" of Unionist womanhood — that is, being involved in a supportive capacity (Urquhart, 1994a: 102). The Ulster Women's Unionist Council was a conservative organization created to be a supportive instrument to the male Unionist's opposition to Home Rule for Ireland and was not an organization created to shape policy or to challenge the status quo, but was meant to be "...a 'steady, silent movement'" (Urquhart, 1994a: 94). Within the constitution of the UWUC, which was signed by 234,406 women in Ulster (Urquhart, 1994a: 98, 105; Ward, 1995c: 90), it was stated that:

¹⁴ The membership of the UWUC was largely upper- and middle-class but, there is evidence of some working-class women members and there were no stated class restrictions placed on membership in the UWUC (Urquhart, 1994: 97).

The sole object of the Council shall be to secure the maintenance and integrity of the...Union between Great Britain and Ireland...*It is a fundamental principle of the Council that no other subject other than the above shall be dealt with* [italics not in original]...it being understood that all other questions in which individual members may be specially interested, shall be subordinate to the single issue of maintenance of the Legislative Union (Urquhart, 1994a: 98).

Thus, similar to the Republican cause of the time, as well as women's experiences throughout the Troubles, women's issues and concerns were marginalized for the sake of unity within the Unionist cause. Many unionist women (just as many republican women) were branded as "disloyal" to the "cause" of women's suffrage (Hearne, 1997: 31). For instance, a Mrs. McCracken (a contributor to the *Irish Citizen* and the *Belfast News Letter*) wrote that: "their [unionist women] services have been of the nature of a self-denying ordinance. Never once, so far as I know, have they formulated any demand on their own behalf or that of their own sex" (Kelly, 1996: 35). However, despite its limited powers, the UWUC did raise the profile of Unionist women's activities. Furthermore, the UWUC allowed many women to develop leadership, organizational and public speaking skills, and a profile in the public constitutional debate.

The UWUC's tireless efforts to gain public support for the anti-Home Rule campaign cannot be underestimated. At the inaugural meeting in Belfast on January 11, 1911, the women of the UWUC continued the Unionist anti-Home Rule work. They canvassed voters and lobbied every anti-Home Rule supporter "...so that every seat in Ulster shall be won for the Union...the women of Ulster will be in no way behind the men in striving for so noble a cause" (Urquhart, 1994a: 95). Lady Londonderry, the leader of the UWUC, stated in February 1914 that "...there was nothing that the women of Ulster would not do or sacrifice in their determination to maintain the Union" (Urquhart, 1994a: 99).

Many members of the UWUC worked tirelessly producing and distributing pamphlets in support of male Unionist electoral candidates and against Home Rule by directly lobbying the electorate for their support and sending leaflets to Britain (Urquhart, 1994a: 100-1). In May 1912 the UWUC collected over 100,000 signatures of women for

an anti-Home Rule petition (Urquhart, 1994a: 100). Hence, via the socially acceptable means of women's participation in the Unionist cause, the UWUC, women ventured into the "unfeminine" worlds of the public realm and party politics.

The UWUC highlighted their concerns regarding the implementation of Home Rule which played upon the anti-Catholic fears and stereotypes that dominated Britain and Protestant communities throughout Ireland. It stated,

...that the civil and religious liberty of the women of Ireland and the security of their homes can only be guaranteed under the Legislative Union of Great Britain and Ireland...If our homes are not sacred from the priest under the existing laws, what can we expect from a priest-governed Ireland...let each woman in Ulster do a woman's part to stem the tide of Home Rule...the Union...meant everything to them — their civil and religious liberty, their homes and children...once the Union was severed there could be no outlook in Ulster but strife and bitterness...Home was a woman's first consideration...in the event of Home Rule being granted, the sanctity and happiness of home life in Ulster would be permanently destroyed (Urquhart, 1994a: 96-7).

The objections of the UWUC to Home Rule also played upon the Unionist notion of a woman's primary role being that of wife and mother and concerned with the "private sphere" and domestic issues. Thus, the UWUC justified its participation in the anti-Home Rule campaign by appealing to those dominant gender roles conveyed within the broader Unionist cause, while at the same time often challenging such gender roles through the manner of its activities.

During World War I, the UWUC carried out extensive charity work in aid of soldiers and their families through a variety of fundraising and recruiting efforts (Urquhart, 1994a: 104-5). The UWUC was also instrumental in opposing the exclusion of Ireland from the Compulsory Military Service Acts of 1916 and 1918 (Urquhart, 1994a: 105). Although the UWUC did not officially endorse the enfranchisement of women due to the fear that the divisiveness that existed around that issue would hinder their work to defeat Home Rule (and the prohibition against women taking on non-family oriented issues), there were suffragists within the UWUC ranks (Urquhart, 1994a: 102-3). There were also women, such as Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, who worked to build bridges among these

various groups of women and supported peaceful means to achieve resolutions to conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. Moreover, there is evidence that Unionists planned to establish a provisional government in Ulster that would have included women on various government boards; there was even an informal promise made by the male Unionist Party leadership in 1913 that women would be granted the vote in a Northern Ireland independent of the rest of Ireland (Urquhart, 1994a: 102-3). Lady Dufferin wrote to Lady Londonderry that:

There is a great deal of feeling...and the Suffragettes are triumphant, others write to suggest that we "veto" the resolution [for women's suffrage], so I came to the conclusion that it would be best to ignore the suffrage part of the letter...our association stands for *one* political question only — that on Home Rule we are united; on every other question we are probably divided, and therefore, it is all important that we should refrain from any expression of opinion on other policies...I know that if any opening had been given for a discussion...there would have been unpleasantness (Urquhart, 1994a: 103).

Lady Londonderry concurred that it was "advisable not to reopen the [suffrage] matter (Urquhart, 1994a: 103).

Although the UWUC did not actively pursue the issue of women's suffrage, when women were granted the vote they knew how to use it and did so strategically. The women of the UWUC did crucial work in keeping the electoral registers up-to-date, which was very important, particularly after women won the right to vote in February 1918, since they were granted the vote based on the existing electoral registers. Hence, the UWUC attempted to get as many women as possible who opposed Home Rule on the electoral registers in their attempt to defeat the Home Rule bill (Urquhart, 1994a: 106). The Duchess of Abercorn wrote in 1921 that, "...they [women] intended to use it [the vote] to the safety, honour, and welfare of their Church, their country, their homes, and their children by helping to put a strong loyal Government in power..." (Urquhart, 1994a: 109).

Despite their apparently subservient role within the Unionist cause, the UWUC did not always agree with the male Unionist leadership and were not always deferential in their attitude to the those in power in the Unionist movement. After the war many women in the

UWUC began to recognize that the contributions of the UWUC were dismissed by many in the Unionist cause as unimportant. Consequently, they issued the following statement to the male Unionist leadership:

...our opinion on any one political matter has never been asked. We...have been mute...We should be comrades in arms in defence of a common cause...what is the position of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council? It has none — we are nothing...is it right or just that we remain in this position — are we wise to re-organize and spend the large sums of money involved and trouble ourselves and expend our health and strength if we have no recognition?...We cannot give up the reins and remain the leading *women's association in Ulster*...[we] realise many anxieties, difficulties, and dangers that have to be faced by the Men with regard to the Vote for Women...But...we have mediated and thought to do [what] will be of supreme importance in keeping our people together, in educating women's opinion and to bring the war to a final and satisfactory conclusion...let us stand out now for the rights and liberties of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (Urquhart, 1994a: 106-7).

Clearly, the experiences women had as members of the UWUC increased women's confidence and they became displeased by the lack of recognition of their contributions by the male leadership of the Unionist cause. Their assertiveness paid off. In 1918 women were granted twelve representatives on the Ulster Unionist Council and a joint committee of the men's and women's councils was established to co-ordinate consultation and co-operation between the councils (Urquhart, 1994a: 107).

Cumann na mBan (1914-1923)

Women were also involved in the Republican cause through *Cumann na mBan* (Irish Women's Council), an organization created by Republican women in 1914 as an avenue through which women could be involved in the Republican movement. *Cumann na mBan* was central to the Irish opposition to conscription (Ward, 1995c: 128). Women were involved in the Republican movement through *Cumann na mBan* in a variety of ways — behind-the-scenes as supporters ("maidens" or "mothers"), as well as directly as combatants, arms smugglers, messengers, and reconnaissance ("rabble rousers").

Cumann na mBan was a subordinate and auxiliary women's organization within the

dominant Republican cause and was hemmed in, to some extent, by its commitment to "assisting" men in their fight for Irish independence, yet it played a central part in the Irish Republican armed struggle against Britain as the only women's organization to be officially involved in the Easter Rising of 1916 (Ward, 1995b: 49-73; Ward, 1995c: 88; Ward, 1993: 39). Women participated in the preparations for the Easter Rising by taking part of the gun-running operations and preparing first aid kits for the Volunteers who were carrying out the Rising (Ward, 1995b: 51-3). Many women also acted as messengers, cooks, and first-aid personnel during the Rising (Ward, 1995b: 55). This subordinate position was a source of tension within the organization as well as between *Cumann na mBan* members and suffragists/feminists, who criticised *Cumann na mBan* for being a "handmaiden" to the male-dominated Republican cause (Ward, 1995c: 96-7; Ward, 1993: 39-40). As a result of *Cumann na mBan*'s involvement in the Easter Rising, it emerged "...a larger, more active, less subordinate, and more consciously feminist organisation" (McKillen, 1982: 67). Consequently, *Cumann na mBan*'s members became more confident in their abilities and less willing to simply "assist" the men. This led to many members of *Cumann na mBan* lobbying for more autonomy in the organization post-1916 (Ward, 1995c: 161-2; Ward, 1993: 40).

The Irish Women's Franchise League, *Cumann na mBan*, the *Irish Citizen*, and the Irish Women's Workers Union all played important roles in the republican debate in Ireland in the early 1900s (McKillen, 1982). These organizations drew connections between universal suffrage, equal rights for women and independence for Ireland. However, *Cumann na mBan*, the Irish Women's Workers Union (IWWU), and the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), as well as individuals such as Constance Markievicz (the only woman to lead a regiment in the Easter Rising of 1916, a feminist, and president of *Cumann na mBan*), Hannah Sheehy Skeffington (a pacifist, feminist, and supporter of independence for a united Ireland), and Louie Bennett (a feminist, militant republican, and trade union organizer) held differing views about the use of armed force within the Republican cause and the role of women within that cause (McKillen, 1982).

Nevertheless, women and women's organizations managed for a time to work

together and support each other despite their differences of opinion on the "national question", Republican militancy, and women's role in the Republican cause (McKillen, 1982: 57-61). However, as a result of the brutality of the British army towards the "rebels" in the 1916 Easter Rising, the IWFL became increasingly sympathetic to the militant demands for Irish independence. This stance caused tensions between the IWFL and women's organizations that did not support the use of arms to achieve Irish independence (McKillen, 1982: 72). In addition, the mainstream Republican movement concerned itself with the cessation of British rule in Ireland, and most women in the Republican movement were influenced by this dominant ideology, which undermined feminist concerns (Hearne, 1997: 31).

Women were also active politically in the Republican and suffrage causes between 1911 and 1913 through their direct involvement in hunger strikes and the moral support they provided to those who were on hunger strike. Hunger strikes were a tool adopted by suffragists¹⁵ and Republicans in their clashes with the British justice system (Fallon, 1987). However, female support of the male hunger strikers, in terms of petitioning and lobbying for their release, did not translate into overwhelming male support for those women who were also on hunger strike (despite these women's status as well-known figures in their own right, or as relatives of well-known Irish personalities) (Fallon, 1987: 91). Fallon writes:

What is surprising is the lack of acknowledgement women's efforts received by Republican men. During the general hungerstrike of male prisoners, there was no reference made to the heroic struggle of Mary MacSwiney or Maude Gonne nor to the success they had achieved. To the men at least, these efforts seem to have been relegated to the same auxiliary status of Cumann na mBan. The legacy of this attitude toward woman as assistant rather than as associate is responsible to the reluctance within Irish society to push for women's rights (Fallon, 1987: 91).

Despite the lack of support they received while on hunger strike themselves, women's activities, both as supporters of the men on hunger strike and as hunger strikers

¹⁵ Suffragists were jailed during this time for their demonstrations in support of universal suffrage. They went on hunger strikes to protest their incarceration for such activities.

themselves, demonstrated political acts of resistance against what they perceived as Britain's illegitimate use of force and rule of law in Ireland.

Women were active in a wide variety of ways in the Republican, Unionist, and Suffragist causes, as well as the 1916 Easter Rising. Such breadth of involvement reflected the diversity among women in terms of their positions on Irish sovereignty, women's suffrage and the use of arms to achieve their desired goals. Such cleavages meant that it was difficult to achieve unity on women's issues; the "national question" and the use of arms were issues that divided women so thoroughly that ideological differences could not be overcome so as to allow women's issues to become more than marginal within the mainstream Republican and Unionist movements.

The emergence of Northern Ireland: 1922-1969

In 1922 Ireland was divided, creating the Irish Free State (which became the Republic of Ireland) and the Province of Northern Ireland (also known as Ulster). Northern Ireland remained a part of the United Kingdom, but was self-governing, with the new parliament residing at Stormont, on the outskirts of Belfast. The Irish Free State was also self-governing, but severed its ties to the British Empire and United Kingdom by 1948 and became the Republic of Ireland (Roulston, 1997: 43).

Northern Ireland was created out of the fear held by many Protestants in the north-eastern part of Ireland that they would become a minority in a predominantly Catholic independent and sovereign Ireland. Hence, many Protestants allied themselves in opposition to Irish independence and carved out an enclave of a majority Protestant population and power, which they would call the Province of Northern Ireland, or Ulster (Rooney, 1995a: 40; Roulston, 1997: 43).¹⁶ The first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Sir James Craig, declared Ulster to be a "Protestant state for a Protestant people" (Rooney, 1995b: 54), thereby making clear the ideology of the new Stormont government: Northern

¹⁶ The choice of the name Ulster was controversial: the proposed six-county Province of Ulster excluded three counties belonging to the historical province of Ulster because those particular counties had large Catholic populations that would jeopardise the power the Protestants had bargained for in the new six-county state.

Ireland was to be a state in which Protestantism reigned supreme. It was also to be a male-dominated, patriarchal state, something that Sir James Craig did not highlight in his declaration. Although women participated in the anti-Home Rule campaign (which supported the maintenance of Ireland's ties to Great Britain) and lobbied in support of partition, women were excluded from the talks at which the partition of Ireland was negotiated. The patriarchal nature of the state was reinforced by the gendered roles advocated by both Catholic and Protestant churches. Protestant male power was further entrenched through the practice of gerrymandering¹⁷ and legislation that discriminated against all Catholics and Protestant women in terms of housing, education, and access to employment, as well as laws that limited individual freedoms, such as a ban on access to birth control, abortion services, and divorce (Roulston, 1997: 43). Moreover, the Stormont government portrayed Catholics as "dangerous, alien and potentially treacherous" (Roulston, 1997: 43).

Not much has been written about women's political participation in Northern Ireland from 1922 to the 1960s, although during the evolution of a new country gendered roles may become more deeply entrenched in an attempt to carve out the identity and ideology of the new state (Callaway, 1987: 228; Porter, 1998a: 45-6). As Callaway writes:

To strengthen group mobilisation, cultural or class identity often becomes more sharply defined. This usually requires a return to 'tradition — that cultural storehouse of historical events, mythical happening, evocative symbols and elusive images which can be used to convey charged meaning in the present. In many societies women are designated as the 'bearers of the collective' — physical and social reproducers of future subjects (Callaway, 1987: 228-9).

This is what Callaway argues occurred in Northern Ireland. This is not to say that women were not active politically, but women's political involvement appears to have been low-key, shaped by the emergence of Northern Ireland, the global Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War. The concerns of women, as had been the case during the First

¹⁷ In Northern Ireland, gerrymandering refers to process whereby Unionists altered the local government property franchise to exclude Catholics from local power by Unionist-controlled housing allocations (Rooney, 2000: 183).

World War and previous Irish nationalist struggles, continued to be marginalized in the interests of "national unity" and the "war effort". Women as well as men played a role in solidifying support for the new country and also participated in campaigns that challenged its legitimacy (Farrell, 1976: 98). Women, largely in their roles as wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters ("maidens" and "mothers"), provided behind-the-scenes support for their husbands', sons', fathers' or brothers' activities and made choices about bringing up their children to support the Republican or Loyalist causes or encouraging them to remain neutral. Women (the "rabble rousers") also demanded universal suffrage in Northern Ireland.

After the violence of the civil war (1920-1922) and the partition of Ireland, political tensions in Ireland (both north and south) declined, but did not dissipate. The period from 1923 to 1930 was a time of relative peace as the new Stormont parliament was consolidated. This involved negotiating with the Catholic minority to accept the legitimacy of the new state, as well as with the government of the Irish Free State to also accept partition and the existing border between the north and south (Farrell, 1976: 108). This relative peace was, in large part, due to the fact that the Republicans (largely Catholics) had been defeated in the civil war, and therefore, many were disillusioned and prepared to renounce armed resistance and attempt to work within the parliamentary system (Farrell, 1976: 100). Hence, the status quo of male, Protestant privilege went primarily unchallenged in Northern Ireland, although the seeds of discontent had been sown with partition (McCracken, 1995: 322).

Northern Ireland, like much of the rest of the world, was greatly affected by the Great Depression. Consequently, throughout the 1930s there was a great deal of labour unrest, and labour issues were something around which working-class Catholics and Protestants were unified and could (and did) work together, at least for a time (Farrell, 1976: 124; McCracken, 1995: 320). Nevertheless, much of the Protestant leadership tried to inflame the underlying sectarian feelings by portraying such labour unrest as a Republican and Communist plot (Farrell, 1976: 129).

World War II resulted in an economic boom in Northern Ireland. Both Derry and

Belfast were major naval bases for the British and Allied navies, as well as major ship-building centres (McCracken, 1995: 321). Many Protestants and Catholics, men and women alike shared in this boom and were unified by their interest in supporting the war effort (McCracken, 1995: 321).

As happened in other parts of the world, in post-World War II Northern Ireland women were encouraged to return to the home and to their roles as wives and mothers in an attempt to provide jobs for returning soldiers (McWilliams, 1993: 86). In 1945, Catholic bishops and Unionist MPs both agreed with and supported the closure of many day nurseries in Northern Ireland, stating that such daycares weakened "the natural and divinely ordained traditional family" (McWilliams, 1993: 85). This further isolated women in the home and entrenched the gendered role of women as "wives" and "mothers", since without daycare facilities, it was very difficult for women to work outside of the home, particularly on a full-time basis. In some sectors, women's return to the home was made mandatory with the implementation of the marriage bar, which prevented married women from working in the civil service, teaching, and banking fields and was only removed in the 1960s (McWilliams, 1993: 86). This further reinforced gendered roles, particularly a woman's identity as a wife and mother and her role in the private sphere.

After World War II, the sectarian tensions resurfaced, in part, as a result of increasing unemployment rates. The Ireland Act of 1949, which stated that Northern Ireland's ties with the rest of the United Kingdom could not be severed without the consent of its parliament raised the contentious constitutional issues once again and served to reignite past tensions (McCracken, 1995: 322). Tough economic times, coupled with an increasing frustration among Republicans that the parliamentary system was getting them nowhere and that Republican protests were frequently silenced by Loyalists (Farrell, 1976: 203; McCracken, 1995: 317), only served to further raise tensions. The result was that the 1950s were a period of increased violence — the most serious rise in violence since 1922 (Farrell, 1976: 203; McCracken, 1995: 322). However, in the midst of this increasing sectarian violence, there was also a growing movement for the reunification of Ireland with the emergence of the Irish Anti-Partition League, which functioned from 1945 to 1951

(Farrell, 1976: 187).¹⁸

The discontent of the 1950s carried into the 1960s. There was widespread discrimination against Catholics in terms of access to government-subsidized housing, employment, and education. As an example of the discrimination faced by Catholics and women, the number of employees in the textile industry, which was the largest employer of women, particularly Catholic women, dropped from 72,800 in 1950 to 56,300 in 1961, while over the same period in the ship-building industry, which predominantly employed Protestant men, the number of workers declined from 24,200 to 20,200 (Farrell, 1975: 227). While there was a decline in both industries, the textiles industry faced a decline in employment of 22.5%, while the shipping industry experienced a decrease in employment of 16%. There was a more concerted effort by the Stormont government to cushion the ship-building industry from the level of decline in employment that the textiles sector faced because the government believed that it was assured of large-scale support within the ship-building industry due to the primarily male and Protestant composition of the work force in that sector (McWilliams, 1993: 84-5).

This sense of injustice and the inspiration gained from the American Civil Rights movement resulted in the development of a political consciousness, primarily (although not solely) in Catholic and republican communities that focused on the widespread discrimination that Catholics faced in Northern Ireland. This developing political consciousness resulted in the emergence of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement (NICRM) and the civil rights marches of the 1960s, which the NICRM organized.

These civil rights marches soon imploded into the Troubles. There were widespread attacks against the civil rights marchers (primarily Catholics) by (predominantly Protestant) mobs. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)¹⁹ frequently took part in these attacks against the marchers, or at other times they did very little to stop the attacks. These attacks

¹⁸ The Irish Anti-Partition League's objective was to create an alliance of all those opposed to the partition of Ireland within the Stormont parliament. The League called for Irish reunification, the cessation of gerrymandering and the release of all internees and political prisoners (Farrell, 1976: 179).

¹⁹ The Royal Ulster Constabulary is the almost entirely Protestant Northern Irish police force. It is due to be disbanded in 2001, and has already begun to undergo this process.

contributed greatly to the increasingly divisive "us" against "them" climate in Northern Ireland; Catholics were attacked by Protestants and the RUC, and many Protestants felt besieged by the largely Catholic Civil Rights Movement's challenge to Protestant power and privileges. The situation deteriorated into armed skirmishes, which made the Northern Irish government and police force look increasingly inept at keeping peace and order. After particularly brutal police treatment of civil rights marchers in Derry in 1969, the Northern Irish prime minister requested that the British government send in troops to "keep the peace", which it did. This was the beginning of the era that was to become known as the Troubles.

Initially, most Catholic communities welcomed the arrival of the British troops, believing that the army would protect them against future Protestant attacks. However, with the late-night raids of numerous Catholic homes and the random arrests of hundreds of Catholics, many Catholics came to view the British army as part of the system of discrimination in Northern Ireland, and therefore, the "enemy" (Sales, 1997: 43). The Troubles brought the conflict into the homes of Northern Ireland through internment, curfews, house raids, and sectarian violence, which seemed to affect every family in the country, directly or indirectly. Women were involved throughout the Troubles in a multitude of ways which often developed from the dominant ways women have organized: within and on behalf of their communities, and in behind-the-scenes, supportive ways (Callaway, 1987: 221). Some women opposed internment, the house raids, and sectarian violence. Other women participated directly in the sectarian violence as strategists, gun-runners, paramilitary operatives, and soldiers. Still others participated in community, philanthropic, and peace work.

Conclusion

It is only by using a broad definition of political participation, which looks at activities in the private realm and informal sphere of civil society (church, community and philanthropic organizations) and how the public and private domains are interconnected, that many of women's activities can be uncovered and understood as modes of political

participation. Women participated politically throughout the history of Ireland — in the Rising of 1798, the Young Ireland movement, the Ladies Land League, the Gaelic Revival movement, the Suffrage movement, the Unionist cause, the Rising of 1916, and through philanthropy. The ways women were involved in these social movements were diverse, and they were shaped by the historically and socially constructed notions of Irish "womanhood" — the conceptions of the "proper" ways and means for women to participate politically, as "maidens" or "mothers" in a supportive, behind-the-scenes manner. Furthermore, these socially and historically constructed gender roles shaped the arguments used against women's involvement in the "traditional", public realm of party politics and government; it was argued that women's role was that of wife and mother and work in the domestic, "private" sphere - the supportive forces behind the men in the public realm. Women were deemed too fragile for the martial nature of party politics in Ireland. However, those dominant notions of womanhood were also challenged by many women through their participation as "rabble rousers" in the militant Republican movement, the Unionist cause, and philanthropic work, as well as through their writing and public support for social change. In addition, many women working for social change in supportive roles in community, church, or voluntary organizations, as well as around issues concerning health, employment, education, women's reproductive rights and universal suffrage, also challenged dominant notions of Irish womanhood. Such active participation was shaped by and founded on the participation of previous generations of Irish women.

By 1922, Ireland was divided into the Irish Free State (later the Republic of Ireland) and Northern Ireland. Women participated in opposition to and support of such a partition. Women also had suffrage, although it was not granted universally, but it was a start in the process of getting women's rights on the national agenda. Women continued to be active politically on both sides of the border in Ireland after partition, which set the stage for the events which led to the explosion of the Troubles in 1969. I will now turn to an examination of women's activities throughout the Troubles in Northern Ireland from 1969 to the present day.

Chapter Two

The work continues: Women's political participation throughout the Troubles, 1969–2001

Women and the Troubles

Northern Ireland emerged from the 1950s a very conservative and divided society, with the dominant gendered roles crucial in reinforcing the sectarianism that had re-emerged as a result of increasing social, political, and economic tensions. Hence, 1960s Northern Ireland, shaped by the previous decade, remained a society with rigid gender roles conveyed by the Catholic and Protestant churches, the Republican and Unionist movements, and also by the Northern Irish government, dominating Northern Irish society. The gender roles that defined womanhood were shaped by the history of Northern Ireland, as outlined in chapter one and continued to influence the ways in which women participated politically, whether reinforcing those roles or opposing them. I will turn now to an examination of the dominant images of womanhood in Northern Ireland at the time of the emergence of the Troubles and how these images shaped women's political participation.

Images of womanhood

Women's participation throughout the Troubles continued to be affected by historically and socially constructed gendered norms of female behaviour and space. Some women have reinforced those gendered norms as "maidens" and/or "mothers", while others have strenuously opposed them, as "rabble rousers"; still others have participated in ways that at times appear to support such gender roles, while at other times seem to challenge them.

As throughout history in Ireland, the church and state and Republican and Unionist causes conveyed notions of an "acceptable" role for women as far as political involvement was concerned and in this way, contrived to construct the dominant and "proper" gendered role for women within the Catholic, republican, Protestant, and unionist communities of Northern Ireland (McWilliams, 1991: 81; McWilliams, 1993: 79; Roulston, 1996: 139). Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary continued to be portrayed as the pinnacle of Irish Catholic republican womanhood. Mary Holland notes that: "The proper place for a woman

apart from the convent is the home, preferably rearing sons for Ireland" (cited in McWilliams, 1993: 83). Motherhood was also central to Protestant unionist images of womanhood, although the "ideal" was a subservient, passive, supportive wife and mother, rather than the *Mater Dolorosa* who actively encourages her children's involvement in the Republican cause (McWilliams, 1991: 86; Morgan, 2000: 2; Sales, 1997: 63). Porter states that as the primary child rearers, women "impart much of the national heritage including perpetuating sectarianism and glorifying men as national heroes" (Porter, 1998a: 43). The churches, both Catholic and Protestant, contributed to the reinforcement of traditional gendered roles by asserting particular modes of involvement for women as "crucial", while insisting that other ways women were politically active were "unfeminine" (Kilmurray, 1987: 180). Hence, the "maiden" and "mother" images still remain powerful images of Northern Irish womanhood. From the 1970s until the present, Republican wall murals portrayed Mary mourning her martyred son. "The pictures were meant to convey a symbol of Mother Ireland where the crucifiers were, of course, British imperialists" (McWilliams, 1993: 83). Such images have shaped the ways women have been politically active throughout the Troubles. Many women have been involved in ways that either reinforced such gendered roles, and/or they participated in ways which oppose(d) such gendered norms, supporting Callaway's observation that "political conflict often involves redefinitions of social reality...cultural concepts operate to control women's lives, but...in some cases...women act against imposed classifications to assert their own definitions of themselves and their society" (Callaway, 1987: 216).

Yuval-Davis and Anthias argue that one of the most prominent ways women are constructed by states and participate politically within nationalist movements are as bearers and rearers of children, as symbols and teachers of culture and "...as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles" (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989: 7; Yuval-Davis, 1998: 28). The experience of both republican and unionist women in Northern Ireland supports this. Women were encouraged to participate in certain ways, such as the peace movement, since peace work seemed to fit in with the dominant notion of women within Republican and Unionist traditions as the "bearers" of life and culture

(Morgan, 2000: 7; Porter, 1998a: 45). "The activity of women in supportive political roles was ignored; the mobilisation of women in the officially sanctioned Peace People²⁰ was applauded, while organisation of small groups of women around issues of personal concern, such as abortion facilities or divorce, was deplored" (Kilmurray, 1987: 180). The position was conveyed by the churches via a segregated education system, rigid gender roles, and solidarity in opposing the introduction of British divorce, abortion, and birth-control legislation to Northern Ireland (Kilmurray, 1987: 179). Yet notions of womanhood were not only socially and historically created by those imbued in patriarchal culture and imposed on women; women also opposed such dominant notions of womanhood (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989: 11). As throughout history, women in Northern Ireland continued to be portrayed as the bearers of tradition and culture, while at the same time many of them demanded and worked for significant changes within Northern Irish society. Hence, through the dominant images of womanhood that were (and are) conveyed by the churches and within the Republican and Loyalist causes, "...women [were] caught in the tension between...the demands of ideology and the reality of daily living" (Callaway, 1987: 229).

Callaway describes the way such dominant gendered images have contributed to the further entrenched marginalization of women. She writes that

...women are designated in the background to carry on the tasks of survival and support. Even when women join the 'lines' of men, they are considered exceptional; in this way, the stereotypes of male and female are reinforced. The roles of 'mother' and 'housewife' may be enlarged and praised...the value given to female roles emphasises gender polarity, thus strengthening male roles as the dominant structure (Callaway, 1987: 228).

Hence the historical dominant images of womanhood continued to shape the ways women participated politically throughout the Troubles. Some reinforced such roles, while others

²⁰ Peace People was an organization that lobbied for non-violent solutions to the Troubles. The organization was created in 1976 by two women, Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, after the tragic and accidental death of Corrigan's sister and three of her sister's four children (McWilliams, 1995: 28). Initially it attracted a great deal of support and media attention with its weekly marches against sectarian violence. Corrigan and Williams won the Nobel Peace prize for their leadership role in the organization. However, support for Peace People waned by the late 1970s and early 1980s, due to internal divisions within the organization (McWilliams, 1995: 28).

railed against them; still others both embraced and challenged such notions.

I will now explore the ways women have participated politically throughout the Troubles from 1969 to the present. I will look at women's activities in the Civil Rights movement, the women's movement, and the Republican and Unionist causes, as well as the party political arena, community work (which is often volunteer and philanthropic in nature), and peace work. I will argue that by using a broader definition of political participation, one can see that women have participated politically throughout the Troubles in a myriad of ways, contrary to the dominant accounts of the Troubles which portray women as apart from or irrelevant to the conflict — innocent victims of the conflict (Rooney, 1995b: 54). As Rooney states:

Women have participated in the war in the North of Ireland and they have participated in the peace. They have been active in all military and paramilitary forces. Where they have not themselves been agents of military force, they have supported and sustained those who are. Women are a part of the conflict, not apart from it (Rooney, 1995b: 53).

Women and the Troubles

Women in Northern Ireland have been involved politically throughout the Troubles in a variety of ways, many of which mirror the ways women historically have participated politically in Ireland, as discussed in chapter one. Some women have been active throughout the Troubles in ways that reinforce the dominant societal gendered roles, as "maidens" or "mothers", while other women have challenged those roles, as "rabble rousers" and still others have been involved in ways that both reinforce and challenge such gendered roles.

Women have participated in the Republican and Loyalist causes in supportive, behind the scenes capacities, through auxiliary organizations, such as the Women's Orange Order and the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (UWUC), *Cumman na mBan* and the women's branch of Sinn Féin. Women have also lobbied on behalf of incarcerated relatives (mostly men), arranged legal counsel for them, and protested the abuses that their

imprisoned relatives have faced at the hands of the British military and justice system (Rooney, 2000: 171). In addition, many women have supported and taken on the work of their family members in prison and visited them regularly while they were in jail.

Women have also been directly involved in the Troubles through their participation in the Civil Rights movement, the women's movement and the Republican and Unionist causes and paramilitaries. Women have also been active in political parties, volunteer work, and church groups. Such participation has been circumscribed by images of womanhood as conveyed by the Catholic and Protestant churches and the Republican and Unionist causes.

Women have also participated politically during the Troubles at the community level, concerned with issues of housing, civil rights, unemployment, children's welfare, education and health care (Percy & Kremer, 1995: 204; Porter, 1998b: 28; Roulston, 1997: 45). Many women have supported individuals who are suspected of terrorist activities, providing them with shelter, clothing, and food, as well as devising a system (bin-lid banging)²¹ for warning fugitives that the military and police were carrying out house raids in the area. Such protests played on the dominant gender role of women as "nurturers" ("mothers") and grew out of a woman's traditional role in a community as a "care-giver". Hence, women who engaged in such activities reinforced traditional gendered norms. However, at the same time, such protests resulted in shifts in those gendered roles, since women were becoming active in the streets of their communities — the public domain — and such actions were also protests organized and carried out by women only. Moreover, women involved in the "bin-lid" protest were playing on the reluctance of British soldiers to shoot women and the notion that women were not a "threat". With the death of Katie Thompson, the first woman to be shot while participating in the "bin-lid" protests, women

²¹ Women mostly in West Belfast neighbourhoods, went into the streets and banged their garbage-can lids on the side-walks. This was not only an act of protest against what they perceived as an invasion of their communities by the British army, but also served as a warning to those who were in hiding in the area that the British army was carrying out house raids (Edgerton, 1987: 65; McWilliams, 1995: 23). This type of activity had its origins in an earlier period when women in working-class areas warned each other about the presence of the Housing Trust inspectors who assessed their homes for cleanliness before making decisions about "suitable" applicants for Housing Trust accommodations (Edgerton, 1987: 65; McWilliams, 1995: 23). While the bin-lid banging tactic is no longer employed, it was vital during the early years of the Troubles when internment was implemented.

realized that they were integral to a struggle in which their lives were potentially at risk; no longer were they mere supporters (McWilliams: 1995: 28).

Throughout the 1970s women continued to participate politically in the Republican and Unionist causes, the women's movement, community and grass-roots organizations, the peace movement, and political parties. The scope of women's political activities expanded as women became more politically self-confident – willing and able to assert their interests and concerns more forcefully. Women also began to take on health issues, such as abortion and birth control, reforming the laws regarding divorce and abortion, as well as raising the issue of domestic violence and its connections to the sectarian political violence in Northern Ireland. Working on such issues challenged the dominant Republican and Loyalist ideologies, as well as Church and State stances on these issues, and therefore brought many women into conflict with others in their communities as "rabble rousers".

Women and the Civil Rights movement

The emergence of the United States Civil Rights movement in the mid-1960s inspired many Catholics (and some Protestant-nationalists) in Northern Ireland with hope, and many of the United States Civil Rights campaign tactics were adopted by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in their campaigns (Evason, 1991: 13). The Civil Rights movement was one of the first fora through which women participated in the Troubles, through participation in the Campaign for Social Justice in 1964, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association from its inception in 1967 and People's Democracy, a student-led organization, established in 1968 (Edgerton, 1987: 65; McCandless, 1999: 19; McWilliams, 1995: 19; Wilford, 1996: 46). Women formed the majority of the members of the local branches and committees of NICRA and were also among its founders (Callaway, 1987: 223; Edgerton, 1997: 66; McCoy, 2000: 12; McWilliams, 1995: 19). Nevertheless, only one woman, Betty Sinclair, sat on its first formal executive in 1967. The formal representation of women within NICRA did improve, however, with a greater number of women on the executive of NICRA as the years progressed (Edgerton, 1987: 66; McWilliams, 1995: 20).

Discrimination in terms of housing is what initially sparked off the widespread civil rights protests in which women were an integral force. There was a widespread sense of discrimination against Catholics in terms of government-subsidized housing. This sense of outrage turned into action when a young, single Protestant woman in Dungannon was provided with a council-house²² ahead of many Catholic families who sorely needed housing. Some outraged Catholics organized a sit-in at the house in question, protesting against what they considered to be discriminatory access to government housing (Sales, 1997: 42). It was out of this demonstration that a well-organized Civil Rights Movement emerged in Northern Ireland, focusing on the discrimination that Catholics faced in terms of housing, employment, and education. Women were an integral part of this movement, as protesters, supporters, organizers of demonstrations, and articulators of the civil rights movements' interest in this issue, but their contributions were often ignored (McWilliams, 1995: 19; Roulston, 1997: 41).²³ While some individual women did gain prominence throughout the Troubles (such as, Bernadette Devlin)²⁴, they were the exception rather than the rule (Edgerton, 1987: 66).

Women's work behind the scenes in the Dungannon housing protest was also crucial, since it was women who prepared the food for the protesters. Women did not often question their role within the movement or the marginalization of their contributions, nor did many of them see their contributions as "political" per se. Hence, such women's

²² A council-house is government-subsidized housing.

²³ It was the women of Dungannon and their tactics of picketing and protesting that drew media attention to the protest, but it was Austin Currie, an MP for Northern Ireland, who was involved in the sit-in who was given the credit by the media and others for instigating the campaign against unfair housing allocation practices that triggered the Civil Rights Movement (McWilliams, 1995: 19).

²⁴ Bernadette Devlin was a central figure in the Civil Rights Movement and gained even greater prominence as the first female Northern Irish MP at Westminster, and also Westminster's youngest-ever MP, elected at the age of 21 in 1969 (Percy & Kremer, 1995: 204; Sales, 1997: 171). She was involved in many ways throughout the Troubles as a politician, a civil rights activist, a participant in the Republican movement, and later, in the women's movement.

activities reinforced²⁵ the dominant gendered notion of women: the nurturing and supportive "maidens" and "mothers" within the private realm. One woman recalls:

[women] were still unquestioningly accepting the fact that when we undertook a token overnight squat of a house in protest against housing policies, it was the women who would go and shop for food and make the endless sandwiches and ensure that all those who came to make speeches that evening would be fed. I think I missed most of the political talk because I was so busy buttering bread (cited in Sales, 1997: 42).

Women, therefore, were crucial in initiating, organizing and supporting the activities undertaken by the Civil Rights movement, whether they assisted in providing food for the squatters, provided moral support to the squatters, or were the initiators of the protest itself.

Another aspect of the Civil Rights Movement in which women were involved was protesting the practice of gerrymandering. Women were key to such demonstrations, yet the irony of the protest chant of "One Man, One Vote" was lost on many of the women involved, as the second-wave feminist movement did not emerge as a political force in Northern Ireland until the mid-1970s (McWilliams, 1993: 90; Roulston, 1997: 44). Women's participation in the Civil Rights Movement was, however, the training for many women's future political activities in community and grass-roots organizations, in the voluntary sector and the women's movement, as well as in the realm of party politics and government.

In response to the escalating violence in 1971, the British government introduced internment (incarceration without trial) for those even suspected of terrorist activities. The implementation of internment involved late-night house raids in which Catholic men in particular were rounded up and imprisoned without having charges laid against them within a specified time period. Internment, it was reasoned, would decrease the violence, as fewer terrorists would be on the streets. In fact, it further increased the violence by escalating the

²⁵ The term "reinforced" is used here to denote the ways in which women's activities supported the dominant gendered roles in Northern Irish society as conceived through the imagery of the Madonna, Erin and the Mater Dolorosa which were grounded in the socially acceptable roles for women in the private sphere as the nurturers of their families and communities.

anger already felt within Catholic communities at the government and army, since it was only republicans (primarily Catholics) who were interned at the outset and continued to be interned in the greatest numbers.²⁶ Outraged by the targeting of Catholic men by the police and army during these night raids, many women conducted night street patrols in an effort to identify the young men who were being apprehended by the British army and where they were being taken. This was important work, since the information gathered by the women in these patrols was often the only information people would receive about their loved ones (Rock, 1997: 70).

Women were involved in public demonstrations against internment too, as "rabble rousers". The Ormeau Road branch of the NICRA (mostly women) blocked the roads to the Catholic Ormeau Road area of Belfast in protest against internment. They also formed alliances with women from other parts of Belfast and demonstrated at the intersection of the Falls and Springfield Roads, near the Springfield Road Police Station and a British army barracks. This public protest was one of the first times that women had directly challenged the authority of the state, and it gave the women involved a sense of collective power, since through this protest they stopped traffic, confronted the army, and gained the attention of the media (Edgerton, 1987: 67). Such actions, however, were not confined to republican women. Women in unionist areas were also involved in public demonstrations that disrupted vehicular traffic. The *UDA News* reported (with just a bit of sexism) about traffic disturbances in East and North Belfast in 1972:

What are the reasons for these diversions? Bomb scares? Rioters? Assemblies? Not on your sweet life. Something more effective, difficult to handle, extremely dangerous, and highly explosive. The womenfolk of (Loyalist) Belfast are in action. The girls are out in force with their posters, flags, prams, and shopping bags. They form large circles and walk about in the centre of the road for up to an hour at a time occupying the road from footpath to footpath, so that traffic cannot pass (cited in Edgerton, 1987: 67).

Furthermore, women spoke at public meetings in republican areas, although often

²⁶ In one night, August 9, 1971, over 500 Catholic boys and men were arrested. Catholic women began to be interned in 1972, and in 1973 the internment of Protestant men first began (Edgerton, 1987: 65).

they would do so on behalf of their interned husbands, sons, brothers, fathers, or boyfriends, and their remarks did not often include feminist demands, but rather were focused on the suffering of their menfolk in prison and on protesting internment. Perhaps many women felt they would face opposition if they overtly challenged the dominant gendered norms, and this would hinder the effectiveness of their work, so they believed that they could maximize the effectiveness of their work if they participated politically in ways that were socially "acceptable" for women (McWilliams, 1991: 84; McWilliams, 1993: 82; Rooney, 2000: 178). Nevertheless, through this participation as "maidens", "mothers" and "rabble rousers", women developed a new self-awareness and social identity, which they would carry with them for the rest of their lives (Edgerton, 1987: 71).

With the emergence of the Troubles, the dominant gendered female role as maternal guardian of the family was faced with the "threat" of "external, alien elements" — the security forces that were seen as the enemy of the Catholic working-class in Northern Ireland (Edgerton, 1987: 68). Often injustices suffered by family members, such as the internment of relatives or the poor access to education available to their children, was the initial impetus for women's political involvement (Callaway, 1987: 214). One woman, aged 20 with three children, reported that she "...had heard of civil rights marches, but it wasn't until Jimmy [her husband] was interned that I got interested. His mother had joined the CRA [Civil Rights Association] and she went on demonstrations with me...I joined the 'Women against Internment Committee'" (Edgerton, 1987: 68). Another young woman (also a wife and mother) whose husband had been interned stated: "I didn't have much choice but to demonstrate...they [friends, relatives and neighbours] would have thought I didn't care about my husband. And there was the army to remind me night and day, you couldn't forget that they had taken him away..." (Edgerton, 1987: 68). Still yet another young wife and mother described the difficulties that many women faced: "It was a struggle...because if I wasn't going on some protest, I was at a meeting or going to visit him at Long Kesh [an internment camp]. I sometimes took the kids, although my sister would often mind them for me" (Edgerton, 1987: 68).

As was often the case historically, women assumed control of the Civil Rights

Movement when many of the men credited as its leaders were arrested with the introduction of internment (Evason, 1991: 48; McWilliams, 1995: 19-20). With the imprisonment of so many men, women ("rabble rousers") became the focus of world-wide publicity as they began to lead and organize civil rights demonstrations (Edgerton, 1987: 70). Undoubtedly these responsibilities and activities instilled in many women a sense of confidence, achievement, and collective power as they found themselves to be important figures outside the spheres of their immediate families and communities, in many cases for the first time in their lives (Edgerton, 1987: 70).

As well, many women were also learning to deal with family finances, often for the first time, after the imprisonment of their male relations. Women now had to collect and administer the social security benefits and to prepare the family budget. Prior to the Troubles, the social security offices frequently refused to pay out money to women whose husbands were available to receive the payments (Edgerton, 1987: 69). This new responsibility required that women discover very quickly how to survive as single mothers and social security claimants, and very often it served to politicize women who were faced with dealing with declining family budgets and the ill-treatment they often received at the hands of government officials. This was a class-based issue concerning primarily working-class women and is documented based on interviews. The new responsibility many women had for the family finances was an issue around which women quickly and effectively organized. For instance, in one impressive instance of organizing and political activity in Lurgan, Co. Armagh, a group comprised mainly of women initiated a campaign against internment known as the Rates Strike. This protest involved the withholding of all payments of rent and taxes and at its height had the support of more than 30,000 households. Women were primarily responsible for the Rates Strike campaign's success, but it was also women who, by and large, paid the price for the campaign as well, with family budgets being greatly reduced by the Payment for Debt Act of 1971, which confiscated family allowance and also withheld the wages and state benefits from those involved in the Rates Strike (Edgerton, 1987: 66).

The civil rights marches peaked in 1971-72 and represented a time when the

Catholic community publicly opposed the injustices it had suffered for decades (McWilliams, 1995: 20). Yet the women who protested the violence their communities faced at the hands of soldiers, police, and paramilitaries were less able to oppose domestic violence, since to do so would divide communities (those in support of the use of arms and those against such tactics) when the "success" of their causes required unity (McWilliams, 1995: 21). Moreover, to highlight the connections between sectarian and domestic violence would be to challenge some very powerful elements within the Republican and Unionist causes.²⁷

Public outrage against the British government and army reached new heights, when in January 1972, the British army opened fire on a group of peaceful civil rights marchers in Derry and killed fourteen unarmed civilians. That event became known as Bloody Sunday, and in response to the increased rioting (which resulted from the massacre) and the Northern Irish government's inability to manage the situation, the British government dissolved the Stormont government and imposed direct rule of Northern Ireland by Westminster (Cockburn, 1998: 20; McWilliams, 1995: 20; Sales, 1997: 44). This altered the political situation in Northern Ireland significantly since as of 1972 Northern Ireland was no longer a self-governing state.

Throughout the period leading up to direct rule by Westminster, women demonstrated against the arrests of their loved ones, and in some cases even carried on the work of those who were incarcerated. Women's leadership and participation in the Civil Rights Movement enabled them to give political voice to their long-held grievances about the discrimination they endured in terms of housing, education and employment.

The women's movement

During a slight decline in sectarian violence in the mid-1970s, women turned their attention to specific issues that affected them as women, such as the internment of women; the treatment of female prisoners; access to housing and education; the legalization of

²⁷ It was also noted in personal correspondence between the author and Dr. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman that internationally, the women's movement had not yet defined violence against women as an issue, and therefore, perhaps it would have been premature to have raised the issue in the early 1970s.

divorce, birth control and abortion; and domestic violence and its connections to paramilitary violence. The second-wave women's movement emerged in Northern Ireland. Many of those involved in the second-wave women's movement had gained activist, public-speaking, grass-roots organizing and leadership skills, as well as confidence in themselves and their abilities through previous involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, the Republican or Unionist causes and/or a variety of community and voluntary work (Roulston, 1997: 41).

Slowly, the irony of the Civil Rights chant "One Man, One Vote" dawned on many women. Women organized in support of various causes (McWilliams, 1993: 90). In 1974, the Women's Group in Coleraine was created (Magee, 1992: 19) and in 1975 the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (NIWRM) was established as an umbrella organization for women's groups (Callaway: 1987: 225; Edgerton, 1987: 76; Morgan, 2000a: 5; Porter, 1998b: 28) to lobby around a broad range of issues (Kilmurray, 1987: 180). It was hoped that in this way a united women's movement would emerge, with Protestant and Catholic women coming together around common demands and concerns (Edgerton, 1987: 76). This organization gained the support of trade unions,²⁸ political parties and individuals (Edgerton, 1987: 76). Through its activities and research the NIWRM has been at the forefront of raising feminist issues in Northern Ireland (Edgerton, 1987: 76). The NIWRM also drew attention to issues such as inadequate daycare facilities, unequal pay, the delayed implementation of the Sex Discrimination Order of 1976, and the parity of rights with women in Britain on divorce, abortion, and other legal matters (Edgerton, 1987: 76). The 1975 Charter for Northern Ireland, drawn up by the NIWRM, listed seven feminist demands:

- (1) equal opportunities in education, training and work; (2) equal pay for work of equal value; (3) equality of legal and social rights; (4) the right to maternity and child care facilities; (5) parity of rights for women in Northern

²⁸ Both Inez McCormack and Ann Hope, the NIWRM's founders, had previously been active in the Civil Rights Movement and by the mid-1990s held positions of power within the Irish trade union movement (McWilliams, 1995: 21). They have also both been involved in developing women's committees in trade unions and have also been vital to the maintenance of the connection between women in the trade union movement and women involved in community development (McWilliams, 1995: 21).

Ireland with women in England; (6) improved family planning services; (7) recognition for non-working wives and mothers (Edgerton, 1987: 76).

Other women's organizations that were also established in the mid-1970s to lobby around issues raised by the second-wave women's movement included the following: the Women's Aid Federation, the Falls Women's Centre, the Foyle Daycare, the Socialist Women's Group, and various women's self-help health groups (Magee, 1992: 19). The mission of Women's Aid, formed in 1975, was to highlight the issue of domestic violence and the connections between domestic and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland (McWilliams, 1995: 21). In 1980, the NIWRM set up the Belfast Women's Centre, the first women's centre in the city (Kilmurray, 1987: 181; McCoy, 2000: 14; McWilliams, 1995: 26). The Women's Education Project, also established in 1980, provided support, advice, and expertise to both individual women and local women's groups (Kilmurray, 1987: 181; McCoy, 2000: 14; McWilliams, 1995: 26). These groups, along with the Women's Information Group (also created in 1980) and the Women's Resource and Development Agency (founded in 1983), are examples of the grass-roots and working-class organizing that the women's movement in Northern Ireland has carried out (McWilliams, 1995: 30). The Women's Support Network was formed in 1989 as an umbrella organization to facilitate the forging of alliances and coalitions among various women's groups and women's centres (McWilliams, 1995: 30). Such groups work in a non-sectarian fashion, holding meetings in both republican and unionist areas as well as raising contentious issues in ways that are sensitive to the beliefs of both communities. These meetings provide opportunities for women to meet each other across the sectarian divide — opportunities that may not otherwise be available to them (McWilliams, 1995: 30).

In the mid-1970s, the women's movement in Northern Ireland began to lobby the government to enact legislation preventing discrimination by employers on the basis of gender, demanding the extension of the Sex Discrimination Act of Northern Ireland. Equal-pay legislation (which was aimed at preventing religious discrimination in terms of wages)

had been introduced in 1970, but no legislation existed with regard to sex discrimination because the government argued that Northern Irish women did not want such legislation (McWilliams, 1995: 26). The campaign was mounted by the Coleraine Women's Group and the NIWRM, and succeeded in achieving its goal in 1976 when the government introduced the Sex Discrimination Order, which led to the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission in Northern Ireland, a watch-dog for discriminatory employment practices (McWilliams, 1995: 26). Women also pressured Westminster to bring the divorce laws of Northern Ireland into line with the laws of the rest of the United Kingdom, which was achieved in 1980. Furthermore, those involved in the women's movement organized a rally in Belfast in 1976 on International Women's Day, which has become an annual event, although not one that has successfully united all women (Edgerton, 1987: 74; McWilliams, 1991: 80-1).

Additionally, women have been working to extend the 1967 Abortion Act of the United Kingdom to Northern Ireland, and to this end created the Campaign for Information and Choice, launched by the Northern Ireland Abortion Law Reform Association, the Belfast Rape Crisis Centre (Magee, 1992: 20); still other groups, such as the Northern Ireland Abortion Campaign, also organized around the issue of the legalisation of abortion and birth control. Other women, through organizations, such as the Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation,²⁹ the Rape Crisis Centre, and Women Against Imperialism, raised the issue of domestic violence and made connections between domestic violence and sectarian violence. Domestic violence had long been ignored and marginalized in Northern Ireland due to the dominant focus on the "national question" (Callaway, 1987: 225; Edgerton, 1987: 78). Since 1980, women's education projects and organizations that provide support to rape victims have emerged (Edgerton, 1987: 80). These organizations make public the connections between sectarian and domestic violence and have brought forth the particular dimensions of domestic violence in Northern Ireland in a manner that

²⁹ Women's Aid has provided assistance to many women in very difficult circumstances and provides refuges in "neutral" areas where both Protestant and Catholic women can find protection (Edgerton, 1987: 79). In this way, women involved in the women's movement have been "rabble rousers", challenging the gendered norms and the sectarian status quo in Northern Ireland.

makes the connections between the private and the public realms quite clear.³⁰ Given the historical links between the churches and the Republican and Unionist movements, legislation against domestic violence has been labelled by some as a "peril to family life" (McWilliams, 1993: 81). This has brought Women's Aid and other groups and individuals involved in anti-domestic violence work into conflict with the Protestant and Catholic churches, as well as the Republican and Unionist movements (McWilliams, 1993: 81).

Other events and organizations arose out of grass-roots community organizing. For instance, in 1980 a group of four community workers established a forum in which the women with whom they had been working could come together to share information. This very first Women's Information Day was such a success that it became an annual event. The agenda of the day was to inform women, which is a political activity, particularly in a society in which women are so often sidelined. As one of the organizers of the day explains, "The day was called Information Day, acknowledging the fact that information is a key ingredient for any individual or groups in the process of gaining confidence, or getting things done, or simply being heard. It is a source of power, especially for women who are so often isolated in their homes, where information is much harder to acquire..." (Kilmurray, 1987: 182). Nonetheless, many of the women involved in Women's Information Day did not consider their participation in the day to be "political", since they were dealing largely with "women's issues" (e.g. health, child-care, rent increases, social security cuts) which, in light of the "national question" in Northern Ireland, are not generally considered to be "political" issues (Kilmurray, 1987: 182). Contrary to the opinions of such women that their work for Women's Information Day is not political, many feminist organizations in Northern Ireland point out that the issues that the day deals with are political and the work women do through the Women's Information Day is

³⁰ For instance, membership in a paramilitary organization gives one access to weapons, prestige within one's community (or at least power due to the threat of the use of force) and a certain degree of protection from being prosecuted for domestic violence (Edgerton, 1987: 78-9). Men may use the power they wield as members of paramilitaries to control their partners and to prevent them from seeking help by threatening them or their relatives or friends (Edgerton, 1987: 79). Moreover, many assaulted women in Northern Ireland live in areas where the police are not welcome and in which neighbours frown on calling for police assistance (Edgerton, 1987: 79; Morgan, 2000: 6).

political.

Grass-roots, non-hierarchical groups such as the Women's Information Group provided a supportive political environment that benefited many women (McWilliams, 1995: 31). These non-hierarchical organizations provided fora in which women, especially unemployed and low-income women, could take control of their lives. Such organizing also highlighted for women the many kinds of oppression they faced and around which they could work. While some forms of oppression are experienced by all women, other forms of oppression do not affect all women or affect women to varying degrees (McWilliams, 1995: 31; Porter, 1997: 87-8; Rooney, 2000: 180). In Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, "...the oppression which women experience is often multiple, based on class, sex, religion, or ethnicity, or can affect women from the nationalist community more, while others affect Protestant and Catholic women equally" (McWilliams, 1995: 31).

Women's issues have become increasingly public, yet they have not, in the main, become dominant issues of concern within Northern Irish society and its major political parties (Edgerton, 1987: 80). Even with the emergence of many women's organizations and their hard work, women still face challenges in getting their voices heard and concerns addressed because "women's issues" are marginalized in various circles, denounced by many political parties as "red herrings", considered irrelevant because the women's movement was characterized as middle-class, or believed to be part of a "communist plot" (Kilmurray, 1987: 180). Still the dominant notion is that all dissension and identities other than Unionist/Republican; Protestant/Catholic; British/Irish must be subsumed for the greater good of the "cause" (McWilliams, 1993: 94-5).

The fact that most women's organizations are to be found in urban centres seems to give credence to the criticism that the women's movement in Northern Ireland is "elitist". Rural women who do not have their own mode of transportation would find it very difficult to become involved in urban-based organizations (Morgan & Fraser, 2000: 4). Poverty, however, has alienated many Catholic and Protestant women even further from mainstream government politics, and the women's movement has tried to channel this by organizing women around their sense of alienation and striving to develop a consciousness around the

exclusion women struggle against in Northern Ireland (McWilliams, 1995: 32). This shared sense of alienation has often made coalition-building much easier because women have a common grievance: their sense of marginalization within Northern Irish society.

Women's organizations set up in Northern Ireland by feminists in the late 1970s and early 1980s, were very important because they provided the support and services necessary to enable women to organize at the local, grass-roots level. These organizations did not necessarily claim to be feminist in ideology or goals; however, despite the apparent shrugging off of the feminist label, these groups have organized around issues that affect them, such as poverty, isolation, health concerns, housing, and education (Rooney, 1995a: 45). Such organizations (as well as self-identified feminists) have contributed to the women's movement in Northern Ireland as well as women's more broad-based political participation by providing avenues through which many women could and have gained the skills and expertise to organize (Rooney, 1995a: 45).

In the 1990s there was a shift within many women's organizations. Many women were no longer prepared to be involved indirectly or to have their contributions marginalized. They began insisting that their voices be heard at the level of government policy and also at the negotiating tables and the Peace Talks. In 1992, the Citizen's Inquiry³¹ provided a public forum for political discussions in Northern Ireland. The Inquiry received submissions from many women's groups about the particular situations that women were facing (McWilliams, 1995: 31). What came out of this inquiry was a voicing of political dissatisfaction and alienation within Protestant working-class communities, something that had been previously more frequently associated with Catholic communities, but was now shared by Protestant women's groups (McWilliams, 1995: 32).

There were over 400 community and women's groups in Northern Ireland by the early to mid-1990s, and a new dimension — a European dimension — was added through EC membership, which provided even more plurality to women's identities (McWilliams,

³¹ The Citizen's Inquiry was a part of Initiative '92 to provide a forum for citizen participation in discussions about peace and constitutional negotiations in Northern Ireland.

1995: 31). The Women's European Platform³² is another stage on which women can campaign and lobby both within and outside of Northern Ireland. Also, Northern Irish women can now appeal to European laws and courts (based on the European Convention on Human Rights) for rights which have been denied them (McWilliams, 1995: 31; Whitaker, 1998: 17).

In the mid- to late 1990s women's centres also began providing classes on politics and support groups for young women carried out by the Women into Politics Group. Some women's centres also began running classes on sex education for teens. The Shankill Women's Centre has a teen group that runs its own sex education and anti-drug programs and provides opportunities for young women to express their feelings and gain a sense of community (Rock, 1997: 72).

Based on the number of women's groups by the 1990s, it is clear that women have been actively politically engaged at the community level throughout the Troubles, meeting the immediate needs of their communities and also in some cases, working at bridging the sectarian divide that exists in Northern Ireland. However, this does not mean that the Northern Irish women's movement is a unified force. It was not and is not immune to the sectarian tensions in Northern Ireland, which have caused tensions among women's groups, nor has the Northern Irish women's movement been immune to the very common divisions within women's movements based on class, race, and sexual orientation.

Divisions within the women's movement

The sectarian divisions within Northern Irish society have inevitably spilled over into the women's movement, creating division within it around the issue of a unified Ireland and national identity, as well as the use of violence (Heenan, 1997: 90; Morgan & Fraser: 4; Rooney, 1992a: 479). This has resulted in the dissolution of many women's groups, although other women's groups, as a way to avoid dissolution, have agreed to

³² This group is connected to the European Women's Lobby. Its primary purpose is to campaign to raise awareness about the affects of European Union policies on women. The Women's European Platform also makes proposals to European Union bodies on women's issues in Northern Ireland (Fearon & McWilliams, 2000: 135).

have no official position on the constitutional question; the use of violence to achieve Republican or Unionist aims; or potentially divisive issues such as abortion (Heenan, 1999: 90; Roulston, 1997: 41; Ward, 1992: 497).

By the late 1970s there were divisions emerging within the women's movement based on what priorities should be assigned to feminist, socialist, or nationalist concerns and over what the main causes of women's oppression were in Northern Ireland (McWilliams, 1995: 26). Derry Women's Aid believed that women in both Republican and Unionist organizations experienced a subjugation of their concerns as women for the good of the greater "cause", while Women Against Imperialism (WAI)³³ advocated that women should focus on Republican and feminist issues. For WAI, the demands of Republican political prisoners, especially the women in Armagh prison, were of great importance (McWilliams, 1995: 26).

The women's movement has continued to be divided over several issues, as it was in the early 1900s. Women within the women's movement have not been able to overcome divisions around the "national question" and the sense of marginalization of various groups within the broader women's movement. Some feel that the women's movement is controlled by the middle classes and that the concerns of the working class are silenced, while others feel that the movement is controlled by Catholics, and many Protestants feel marginalized. However, many groups have made attempts to overcome such tensions, in some cases by focussing on one particular issue, and in other cases by agreeing to disagree and not having an "official" position on the "national question" or issues such as abortion.

One of the major divisions within the women's movement was about the perceived exclusivity of the movement. Some argue that the women's movement in Northern Ireland has been dominated by republican and Catholic women, and consequently, Protestant women have been silenced within the movement (McWilliams, 1995: 27). At a 1991 women's conference in Belfast, Protestant women expressed this sense of marginalization.

³³ Women Against Imperialism was a republican/feminist organization established in 1978 by a group of women who were angry at the lack of attention paid to women's issues within the mainstream Republican movement. The women of WAI considered themselves to be an autonomous women's movement within the broader Republican movement. The organization disbanded in 1981 owing to internal and external tensions (Loughran, 1986: 64; Evason, 1991: 28).

They stated that they would have liked to have been involved in the women's movement earlier but were unable to because of a sense of alienation they felt because they lacked a tradition of struggle and also because they held different political allegiances to those of the majority republican/Catholic women (McWilliams, 1995: 27). Others argued that, in fact, it has been republican women and lesbians, although actively involved in the movement, who have been silenced within the Northern Irish women's movement (McWilliams, 1995: 27).

There have also been divisions around the issues of Republicanism and Unionism, as well as how feminism fits in with the dominant nationalist ideologies in Northern Ireland. Debates and activities around feminism and Republicanism have mainly focused on support for or opposition to the armed struggle and less on women's access to contraception and abortion and men's responsibilities to share equally in the tasks of keeping a home and raising children (Edgerton, 1987: 80). Without the equal sharing of family and domestic responsibilities women often feel isolated and alone. One woman described her frustration at the lack of understanding shown her by her husband. She exclaimed: "He sits up there in the club, talking about when he was in Long Kesh, he doesn't give a damn about me. This bloody house is like Long Kesh to me, at least he had friends to talk to inside. I'm in here on my own staring at these four walls" (cited in Edgerton, 1987: 82).

Cross-community work and alliances have often been created based on the understanding that "politics" (e.g. the constitutional question) would be avoided (Rooney, 1995a: 45). Such work can be problematic at times, causing divisions among women. For instance, when Sinn Fein, the Brook Clinic (a provider of birth control information to youth) and Lesbian Line (an information and support line for lesbians) were excluded from a Belfast City Council reception on International Women's Day in 1993 by the Unionist-dominated City council because they were perceived to be supportive of the Republican cause (Rooney, 1995a: 45: 45), women from these groups protested their exclusion; other women were angered that those women protested their exclusion. One woman wrote that "In future...I would prefer to see the Sinn Fein women dropping their political tags and supporting the women's movement instead of expecting the women's

movement to support them" (Rooney, 1995a: 45). This brings to the fore the feminist axiom "the personal is political" (Rooney, 1995a: 45): women who supported Sinn Féin (or Unionist organizations) could no more be expected to drop their Republican (or Unionist) principles than women involved in the women's movement could be expected to drop their feminist principles. What complicated things still further was that in some cases, women claimed both Republican or Unionist and feminist principles and felt that they should not be made to choose between one or the other.

It is a testament to the women working in the Northern Irish women's movement that despite these divisions, the women's movement has not collapsed over the last three decades; rather, it continues to function, grow, and evolve, and through a multitude of women's community-based groups to meet the needs of specific groups of women. Such work has given women the skills, confidence, and knowledge to begin to tackle the issue of the paucity of the representation of women in Northern Ireland at the local and national levels of government — an issue of great importance.

Women and the Republican cause

The Republican cause in Ireland has a long legacy of both non-violent and armed resistance to British rule in Ireland. As chapter one illustrates, women have been involved in the Republican cause in Ireland for centuries. Therefore, it should not be surprising that women continued to be active in the Republican movement throughout the Troubles. The expected mode of participation for Catholic and republican women was as wives and mothers, and it was often not acceptable for women to participate in ways that occupied "public" space — unless, of course, a public role for women served the needs of the Republican cause, such as when most of the Republican male leadership was jailed through internment. As in the past, a woman's role within the Republican movement during the Troubles was to encourage and support their male loved ones in their Republican activities and/or to instill Republican values in her children. In an interview with Dowler about women's activities in the Republican cause, Liam, a one-time member of the IRA,

illustrates the gendered roles that abound within the IRA. He declares that "...the Ra³⁴ see being a mum as the most important role to the struggle" (Dowler, 1998: 10). Many women have participated in behind-the-scenes, supportive ways as "maidens" and "mothers", providing "safe-houses" for those under suspicion of "terrorist" activities (Dowler, 1998: 9).

Within the Republican cause, many women (not to mention the leadership of the Republican and Unionist causes) used the dominant gendered role of wife and mother in order to safely convey guns and messages in baby carriages past British soldiers (Dowler, 1998: 9). It was women's perceived powerlessness and innocence that enabled them to carry out such activities successfully, since women were not often stopped by the soldiers; they were not generally regarded as a threat by the security forces (Dowler, 1998: 9; Rooney, 2000: 178). Therefore, while drawing on that image of the innocent "maiden" or "mother", women also challenged it by adopting such an image in order to smuggle arms. Women were also involved in the Republican cause in more formally organized and larger-scale arms-smuggling operations and bombing campaigns; again women were often chosen because the dominant gendered notion of women as "maidens" and "mothers" carried with it the perception that women were not a threat to the security forces in Northern Ireland (Morgan, 1995: 3; Rooney, 1995b: 54).

Not all women accepted the dominant gendered role for women within the Republican movement and Catholic communities, and women's opposition to those roles was (and still is) also prevalent. However, women who have challenged the Republican movement from within (insisting that women's concerns must be addressed) have been branded "disloyal" and accused of weakening the "cause" which must remain united in order to succeed (Hackett, 1995: 113). Women challenged the dominant gendered roles in the Republican cause by taking part in "active service" in various paramilitaries (Morgan, 1995: 3). This challenged the dominant gendered norms because bearing arms was a man's role. Women were regarded as inherently peace-loving, due to their roles as mothers — the bearers of life. Una Gillispe, a Sinn Fein Councillor, illustrates the gendered notions

³⁴ Ra is slang for IRA.

pertaining to the Troubles that dominate Northern Irish society and also challenges such notions when she states: "I think that society thinks that women have to harden their souls to be part of the struggle. [But] we have as much to lose as men in a struggle like this. We are not political innocents" (Dowler, 1998: 10). Una disputes the notion that women in Northern Ireland are not interested in or are irrelevant to the political process in Northern Ireland.

Many women protested against the abuses their fathers, brothers, husbands, and boyfriends faced. For instance, Mary Nellis recalls how a group of women in Derry staged the first blanket protest in 1976 by standing outside a Catholic bishop's house wearing only blankets, in support of the political prisoners' refusal to wear prison uniforms as a protest against the removal of their "political status" (McCoy, 2000: 12; McWilliams, 1995: 23). This type of protest was an unusual one for women to engage in, as Mary Nellis explains, "because of the strict moral code and influence of the church...the women in Ireland, both North and South were generally regarded as the people who bore the children, cooked and cleaned, and their career was marriage...Women have fought their way to the front, and now that we are there, we won't be taking a back role again" (McWilliams, 1995: 23). Such women subverted the dominant gendered norms of women as passive and modest. Nellis clearly illustrates the impact that the dominant images of womanhood conveyed by the churches and Republican and Unionist movements has had on women in Northern Ireland. Often it spurred women on to challenge the strictures imposed on them by those dominant gendered norms.

Moreover, as "rabble rousers", women were central to monitoring who was arrested by the army and police, particularly throughout the years of internment. In fact, many women openly defied the soldiers and police in order to protect their loved ones and their communities. In an interview with Lorraine Dowler, Sean tells of his mother's participation in the Troubles and in her republican community.

Me ma Annie was the bravest person I knew. Braver than anyone in the Ra [IRA]. When the soldiers would come to round up men to be interned,

Annie would get into the back of the Saracens³⁵ and say 'you're not taking these boys today' and she'd push us out. The soldiers didn't know what to do. But they never stopped her, they would just leave and round up some other poor bastards (Dowler, 1998: 8).

Dowler points out that through her actions Annie was not only "...protecting her own son but also the 'sons of Ireland'", and that Annie's claim to the public sphere (like so many other women in Northern Ireland) has evolved through historical imagery (which remains prevalent today) of women as symbols of "nationalism, sacrifice and strength" (Dowler, 1998: 8). These women invoked the dominant Republican concept of womanhood — that of "maiden" or "mother", while also acting as "rabble rousers", challenging the notion that the "private" realm was the only appropriate sphere in which women could participate.

Women's organized participation in the Republican movement has been primarily through separate associations, such as the women's department of Sinn Féin, *Cumann na mBan* (the women's branch of the IRA, in existence since the early 1900s) and *Clár na mBan*³⁶ (Women's Agenda), which have been directed by the male-dominated movement. The priority for many republican women is the "national question". The core of the problem is the British presence in and policy towards Northern Ireland and particularly its republican community (Edgerton, 1987: 73). The communities in which these women work are often labelled "terrorist" by many unionists, as well as by the British and Irish governments (Rooney, 1992a: 482). As has been the case historically for many women in this camp, the lack of support for republican women's issues from the broader women's movement has been considered a betrayal (Rooney, 1992a: 483).

Women experienced (and often still do experience) discrimination based on their gender within the Republican cause, which often revolved around the drinking clubs where many important discussions about Republicanism (from which women were excluded) occurred. One woman, a member of the official IRA, described some of the methods of

³⁵ Saracens are bullet-proof paddy wagons and police vehicles.

³⁶ *Clár na mBan* is an organization comprising a broad grouping of nationalist women. It was created in 1992 in order to discuss "the future of women in the context of Irish national unity" (cited in Sales, 1997: 197).

discrimination against women and gender relations within the Republican movement as follows:

The myth that women were not to be involved in politics was maintained through a number of ways...politics often revolved around the pub and pub discussions; no woman would go into a pub on her own. Also the men found it beneficial to keep the wife in the dark about certain activities. The relationships between man and wife was very strained, the wife couldn't ask where he was going or what he was doing. This is one of the reasons why open public activity was welcomed by women, especially the anti-internment struggle, where for the most part it was our women who were involved, our men being in danger of being lifted (Edgerton, 1987: 74).

Women were marginalized by the gendered nature of the drinking clubs frequented by members of paramilitaries, as well as by the gendered songs many of their male comrades would sing, which often excluded any recognition of women's contributions to the armed struggle (McWilliams, 1995: 20). This gendered division within the Republican movement is further bolstered by wall murals, graffiti and songs of resistance that convey the image of the male soldier and the nurturing mother. Women's participation in the armed struggle is virtually nonexistent in the songs of resistance due to the predominant male imagery invoked in songs such as "Bold Fenian Men" and "Men of the IRA". Women who were active as "soldiers" were not often readily accepted as part of the paramilitaries, and their sexuality was frequently called into question by their male comrades-in-arms. Maureen, a one-time member of a paramilitary, comments. "These songs...are shite nonsense. Men write them and men sing them. They could care less about what the women have done...It is absolutely desperate it is, the bold Fenian Men. What of the bold Fenian Women?" (Dowler, 1998: 12). Peggy, another woman who saw active service in the IRA, concurs. "What of the 'Men in the IRA'...I was in the IRA but that song is not written about me" (Dowler, 1998: 12). Some republican women have picketed outside republican drinking clubs because of their discrimination against women. Such protests have been dismissed by many republican men as petty and taking the focus off the "real" struggle (Edgerton, 1987: 74) — a common reply within the male-dominated Republican movement

to many feminist demands within and outside of the Republican cause.

Through their active service as "soldiers" in paramilitaries, women such as Maureen and Peggy are redefining their roles as what Dowler terms "mothers/warriors". They were very concerned about their families while they were in prison, of course, but felt it was their duty to participate in the armed struggle, and many women would do it again if they had to (Dowler, 1998: 13). These women are proud of their contributions and resent the fact that men do not seem to feel the same sense of duty and commitment to contributing in the domestic sphere of housework and raising children. Women such as Maureen and Peggy want a different life for their children: they want to make Northern Ireland a more equitable, safer, fairer place (Dowler, 1998: 13). This desire is often the impetus for their participation in the armed Republican struggle.

However, Maureen, as a former combatant who was incarcerated for her activities, does not deem herself to be above those women who stayed home and were not "bearers of arms", but were "maidens" or "mothers" instead, taking on a supportive role behind the scenes. Maureen laments the difficulties her mother faced during the five years she was in prison. "My husband didn't have any work and was very busy in the pub each day, she had to take the kids and cook for him as well as come see me in the prison and put packages together for me. Life was easier for me in the prison than it was for my mum...he [her husband] doesn't know what 'Troubles' are" (Dowler, 1998: 12). Maureen continues, "I...want my mother and her friends to tell their stories about trying to keep everything going while their husbands and sons were in prison. I think we should have some of the women from the Shankill tell their stories too" (Dowler, 1998: 12). For Maureen it is important that women tell their stories — all women — not just republican women or those women who have been imprisoned or members of paramilitaries.

Many of the women involved in the paramilitaries have often been shunned by their family members (Edgerton, 1987: 82). Through their activities within a paramilitary organization, Maureen and Peggy and other women like them not only challenge the authority of the British government in Northern Ireland, but also the dominant masculine imagery of Irish Republicanism. While embracing what Dowler refers to as the

"mother/warrior" image, many women recognise that this combination of roles is anathema to many in Northern Ireland. Female soldiers often lose their identities as mothers within republican and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland (Dowler, 1998: 10). Maureen explains in an interview with Dowler that:

the people here definitely view us [women soldiers and prisoners] differently than they do the men. For instance, there is always a big party for a man when he gets out of prison. A hero's return. I didn't have such a welcome home. It was as if, 'Thank Jesus that's over, now I can get my dinner on the table'. They also look at us differently than other women. First off if we were in prison we weren't having wee ones which is what we were supposed to be doing...A lot of the men think I'm wild because I did my whack, because women aren't supposed to be doing the same thing that men are in this war (Dowler, 1998: 10).

Women also participated directly in the Republican cause and challenged dominant gendered norms as participants in the hunger strike and "no-wash" campaign of the early 1980s.³⁷ Thirty female prisoners participated in the "no-wash" campaign and three joined the hunger strike (Morgan, 1995: 3). These women did so as an act of solidarity with their male comrades-in-arms and also in response to the treatment they themselves received at the hands of male prison guards, as it was only women who were subjected to the degrading experience of full strip-searches (Gallagher, 1997: 56). This act of solidarity did not, however, translate into support for the female prisoners by the male prisoners. In fact, many men who were imprisoned downplayed the role of the female prisoners in the "no-wash" campaign and even tried to exclude them from participating in the hunger strike.

During the hunger strike and "no-wash" campaign women were also involved on the other side of the prison walls, demonstrating against the abuses their loved ones faced, and protesting against the sexual harassment the women prisoners experienced.

³⁷ In the early 1980s the British government revoked the "Special Prisoner Status" of prisoners arrested for alleged paramilitary activities. This meant that these prisoners could no longer wear their own clothes in prison; they had to wear the prison uniform. Also, it meant that they would no longer be kept separate from the rest of the prison population. The prisoners and their families protested the revoking of their special status, yet their protest did not result in a change in policy on the part of the British government. Consequently, some prisoners organized a hunger strike and refused to wear their prison uniforms; they only had their blankets with which to cover themselves. They also refused to bathe. The protest became known as the blanket and "no-wash" protest.

Additionally, women lobbied the British government to reach an agreement with the Republican prisoners to bring an end the hunger strike, and demanded that the "political status" of the prisoners concerned be reinstated (Morgan, 1995: 3).

Women Against Imperialism (WAI) was the force behind these demonstrations. WAI made connections between the demands of female Republican prisoners and feminist ideas. They framed the issue of strip-searching female political prisoners as an issue of violence against women, and therefore, an issue all women's groups should be concerned about (McWilliams, 1995: 28; Roulston, 1997: 52). Consequently, WAI organized a protest in front of the Armagh prison in support of the Republican women prisoners on International Women's Day in 1979 (Edgerton, 1987: 74; McWilliams, 1995: 26). However, this campaign did not receive the unqualified support of all those in the women's movement in Northern Ireland. Instead of being a unifying force, it was a source of tension in the broader women's movement, because it was seen by many women as a Republican protest. Many women, primarily Protestants, felt that they could not support the campaign on behalf of the Armagh prisoners; to do so would be tantamount to supporting the Republican cause, since most of those participating in the "no-wash" campaign were Republicans and Catholics (Evason, 1991: 19; Loughran, 1986: 66-68; McWilliams, 1995: 26-8; Rooney, 2000: 177; Roulston, 1997: 52). Consequently, this campaign divided Northern Irish women. The female prisoners and many women in WAI felt betrayed by those women who did not support them, and this drove a wedge between the WAI and the wider women's movement (Evason, 1991: 19; Loughran, 1986: 66-68; McWilliams, 1995: 26-8; Roulston, 1997: 52).

Women have also worked for change in other spheres within the mainstream Republican movement. Female members of Sinn Fein have lobbied since the 1970s to eradicate the discrimination they have faced within that organization (Edgerton, 1987: 75). As a result of such lobbying, the women's department of Sinn Fein was created in 1981, and at Sinn Fein's annual conference in 1983 a policy of positive discrimination was

adopted.³⁸ This policy of positive discrimination required that at least one quarter of the seats on the National Executive Committee of Sinn Fein be reserved for women, either by appointment or election. Women were not as successful in changing Sinn Fein's anti-abortion policy, although they did manage to get the word "totally" removed from the party's official anti-abortion policy (Edgerton, 1987: 75).³⁹ And by 1984, the annual conference of Sinn Fein had accepted the legalisation of birth control and the easing of divorce laws (Edgerton, 1987: 75). Women have also been active in the Republican cause at the party political level, serving as both MPs at Westminster (e.g. Bernadette Devlin) and councillors at the local level of government, although this was certainly not a large-scale mode of participation for Republican women (Miller et al, 1999: 272).

Women and the Unionist cause

Women have also been involved in the Unionist cause, but on a more limited level (Edgerton, 1987: 75). This is, in part, due to the fact that many unionist women benefited from the status and power their husbands, fathers, sons, or brothers achieved as members of the dominant political and economic force in Northern Ireland; hence, many unionist women were reluctant to or uninterested in challenging the status quo in Northern Irish society (Rooney, 2000: 169).⁴⁰ That having been said, unionist women have demonstrated on behalf of imprisoned loved ones as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and girlfriends — the "maidens" and "mothers" (Edgerton, 1987: 75). Occasionally unionist and republican women have come together to make their protests on behalf of their imprisoned relatives even more powerful in terms of numbers (Edgerton, 1987: 75).

³⁸ This policy was also adopted by Sinn Fein in terms of the candidates it fielded in elections and those they employed in local advice centres and offices (Edgerton, 1987: 75).

³⁹ In personal correspondence between the author and Dr. Katherine Side, it was noted that in 2000, Sinn Fein voted for the NIWC Amendment to refer the extension of the 1967 (UK) Abortion Act to the Health and Social Services Committee in Stormont the New Northern Irish Assembly.

⁴⁰ There is often great personal risk (physical violence, ostracism by family and/or friends, as well as being labelled a "traitor") attached to challenging the status quo (*The Times*, 1999: 19).

Within the Orange Order and the Unionist political parties, the role of the women's sections appears to be restricted to that of the traditional "supportive" role: organizing flea markets and refreshments and being cheerleaders and observers at the 12th of July celebrations (Edgerton, 1987: 76). Peter Robinson of the Democratic Unionist Party declared that "the Ulster woman...has seen herself very much as being in support of her man" (Fearon, 2001a: 5).⁴¹

Women's participation in the Unionist cause is also circumscribed by the lack of development of a feminist Unionist ideology. Feminism poses a challenge for many unionist women because historically, feminism has been identified with republican women and "liberation politics", which opposed the dominant Unionist ideology (Morgan, 1995: 5). Consequently, the establishment of formal, funded local women's groups is relatively recent within unionist working-class communities (Rooney, 1992a: 483), as many unionist women do not feel that feminism represents them or their experiences. Evason argues that this is in part because "doctrines of dominance and ascendancy cannot be reconciled with feminism" (cited in, 1992a: 483), while Rooney asserts that, "feminism is part of protest politics to which republicanism has laid claim" (Rooney, 1992a: 483), and that this has contributed to unionist women's reluctance to adopt the feminist label or to be identified as part of the women's movement (Rooney, 1992a: 483; Sales, 1997: 5).

However, there have been (and are) unionist women who have participated politically as "rabble rousers". Unionist women have taken the lead in particular circumstances and not merely acted as the "handmaidens" of the male-dominated Unionist movement. By the 1980s, within unionist communities (especially working-class unionist communities) there was a growing sense of alienation and fear of betrayal by the British government and Conservative Party policies regarding social and welfare services. Consequently, unionist women began to lobby for better housing conditions and education opportunities for young people (McCoy, 2000: 13). In 1985 a group of unionist women went directly to the Secretary of State and his Minister to express their concerns about the

⁴¹ In 1998 Unionist women supported the men of the Orange Order in their attempt to march at Drumcree to mark the 12th of July (Rooney, 2000: 168). It was also noted by Porter that many women (not just unionist women) "...cling on to their traditional role as their only sanctioned identity" (Porter, 1998b: 27).

Anglo-Irish Agreement, which were not being presented by their elected representatives who were boycotting the meeting (McWilliams, 1995: 29). Moreover, unionist women have participated in loyalist paramilitary operations, although certainly on a smaller scale than republican women (Morgan, 1995: 3).

In addition, in spite of the barriers that confront women in party politics, female candidates have been put forward at elections by various Unionist parties. However, as Miller et al note, political parties have often fielded their female candidates in ridings they know they will be unlikely to win (Miller et al, 1996: 158). Thus, the question remains whether there is a genuine attempt on the part of the Unionist leadership to increase the number of women involved in the cause at the level of elected representation.

Nevertheless, unionist women are becoming increasingly vocal in spite of the many barriers they have faced, and particular segments within the Unionist cause are working to open up party political space to women, as well as challenge the dominant Unionist ideology on particular issues (Purvis, 1999: 8-9). For instance, the Progressive Unionist Party and individuals such as Dawn Purvis have adopted positions that challenge the more dominant Ulster Unionist Party's policy on issues. Compared to the others in the grouping of Unionist political parties, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) has a history of support from a sizable number of unionist women (Purvis, 1999: 8-9; *Women's News*, 2000: 7). Purvis points to the internal structures and policies of the party which are aimed at encouraging women's participation at all levels as the primary reason for this (*Women's News*, 2000: 7). Purvis explains that the PUP has a Women's Commission that

...was primarily set up to look at ways of building confidence of women within the party. Training is our priority and we aim to address the emotional and practical barriers that stop women from going into political life. We try to deal with practical matters such as childcare and knowledge based skills to empower women (*Women's News*, 2000: 7).

Both the PUP and Dawn Purvis call for childcare provision to be guaranteed in Northern Ireland as a universal human right, as well as a strengthening of the law in relation to rape and all forms of sexual assault; the PUP also supports increased services for survivors of

domestic and sexual violence (Fearon, 2001a: 2-3; *Women's News*, 2000: 7). Moreover, the PUP has publicly supported the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, making it the only political party in Northern Ireland to do so (*Women's News*, 2000: 7). Dawn Purvis' views on the abortion issue challenge the dominant Unionist position on the issue and also challenge the dominant view of all Unionist women as conservative and "handmaidens" of the male-dominated Unionist movement. Purvis argues that "it is the potent mix of religion and politics in a traditionalist society that has blocked the act. Abortion is also the symptom of the failure of other agencies such as education and health. It is a failure to instigate adequate levels of sex education and contraceptive provision that leads to the symptom of abortion" (*Women's News*, 2000: 7). Purvis puts forth the PUP position on abortion thus: "The PUP adopts a holistic approach to the problem [abortion] and that is to get all the agencies working effectively together. We are not pro-abortionists per se. What we are is pro-choice...this issue is not suddenly going to disappear because we send it across the water" (*Women's News*, 2000: 7). In addition to the abortion issue, the PUP's Women's Commission has contributed to the drafting of the new Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, and the Commission states in its policy document that "Women's rights are human rights and any new Bill of rights should include...safeguards against the discrimination of women in all aspects and spheres of human life" (*Women's News*, 2000: 7).

Women and party politics

From Northern Ireland's birth until now, the number of women involved in party politics has been minimal. It has been documented that only thirty-seven women ever held a seat in the fifty-one year history of the Stormont parliament, and there have been only three female Northern Ireland MPs in Westminster since 1972 — the last one sat in the 1970-1974 parliament, which was prorogued by Westminster in 1972 (McCoy, 2000: 5; Miller et al, 1999: 272; Miller et al, 1996: 8; Wilford, 1996: 44).⁴² What is more, currently there

⁴² In the United Kingdom, women make up 9.2% of MPs, while 12% of the Dail Eireann (the Irish parliament) is comprised of women, and in Scotland the number of MPs is 9.7% (Fearon, 2001b: 7).

are no Northern Irish women MPs at Westminster, nor are there any female Northern Irish Members of European Parliament (MEPs) (McCoy, 2000: 5; Rooney, 2000: 165). Also, three district [city or municipal] councils in Northern Ireland do not have any female members, and within all twenty-six district councils in Northern Ireland women account for only fifteen percent of total members (McCoy, 2000: 5; Rooney, 2000: 165). That is not to say that such women's contributions have been minimal, but it is clear that most women have participated in the Troubles in ways other than through party politics and public office. This lack of women's participation in party politics can be traced to gendered roles within Northern Ireland, where the public sphere and party politics have been defined and constructed as "male space" (Dowler, 1998: 5). One woman explained women's "crucial" role to be the party political machine in this way: "We are allowed to sell the ballots and make the tea but not the speech" (Rooney, 1997: 539). Women have been very active in the rank and file of party politics but are not represented at the executive, decision-making level (McCoy, 2000: 5). Consequently, many women have been excluded from and also chosen not to be involved in this way throughout the Troubles. In addition, party politics has not interested many women because it is seen as "lots of talk and no action" and "male space" that is not welcoming to women (Dowler, 1998; Miller et al, 1996; Wilford, 1996; Wilford et al, 1993). Furthermore, many women view party politics of any kind as representing the interests of the middle class. As Dawn Purvis notes, she originally considered the Unionists as "'the fur coat brigade', living in suburbia with no inkling about the reality of community politics" (*Women's News*, 2000: 6).

It is the lack of women's participation in the party political realm, frequently considered the only mode of political involvement, that has contributed to the notion that women are politically apathetic figures, "victims" of the Troubles with no interest in politics; furthermore, it ignores the many women in small "p" political activities such as grass-roots involvement, philanthropy, and voluntary and peace work (Wilford, 2001: 3). The lack of women involved in this sphere is often seen as a sign of disinterest in politics and is therefore used by many to justify women's exclusion from party politics. Nevertheless, some women, such as Bernadette Devlin and Monica McWilliams have

chosen party politics as the avenue through which they are politically active and both have been involved in various ways throughout the Troubles. Bernadette Devlin, for example, was elected to Westminster as an MP from Northern Ireland in 1969. She was also a member of WAI in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Monica McWilliams, who has been involved at the academic and policy level in anti-domestic violence work for decades, is one of the founders of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC)⁴³ which came into being in 1995. She was also one of two NIWC representatives at the 1995-1996 round of peace talks.

From the early 1970s to the mid 1990s, women's participation in party politics was rather limited, as noted earlier. However, most political parties have begun putting forward female candidates in increasing numbers at elections, although a number of women candidates report that they have received very little support from their party during campaigning and were aware that they were placed as the candidates in challenging or no-hope ridings (Miller et al, 1996: 158; Ward, 1997: 154). Hence, it almost appears to be a matter of formality and an attempt to be politically correct, rather than a genuine effort to narrow the gender gap (Ward, 1997: 154). Moreover, women involved in party politics are often deemed a "special breed", implicitly signifying that women in this realm must be prepared to behave more like men (Rooney, 1997: 541).

In the mid-1990s, some women began to organize around the 1995-1996 Peace Talks and the exclusion of women from those talks. They organized the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), which fought for women to have a place at those talks (to

⁴³ The NIWC's election platform advocated creating solutions to the Troubles, inclusivity, focusing on women's concerns, human rights, equality, and devising new ways of thinking within Northern Irish society as well as building bridges across the sectarian divide. It also called for a strengthening of the peace process, tackling poverty and improving the quality of social services (Fearon & McWilliams, 2000: 121-2; Porter, 1998b: 29; Ward, 1997: 158).

which it contributed a great deal)⁴⁴ and is the only political party in Northern Ireland that represents the spectrum of political views from feminist to non-feminist, militant to pacifist, unionist to republican, rural to urban, middle-class and working-class, and those who avoid all such labels making it unique among Northern Irish political parties (Porter, 1998b: 29; Rafter, 1997: 6; Rooney, 1997: 548). The NIWC won two seats at the all party talks (filled by Monica McWilliams and Pearl Sagar), which put women's issues as political issues legitimately on the agenda for the first time (Fearon & McWilliams, 2000: 124; Rooney, 1997: 548). The dominant patriarchal culture reacted to this "incursion" into male political space.

The NIWC has met with criticism though, being labelled a "hen party" of "merely stupid women" (Porter, 1998b: 30). Among other insults, the Democratic Unionist Party called the NIWC a group of "feckless" women "with limited intellect" (Rafter, 1997: 6). Dawn Purvis, the DUP's spokesperson on equality, noted the "horrendous" treatment the members of the NIWC endured from male counterparts at those talks (*Women's News*, 2000: 7). Peter Robinson, of the Democratic Unionist Party, attempted to minimise the credibility of the NIWC candidates by declaring that: "As far as the those individuals that I have seen in the Women's Coalition [are concerned], they haven't been at the forefront of the battle when shots were being fired or when the constitution of Northern Ireland was in peril. They are not representative of the decent Ulster women that I speak to" (Fearon, 2001b: 6). Many others openly questioned whether they would be "tough enough" for the "hard-nosed" negotiations (Fearon, 2001b: 6). These reactions are not surprising, given the history of the perceptions of women's political participation and the dominant notions of Irish womanhood. It is also probably an indication of its strength and success, as energy is

⁴⁴ The NIWC were instrumental in ending the stalemate and getting the talks going by meeting separately with Unionist and Sinn Féin delegates helping to persuade them to enter the talks (Rafter, 1997: 6). In addition, the NIWC was successful in negotiating various constitutional elements of the agreement regarding "conflict resolution", policing, prisoner, human rights, equality, and victims' rights issues. Moreover, the NIWC's notion of a civic forum (to raise awareness of and encourage greater involvement in both political parties and the political process) to function alongside the elected Assembly was also included in the final Good Friday Agreement, as well as a clause affirming the right of all women to full and equal participation in political life in Northern Ireland (Fearon & McWilliams, 2000: 130; McWilliams, 1999: 14).

not often expended criticizing something that is not feared.

Women have become increasingly active at the level of party politics, particularly since the mid-1990s with the emergence of the NIWC. This is due in part to the opening up of the public political arena to women and an increasing number of women demanding such space. In the words of Monica McWilliams, "It will be the case...that when men and women sit down to design the constitution for a New Ireland (if there will ever be such a thing), then the women's movement will have ensured its right to be included. The role of women will be central and not marginal in such discussions. Women have endured too much for that to happen again" (cited in Fearon, 1999: 1).

Women are involved in the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), Sinn Fein, the Alliance Party and the Progressive Unionist Party, yet are less active in the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) as elected representatives⁴⁵ and in the decision-making bodies of the DUP and UUP (Rock, 1997: 71). This is due to the history of the parties and the roles that women have been given and demanded (or not) within each party (Rooney, 1997: 540; Rooney, 2000: 166).

Moreover, women, through much of their political involvement, including their participation in the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, have provided examples of people in Northern Ireland bridging the sectarian divide. However, others feel that the NIWC has made very little impact politically, excepting its contribution to increasing the presence and exposure of women in party politics (Ward, 1997: 159). There is still a lot to be done, and women have much to contribute to the construction of a new Northern Ireland. Women are now demanding that their voices be heard. Monica McWilliams stated that "women have a long experience of being excluded from the political system. But we are not content to sit back and let ourselves be left out anymore" (cited in Rafter, 1997: 6). Also, the Northern

⁴⁵ Within the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) of 1999, the Ulster Unionist Party has two women elected, which accounts for seven percent of its total share of the Assembly; the Social Democratic and Labour Party has three women elected (or 13 percent of its total share of the Assembly); the Democratic Unionist Party has one woman elected, or five percent of its total share of seats in Stormont; Sinn Fein has five women elected, or twenty-eight percent of its share of the Assembly; the Alliance has one woman, or seventeen percent of its total share of representatives in Stormont; the United Kingdom Unionist Party and Progressive Unionist Party have no women elected to the NIA; the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition has two women, which accounts for one hundred percent of its total share of the NIA (Rooney, 2000: 167).

Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) issued a policy paper which stated that women were "particularly conscious that they have not been included to date and wish to have this injustice redressed" (Fearon & McWilliams, 2000: 119). The NIWEP paper went on to note "...the active and integral roles women played in the policy development process and argued that this contribution should be more clearly acknowledged by the mainstream party political process" (Fearon & McWilliams, 2000: 119). Women were excluded from the 1994-1995 peace talks, yet they insisted on being present at the 1995-1996 talks primarily through the NIWC.⁴⁶ They had (and have) much to offer. Monica McWilliams observes that,

The...Forum on Peace and Reconciliation typifies the exclusion of women the decision-making process, in line with the historical precedents in Ireland, both North and South. As a result of their struggles for peace and justice, in both their domestic and political relationships, women now want to be participatory partners in decision-making for peace [sic]; by crossing the traditional boundaries and drawing women from different political traditions into their movements. Women from mainly working-class areas have set the major precedents for the "politics of transition" now taking place. Learning to listen, to share, and to respect each other's identities have been their guiding principles (McWilliams, 1995: 34).

During the women's struggle in 1995 to be heard and present at the peace talks, Bernadette Devlin (McAliskey) exclaimed: "I did not devote the entirety of my adult life [to reconstructing Northern Ireland] to see it reduced to a game of dice by half-a-dozen men" (cited in Connolly, 1995: 124). Devlin (McAliskey) emphasised that the form of the 1994-1995 peace process would not resolve the conflict because it was exclusive, and therefore undemocratic. She contrasted the 1994-1995 male-dominated peace process with feminism, which she characterized as "...a whole way of working, a whole way of thinking" (cited in Connolly, 1995: 124). Women must be given space in the public domain of party politics, leadership positions in trade unions, as well as be able to continue to be active in the ways in which they have always and most commonly been active historically. Such roles must be honoured, not marginalized.

⁴⁶ In 1995, the Women into Politics program was launched in order to encourage women's participation in the party political realm (McCoy, 2000: 17).

Women's involvement throughout the Troubles has not translated into increased formal political power and representation for women. "These diverse ethnographies of women's lives in the midst of conflict...give little evidence ...that through their efforts women have gained any greater share in the making of public policy or even of decisions in areas which affect their own lives as women" (Callaway, 1987: 228). This seems to support the radical perspective that women tend to be more involved politically in a variety of ways and through numerous and interconnected organizations and/or "causes", instead of through conventional electoral, governmental, and judicial channels (Norris, 1991; 61).

More must be done, but women's participation in the 1995-96 peace talks is a beginning for women to be present and heard at the peace talks and in the process of creating a Northern Ireland free of sectarian violence and divisiveness. Women must be included in any constitutional negotiations not only because of their marginalization within Northern Irish society historically, but also because it is their right as citizens of Northern Ireland (and the majority of the population) to be heard and to contribute to the construction of a "new" Northern Ireland. This participation of women in capital "P" politics is key, as this is where decisions are made about legislation that can have dramatic effects on women's lives; without such representation, women's activist and community work may not reach its full potential (Porter, 1998a: 50). Furthermore, in this time of negotiation and debate about peace and a "new" Northern Ireland free of political and sectarian violence, it is vital that women are at the table and that their voices are heard.

Women and community involvement

Women have a history of organizing in their community⁴⁷ — ..."organis[ing] births, wakes, street parties, the rota borrowing and lending of food and money, minding children and so on" (Rooney, 1997: 53-4). This history has meant that community work is seen by the Republican and Unionist causes and the Protestant and Catholic churches as a

⁴⁷ For the purposes of this thesis, community is defined as a group of people organized in pursuit of a common cause, or residing together. Their basis for organizing may be religion, politics, social class, all of the above, or a desire to bridge the gulfs that the aforementioned have caused in Northern Ireland.

legitimate sphere in which women can be active and participate and women are recognized as integral to such work (Heenan, 1997: 90; McCoy, 2000: 3; Rooney, 1992a: 477). Moreover, community work is something which many women consider to be their "territory" (Rooney, 1997: 538). With so many of their men "on the run" or in jail, women became the linchpins of their communities (McWilliams, 1995: 23), although due to the patriarchal nature of Northern Irish society, this crucial and valuable work has often been ignored and marginalized as "women's work". With the emergence of the Troubles, "the role of mother and housewife acquired new emphasis and a political dimension: for individual women when men took on greater political and military duties outside the home, leaving them to provide for families on their own; and for women collectively when their maternal role was extended to provide food and welfare for the community" (Callaway, 1987: 221). With a broader definition of politics and political activity, however, women's activities in this realm are uncovered (Porter, 1998a, 50). To use Christiansen-Ruffman's concept, women's political culture and political activities are brought out of the closet with a broader definition of politics and political activity (Christiansen-Ruffman, 1995). Due to a lack of female representation in either the Westminster or European parliaments, women turned to activism within the community and voluntary sectors as a way to be involved and effect some influence over policies that affect their families, communities, and themselves (McCoy, 2000: 7; McWilliams, 1995: 30). As Wilford

notes:

"...women have carved out a...space between the orthodox public realm of politics and the private sphere of home and family. This space, in which a...range of voluntary and community organisations flourish, is largely characterised by activity offering self-help for women, plugging the gaps of an inadequate welfare regime. It demonstrates that politics is in reality a seamless robe rather than a separate sphere and is testimony to the venerable adage 'the personal is political' (Wilford, 2001: 3).

McWilliams concurs, stating that:

Within the 'democratic deficit' of Northern Ireland, this is where the real political activism has taken place and where some of the most talented political women can be found. Rather than pursue the more official road of

electoral politics, a road from which many of them have been alienated because of its uncompromising and stagnant style of politics, they have chosen instead to become the effective agents of change in their work with women at the more grass-roots level. From these positions they speak with a more dynamic voice than the overwhelmingly male representatives in the formal political arena at the national and local levels (McWilliams, 1995: 30).

Women have participated in grass-roots and community groups in ways that have reinforced traditional gender roles, as supportive mothers, wives, daughters and sisters — "maidens" and "mothers". Much of women's community work has focused on the specific needs of their communities, rather than developing cross-community understandings (Heenan, 1999: 91). This is due in large part to the segregated nature of communities in Northern Ireland. Most women's groups are entirely (or almost entirely) Catholic or Protestant. For the majority of women, women's groups have been instrumental in enabling them to become involved in their communities by providing them with confidence, knowledge, and resources such as childcare facilities (Heenan, 1999: 92). Women provided food and shelter for those who were "on-the-run", under threat of being apprehended by the British military for suspicion of "terrorist" activities, and they also initiated the "bin-lid" protests as warnings to fugitives that the British military was carrying out house-raids in the area, as previously explained. The women on the Derrbeg estate in Newry were labelled the "petticoat brigade" for such actions (Edgerton, 1987: 65).

In 1976, four women in Derry formed the Relatives' Action Committee (RAC). This initiative was prompted by the withdrawal of "political status" for prisoners and fear that with this move the government would attempt to cut the prisoners' relatives off from the rest of their communities through ideological isolation (McWilliams, 1995: 23). One mother remembers the benefits of such a group.

It was wonderful to meet together each week, and know that you were talking to a group of women who understood what you were going through. Mind you, don't get the impression that we met to support each other and that's it, 'cos it wasn't like that. We met to work and campaign too, and that was the basis of the group. It's true we helped each other in all sorts of ways, but our strength developed by working together (McWilliams, 1995: 23).

This recollection demonstrates clearly that these women, whether they acknowledged it or not, had a political goal in mind and were politically involved in the Troubles. Women in the Relatives' Action Committees were very creative in their demonstration techniques. The women of the Belfast Relatives' Action Group lobbied their cause in London by chaining themselves to rails outside Downing Street and using street theatre and wall murals to get their message across (McWilliams, 1995: 24). In this way, the women involved in the Relatives' Action Committees became experienced political activists, starting political protests that evolved into mass demonstrations and worldwide speaking tours (McWilliams, 1995: 24).

Women's community work was most often grass-roots, community-based, and meant to meet the practical and everyday needs of women as defined by them and others in those in their communities (Heenan, 1997: 90; Fearon, 2001a: 2).⁴⁸ For many women, the local or community-based organizations are "woman and child friendly" places where women believe that they can make an impact within their own communities, and carry out work which benefits their own lives too (Rooney, 1997: 538, 546). Women involved in community work have organized workshops and conferences (often cross-community in composition) about politics in general, the Troubles, and women's specific political concerns faced by themselves and their communities, such as housing, health, domestic violence, and education issues, as well as access to safe abortion procedures and birth control (Rooney, 1992a: 477).

Additionally, female novelists, playwrights, poets, songwriters, actors, screenwriters, and filmmakers have explored the issues of political violence, inadequate housing, unemployment, abortion, domestic violence, women's experiences as single parents, and women's roles in the armed struggle (Sullivan, 1999: 2, 3, 13-5). In this way, many female artists have brought forth the issues of women's experiences of the Troubles which have not frequently been documented and also, in many cases, have challenged the

⁴⁸ Many women involved in such work do not see their activities as political participation. They make a distinction between big "P" politics and small "p" politics and they argue that their activities have more to do with people than politics (Rooney & Woods, 1992b: 5) — "the former is divisive and could harm relationships and group work. The latter includes work around social security legislation, education (Rooney, 1997: 545).

dominant gendered norms in Northern Irish society. For instance, Roisin McAliskey wrote an open letter from prison about her experiences of incarceration. In it she urges the reformation of the penal system in Northern Ireland (Sullivan, 1999: 13). Also, the Charabanc Theatre Company highlighted the treatment of those who are incarcerated as political prisoners in many of its productions about the day-to-day struggles that women in Northern Ireland faced throughout the Troubles (Sullivan, 1999: 15). Relatedly, Pat Murphy and Anne Crilly (both filmmakers) have examined the relations and tensions between feminism and Republicanism and Unionism and also women's experiences of incarceration (Sullivan, 1999: 101)

Housing has been an issue around which women have organized since the emergence of the Troubles, and women have continued to be involved in housing issues, demanding improved public housing, both in terms of housing conditions and access (Heenan, 1997: 90; McCandless, 1999: 19). Women were central to the successful 1978 campaign against the squalid living conditions in the Turf Lodge housing estate in West Belfast (Heenan, 1997: 90).⁴⁹ Women were also central figures in the campaign that called for the demolition of the Divis flats in West Belfast in the 1980s (Heenan, 1997: 90). Moreover, many women have fought against the destruction of working-class residential areas to make way for "smarter" housing developments. As an example, one group of women formed the Ormeau Road Women's Group (the first women's group in Northern Ireland) to lobby for improved housing in their area (Edgerton, 1987: 71-2; Magee, 1992: 19; McWilliams, 1995: 22; Roulston, 1997: 46). In addition, women were at the forefront of many community-driven campaigns against plans to destroy many working-class communities in order to redevelop particular areas (Edgerton, 1987: 73). Such actions often involved women from both Catholic and Protestant communities.

Due to the segregated nature of residential areas in Northern Ireland, the result was that most of these centres focused on the needs of one group of women (Catholic or

⁴⁹ Their protest became known as the Turf Lodge campaign and came about as a result of the suicide of one young mother of four who was distraught at her inability to improve the living conditions of her family. The participants in the campaign lobbied the public housing authority over the living conditions there and after an eighteen-month protest the housing authority promised to provide 250 new housing units (McWilliams, 1995: 25).

Protestant), depending on where the centre or organization was located, rather than concentrating on cross-community projects and work (Cockburn, 1998: 61). Cross-community initiatives were further made difficult due to the challenges regarding cross-community contact in a polarized community, such as the practical problems of locating an acceptable neutral venue, not knowing how to establish the first contact, and limited resources (Heenan, 1997: 91; Morgan, 2000: 7).

That being said, some women did work together on cross-community initiatives, such as anti-internment campaigns and working for peace in Northern Ireland. In fact, it has been women's groups that have been most successful in developing cross-community actions and coalitions. However, this unity has often been achieved by avoiding instead of tackling the issues that divide them (Morgan, 1995: 5; Sales, 1997: 54). For example, in 1985 both Catholic and Protestant women went to London to lobby their MPs not to support the Social Security bill, which would have had detrimental effects on their claims for welfare assistance (Heenan, 1997: 91; McWilliams, 1995: 23, 30). Women encountered difficulties in getting their MPs interested in the issue, but managed to lobby non-Northern Irish MPs. This experience illustrated to many Protestant women for the first time that their MPs were not interested in their problems. Consequently, many Protestant women became less reluctant about criticizing their elected officials, which has become a key component of Protestant activity in the women's movement in Ulster (McWilliams, 1995: 31). Some women began to form tactical alliances and cross-community alliances to combat sectarian funding decisions made by various local councils that were dominated by Unionists, and these alliances have become networks of mutual support and lobbying power (McCoy, 2000: 10; Rooney, 1995a: 45).⁵⁰

The Falls Road Curfew campaign was perhaps one of the more powerful examples of cross-community actions that women carried out; it was also an example of women's participation within their communities (Callaway, 1987: 224; Evason, 1991: 48; McWilliams, 1995: 21). On July 1, 1970, the British army imposed a curfew on the

⁵⁰ For example, in the early 1990s women from all across Belfast and from both sides of the sectarian divide joined forces to demonstrate against the planned closure of the Falls Women's Centre and the "anti-women ethos" of the Belfast City Council (Hackett, 1995: 112; Ward, 1992: 497).

Catholic Falls Road residential area, preventing food vans that delivered bread and milk from entering the Lower Falls Road. Consequently, women from the immediate surrounding area gathered milk and bread and marched down the Falls Road delivering the goods to those living on the street. By July 3, 1970, the anti-Curfew campaign had garnered the support of 3,000 women, who assisted in the gathering and delivery of the food. Two days later the Curfew was lifted and never reinstated. It was the activities of these women that broke the Falls Road Curfew and the anti-Curfew campaign clearly illustrates the connections working-class women felt for one another and each others' families (Edgerton, 1987: 64; Evason, 1991: 48; McWilliams, 1995: 21-2). The women involved in the campaign saw demonstrating against the Curfew as their role and responsibility as wives and mothers (Magee, 1992: 19; Roulston, 1997: 45). The fact that working-class women, both Protestant and Catholic, worked together on this campaign gave some people hope that women could bring about an end to the Troubles. This notion was further strengthened by various campaigns for peace, such as Women for Peace, which were based on the gendered characteristics and notions of women as nurturers, and therefore proponents of non-violence.

The "Mothers of Belfast" action is another illustration of women's cross-community organizing. In 1971 women organized to protest against the withdrawal of free milk from schools, becoming known as "the Mothers of Belfast".⁵¹ Two hundred women and children, both Catholics and Protestants, turned up to their demonstration at Belfast City Hall (Edgerton, 1987: 71; Evason, 1991: 49). These "Mothers of Belfast" lobbied politicians at Stormont and staged public demonstrations, marching through the streets of Belfast (Evason, 1991: 49; McCoy, 2000: 13). However, certain elements of society claimed that "the Mothers of Belfast" was a Catholic conspiracy, since Catholics generally had more children than Protestants and would, therefore, benefit the most from the success of the campaign. This assertion dampened the support the campaign received from

⁵¹ This group developed from the activities of women from the Ormeau Road, who decided to get together and write protest letters to the newspapers and picket City Hall over the removal of milk from schools, and is another example of cross-community action (Edgerton, 1987: 71; Evason, 1991: 49).

Protestant women, since many of them feared being seen to support the Republican cause (Edgerton, 1987: 71). That is not to say that the campaign, which had also gained the support of trade unions, various political parties, the Child Poverty Action Group, and the Irish National Teacher's Association, lost all of its support within Protestant communities, but when the British government implemented internment in August 1971, support for "the Mothers of Belfast" declined as many women turned their energies to protesting internment (Edgerton, 1987: 72).

The alliances formed across the sectarian divide, Rooney argues, do not mean that women were (or are) igniting or denying the division among them, but illustrates the benefits and practicality of such alliances — they allowed women to make some progress on the issues that concerned them (Rooney, 1992a: 478). Thus, it should not be surprising that women were also active in community groups concerned with issues of health care, housing, and employment, as well as in creating youth centres where young people could spend time after school in the hope of preventing them from turning to sectarian violence and joining paramilitaries out of boredom. Women have often been the backbone of such community work, initiating and administering community organizations from youth clubs to trade unions (Heenan, 1997: 90; McCoy, 2000: 3; McDonough, 2000: 2; Ward, 1997: 152).

Geraldine O'Regan and May Blood exemplify the type of community work many women have undertaken in Northern Ireland. Geraldine O'Regan was a young mother in 1969-70 when she noticed that many youth in her community were committing petty crimes such as theft, damaging property, and joy-riding. She decided she wanted to do something about it. Consequently, she started a community centre for youth in order for them to have somewhere and some way to pass their time. She has been active in her community working with youth ever since (Rock, 1997: 71). May Blood (a Protestant) has been involved in the Troubles since the conflict began. She was one of the few female union leaders in Northern Ireland in the later 1960s and early 1970s, working in one of the Belfast textile factories. For her, grass-roots work is paramount and she believes that women have a central role to play in the political future of Northern Ireland. Hence, she

works at the grass-roots level, endeavouring to increase women's understanding of politics and the political system and encouraging them to vote (Rock, 1997: 71). However, women frequently were excluded from the positions of leadership or decision-making involved in such work (Heenan, 1997: 90; Kilmurray, 1987: 180).

Still other women were (and are) central to the integrated school movement — creating schools which both Roman Catholic and Protestant children can attend (McCoy, 2000: 19). Such schools are an attempt to foster cross-denominational understanding in the youth to create a climate in which both communities can live peacefully together, although relatively few school-age children (about 4%)⁵² are currently enrolled in integrated schools.

Protestant women have been involved in the Troubles at the community-based level in a wide variety of ways, yet particularly in the early years of the Troubles, they faced the difficulty of challenging a state with which they identified to a larger degree than Catholic women. Dawn Purvis notes that unionists were discouraged from complaining about the deprivations they faced because "their" government was in power, so how could they complain (*Women's News*, 2000: 6). This was a barrier to many Protestant women participating in particular causes, such as the withdrawal of free milk in schools, since it appeared to many that such protests were allied with Republicanism (Evason, 1991: 11).⁵³

The community-based work in which so many women were instrumental taught women tactics and skills they could and would put into use in the women's movement and other campaigns geared to issues specifically concerning women, such as abortion, birth control and domestic violence (McWilliams, 1995: 23). Women formed support groups, organized the welfare needs of their communities, and carried out public demonstrations (Callaway, 1987: 215). They created both hierarchical and non-hierarchical organizations to meet their immediate and long-term goals, and lobbied their communities for their support. This is true of women's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, community work,

⁵² This information was provided to the author in personal correspondence with Dr. Katherine Side.

⁵³ Further research might focus on the ways in which these Republican/Unionist divisions were created by patriarchal institutions such as the media, political parties, the Churches to undermine women's political threat.

voluntary work, and women's activities in the peace movements (Callaway, 1987: 225). Women have primarily been involved in community work out of concern for family members. For many women, such participation has been positive and has contributed to the slowly expanding public and political roles for women in Northern Ireland, as well as made many women more self-confident and independent (Kilmurray, 1987: 179). Women have also been central to the housing rights movement, the development of child-care, and various community-development initiatives that were fundamental to the voluntary and community sector from the 1960s to the present day as an alternative to capital "P" politics (McCandless, 1999: 19). Women's participation in grass-roots and non-party politics illustrates that they have not just been having "private" discussions over coffee; rather, over the past thirty years in particular women have been actively shaping the political process of their country and have also developed the knowledge and skills required to enter the party political arena (McCandless, 1999: 19).⁵⁴ Moreover, the community work women have carried out during the Troubles has served as an important "prerequisite" for the future cross-community work required to bring an end to the Troubles (Heenan, 1997: 94); many women have built up a network of contacts and developed a bond of trust across the sectarian divide.

Women and Peace

Peace building, to a large degree, was (is) considered by many in Northern Ireland, including many women, to be "women's work". Since women were (are) the "nurturers" and "life-givers" they were (are) portrayed as having a "natural" aversion to the destruction of life through war and armed conflict. As Rooney notes, "the burden of peacemaking is clearly linked to the role of mother and nurturer and seen as appropriate to women" (Rooney, 1992a: 476). Women are "...applauded for being uninterested in politics; for prioritising the 'personal' over the conflict ridden 'political'...the underlying assumption of

⁵⁴ Such work by women was recognized by the Opsahl Commission (part of Initiative '92). The Commission noted: "While there is no simple relationship between women's political participation and the resolution of the conflict, the experience of women's involvement in local community groups suggests that they could have an important contribution to make in the search for a political and constitutional settlement" (Ward, 1997: 152).

this work is that women are apart *from* the conflict rather than a part *of* it" (Rooney, 1992a: 476). This is where dominant images of womanhood are prevalent, in that women are deemed to be "nurturing" and "caring" and skilled at building bridges across sectarian divides based on personal relationships — all seen to be necessary components of peace work.

However, many women have also used this gendered notion to justify their activities. For instance, in workshops and conferences on peace-building women have drawn on women's roles as mothers. One woman stated that: "...most women in Northern Ireland would want there to be peace, because I think women generally have more desire for that. I think...women in particular are like that because of their maternal instincts and because of a protective thing in them for their children" (cited in Percy & Kremer, 1995: 211). Ann Carr, a spokesperson for Women Together for Peace, asserted that women should use their skills as peacemakers to influence the peace process, since "women are less aggressive. They are more likely to seek agreement. They should exert their influence over men" (Ward, 1997: 157). While Carr clearly envisions women having a role in the peace process, it is an indirect role (exerting influence over men) and implies that men are the ones who have the direct role to play in negotiating a peace settlement. This gendered notion of women also fed into the dominant image of women conveyed within Catholic and Protestant and loyalist and republican communities. Nevertheless, in the process of doing such work many women have challenged such dominant gendered roles by demanding a public presence and recognition, and also have been drawing the connections between domestic violence and the political violence in Northern Ireland and opposing the punishment beatings and shootings carried out by both Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries against those whom they considered to be "traitors".

Given this gendered role related to peace work, it should not be surprising that throughout the Troubles women have been integral to various campaigns for peace (Morgan: 2000: 4). In 1972, a group called Women for Peace was initiated by Margaret Dougherty. This group played an important part in securing a ceasefire in August 1972 that lasted for thirteen days. However, it was also women who were often the most critical of

these campaigns for peace. Many republican women voiced some of the most openly critical opinions of Women for Peace (Morgan, 1995: 4).

Another peace initiative in which women were central was the work of Peace Women (which became Peace People) of the mid-1970s and early 1980s. Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams formed Peace Women in 1976 after the tragic death of Corrigan's sister and three of her sister's children (McWilliams, 1995: 28; Ward, 1997: 153).⁵⁵ Peace People seemed to provide non-violent and nonsectarian solutions to the Troubles. The group held marches every weekend across Northern Ireland and England from August until the end of December 1976, and in 1977 Corrigan and Williams won the Nobel Peace Prize for their work (Ward, 1997: 153). However, by this time, the movement was beginning to fall apart due to internal dissension and external criticism (McWilliams, 1995: 28). Peace People was criticized for asking members of communities to "inform" the police of any paramilitary activities within their communities and for raising the issue of peace without connecting it to notions of justice (McWilliams, 1995: 28; Ward, 1997: 153). Peace People never did regain its initial strength; Mairead Corrigan-Maguire has remained part of the organization, while Betty Williams withdrew from Peace People in 1980 (McWilliams, 1995: 28).

Other women were involved in peace work through community groups that attempted to foster cross-cultural understanding, such as integrated schools and youth centres or programs and provided women and youth with fora in which to discuss issues of common concern, in addition to opportunities to form alliances and understandings across the sectarian divide. Women Together is one such organization (McWilliams, 1995: 29). Other groups have started with the aim of providing mutual support to the victims on both sides of the Troubles (McWilliams, 1995: 29).

It was through the peace movement(s) that people began to envision a different way

⁵⁵ Williams heard about the deaths and organized a petition in her community that garnered 6,000 signatures. When Corrigan heard about this petition she invited Williams to meet with her (McWilliams, 1995: 28). After their meeting, they announced the formation of Peace Women and a demonstration they were planning to hold, to which 10,000 women came (Ward, 1997: 153). The media identified them as Peace Women, since initially its membership was all women, but the name was changed to Peace People when men joined the organization.

of solving the conflict, according to Scilla McLean (Callaway, 1987: 224). She writes that

individuals, women particularly, whose lives until the movement began had never led them to articulate their opinions and desires publicly, learned to assert themselves, express their wishes, and taste active involvement. However reduced, in numbers and scope, it is a living exercise in community democracy, in the midst of a situation of extraordinary violence, renowned for entrenched positions and pathological refusal to negotiate (cited in Callaway, 1987: 225).

The failure of these generalized peace organizations caused great disillusionment among those involved and throughout the 1980s, peace activities shifted to community development work, such as the integrated school movement, inter-church groups, and the provision of local services and employment opportunities (Morgan, 1995: 4; Roulston, 1997: 56).

In the early 1990s instances of Republican and Unionist paramilitary violence, such as the bombing in Warrington and the Shankill and Greysteele massacres of 1993 created a reinvigorated groundswell of grass-roots campaigns against paramilitary activities and violence (McWilliams, 1995: 28). For example, Women Together for Peace organized demonstrations when the IRA ended its ceasefire in 1996; women also took the lead in forming the Community Dialogue in 1996 (McCoy, 2000: 11). In addition, Rachel Ward points out that women's community and grass-roots work and lobbying has provided much needed pressure from below to those political parties involved in the peace process, encouraging them to continue negotiating rather than resorting to violence again, although it is difficult to measure to what extent this pressure has been effective (Ward, 1997: 155).

During the cease fire of 1994, women were vital to a wide range of public consultations about the political future of Northern Ireland, including appearances on local radio programs and organizing and participating in meetings for local groups at community centres, local and regional conferences and workshops, and larger public gatherings (Morgan, 1995: 4; Roulston, 1997: 56). In 1994, a conference was organized in Belfast on International Women's Day by a republican women's organization, *Clár na mBan* (Women's Agenda) under the theme of *Women's Agenda for Peace*, which gave women a

chance to openly discuss and debate their concerns and sense of political isolation at being excluded from the 1994 round of peace talks (Connolly, 1995: 112-3; Hackett, 1995: 112; McWilliams, 1995: 32; Rooney, 1994: 28-9; Rooney, 2000: 171; Ward, 1997: 152). The conference attendees spoke with strength and conviction. After their years of political involvement and activist work, they were not willing to give politicians at the peace talks their unconditional support (McWilliams, 1995: 32). Oonagh Marron opened the conference with the words: "...it is time to send a message to those negotiating on our behalf that this time around our support will not be unconditional; never again will we collude with the exclusion of people, with the denial of their rights" (Connolly, 1999: 120). She then declared that, "it is up to us in the women's movement to build an undeniable force, to maintain the pressure that will ensure that when the politicians talk of peace they mean peace with justice and when they talk about guarantees, they mean a guarantee of equality for all the citizens of this country" (McWilliams, 1995: 32). Another woman stated, "I have not fought for the last twenty-five years for a future that represents one class, one sex, one political group, one culture and denies all other truths" (Rooney, 1995a: 47). *Women's Agenda for Peace* submitted a document (intended for debate, rather than as a blueprint) to the Ireland Forum for Peace and Conciliation that called for a new constitution in Ireland that reflected the diversity of the population of Ireland and represented all Irish equally; this document also demanded new democratic structures in order to ensure equal participation of all in Northern Ireland and a guaranteed social security system in order to alleviate poverty (Hackett, 1995: 115).⁵⁶ The republican women who organized *Women's Agenda for Peace* urged unionist women to set out their platforms for peace too, which they began to do under the guidance of a Protestant women's group (Rooney, 1995a: 47; Rooney, 1995b: 51). Women were now stepping onto the public stage in a more formal manner and they were claiming their place at the negotiating table.

⁵⁶ This proposal called for a "demilitarized society" and "economic equality", "children's rights" and an end to discrimination based on physical ability and sexual orientation (Rooney, 1995b: 52).

Conclusion

Women have been involved politically throughout the Troubles from 1969 to the present day in a variety of ways. Such involvement has emerged from and mirrored many of the ways women have participated politically throughout Irish history in both north and the south. Moreover, women's involvement has been shaped by historical images of womanhood. The evidence of women's involvement in the Troubles runs contrary to many accounts, in which women have either been portrayed as passive victims or their roles have been ignored completely, thereby giving the impression that women are either uninterested in or irrelevant to the political and historical development of Northern Ireland.

Women have participated politically throughout the Troubles in supportive, behind-the-scenes ways as "maidens" and/or "mothers", in public on behalf of male relations, in community groups and grass-roots actions, and through political parties and participating directly in the armed struggle as "rabble rousers". As has occurred throughout the history of Ireland, women's specific concerns were marginalized in the interests of maintaining unity within the "cause", whether Republican or Unionist. Those women who were not prepared to let their concerns as women take a back seat were roundly condemned by other women and men in the mainstream Republican and Unionist causes for being traitors to their "nation", just as those women who highlighted women's issues criticized women who allied themselves more directly with the Republican or Unionist causes as betraying their sex. It was the nationalist and suffrage struggle of the early 1900s revisited.

The majority of women in the early years of the Troubles became involved out of what they perceived to be necessity, on behalf of male loved ones, or their children. Many women saw their political participation as an extension of their role within the family, as "maidens" and "mothers". It was necessary for them to protest in public about the ill-treatment and imprisonment of male relatives because no one else would if they did not (Callaway, 1987: 224). However, many women ("rabble rousers") also participated actively and publicly challenged the dominant perception that politics was the domain of men and the public realm. Women brought politics into the private domain of family and the domestic sphere and vice versa, and justified their involvement based on women's

gendered role as "guardians" of family and the home. This role was extended by many women to providing food for and looking after the welfare of their communities, not just their own immediate families (Callaway, 1987: 221). Women's activities have been crucial to the survival of their communities during a time of socio-political turmoil (the Troubles). Women provided emotional, physical and financial support to those within their communities. Some women established and operated community centres for women and children in the communities in which they lived. Others continued the work of incarcerated loved ones. Still others provided safe-houses for "fugitives" and devised warning systems to maintain the safety of those "fugitives". Many women also organized self-help groups for women, thus providing support networks for women across Northern Ireland. All of this work maintained the day-to-day activities of families and communities. Moreover, the activities which many women carried out within their communities served to increase their leadership skills and confidence. Furthermore, the community work women have and do carry out has resulted in women building bridges across the sectarian divide, further the development of an identity for these women outside of their individual family unit, as well as raise their consciousnesses around issues affecting them as women.

McWilliams sums up nicely the role women have played throughout the Troubles.

From the civil rights campaigns of the sixties, to the community projects and women's centres in the mid-1970s and 1980s, women in Northern Ireland have played a central role in the development of alternative political structures. Women have created safe, yet subversive, spaces where they can organise together around issues of concern which cross the sectarian divide all the while "agreeing to disagree" on the more divisive ones (McWilliams, 1995: 32).

Women in Northern Ireland have come a long way from the 1960s when they chanted "One Man, One Vote". By 1996 women had a legitimate place at the political peace talks and had contributed greatly to the discussions that would culminate in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) — but there is still a long way to go.

Conclusion

Conclusion

An understanding of history is vital, as it provides a society or community (whether it be a group that lives in the same geographical area, or shares a common purpose or goal) with a record of its evolution and taken for granted assumptions about its structure and culture. History can be used as guide for charting the future. Without a sense of one's history at the individual, community or national level, one cannot learn from the past.

Ireland is an island rich with history. Its past of conquest, colonialism and competing national identities has shaped the recent history of Northern Ireland in a particularly brutal way. For the last thirty-two years, Northern Ireland has been engulfed in an armed conflict known as the Troubles based on differing and rather narrow nationalistic aspirations — one is either British (read also Protestant and unionist) or Irish (read also Catholic and republican). All other forms of identity must be subsumed in the interest of the "cause", which has meant that women's concerns and rights have been marginalized for the sake of the "greater good" of Unionism or Republicanism (Wilford, 1996; 44). The lack of representation of women in the formal political arena only compounds this marginalization which Northern Irish women face (Wilford, 1996; 44). Consequently, it may appear at first glance that women have not and do not participate politically to any great degree in Northern Ireland. As the following quote shows, that notion is prevalent in interpretations of the Troubles: "The Troubles transformed the roles of women, providing them with new opportunities. Women are becoming players in the society" (Rock, 1997: 71). This quote sums up well a dominant notion — that women have been politically inactive and are only now *becoming* political players. I would argue that women in Northern Ireland have always been political players, but their political activities have not always been recognized in Northern Ireland or in the telling of histories.

Women's political participation throughout the Troubles is only now beginning to be uncovered. The history of women's political participation in Northern Ireland goes back centuries, even millennia, and has shaped women's involvement in the Troubles, as "maidens" and "mothers" reinforcing dominant gendered norms, as "rabble rousers" challenging such gendered norms, and in some instances both challenging and reinforcing

such norms. Women's political involvement has also been shaped by historically and socially constructed notions of politics, political participation, and womanhood, conveyed by Protestant and Catholic churches and the Unionist and Republican causes. Women were regarded as the "bearers of life and culture", to borrow the phrase from Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989). This has placed women in Northern Ireland (as elsewhere) firmly in the private realm of home and child-rearing. However, this was not the only way Northern Irish women have been politically active. This research has shown that contrary to dominant accounts, women have been politically active in Northern Ireland in a variety of ways and are not politically agentless, passive, politically apathetic "victims" of history.

I have argued that many of the ways women have participated throughout the Troubles are political by using a broader definition of politics and political participation. The definition of political participation I have employed in this paper recognizes the connections between the "private" and "public" spheres. It conceives of activities such as rearing children; providing behind the scenes support; and voluntary; community and philanthropic work (as well as the more conventional notion of modes of political participation — that of participation in a political party, or involvement in government as ways many women have participated politically.

Women responded practically to the dilemmas presented to them with the emergence of the Troubles. They organized with other women and wielded power that many women had never been able to exercise before. As women's private and personal lives became politicized through the Troubles, women's political activities and awareness grew immensely (Callaway, 1987: 214). It was from their politicized personal lives that women's modes of political action grew and developed to respond to their immediate needs and concerns resulting from the Troubles (Callaway, 1987: 215). Women, long observed and portrayed as powerless, "...enter[ed] into 'negotiations' of power" as soon as they began to participate in even the most minor of ways throughout the Troubles (Callaway, 1987: 215).

From this research it is clear that the "private" and "public" spheres are socially created and intricately related. Women's roles and experiences in the private sphere (as

mothers, wives and sisters) have been the impetus for many women's participation in the public realm as community workers, philanthropic agents, educators, activists, and members of paramilitaries and political parties. Thus, expanded notions of political space are more inclusive and better able to capture women's traditional community involvement. However, such expanded notions can also be problematic because activism "...does not automatically translate into electoral representation and decision-making...community altruism is not political representation. Without such representation, the efficacy of activism is not maximized" (Porter, 1998a: 50). Hence, while women's activism and lobbying work is important and must be recognized and continue, women must also not ignore the issue of the representation of women in government and party politics, for without such representation, their lobbying and activist efforts may not achieve their full potential. Lobbying and activism can (and do) contribute greatly to the shaping of economic, social, and environmental policy, but those lobbying efforts are further strengthened by having representation in the governmental and civil service spheres as well.

Through their various modes of political participation Northern Irish women have been exposed to a multitude of new experiences, that challenged women's roles in the domestic sphere significantly, since for the first time, many women were regularly involved in events and activities outside the house, such as meetings and demonstrations, often without their children (Edgerton, 1987: 69).

Despite the increasingly public political participation of women as "rabble rousers" in campaigns around internment, prisoners' rights, housing, and milk in schools, such activities and work did not result in an appreciable shift in women's perceptions about themselves, nor their role in society, nor did it drastically alter the perceptions of women's roles within Northern Irish society more broadly (Callaway, 1987: 214). This seems to confirm the findings of Sarvasy and Siim, who point out that women's participation and contributions during times of wars, revolutions, independence struggles, and social upheaval have not often translated into permanent social change (Sarvasy & Siim, 1994: 249). They note that:

They [women] fight side by side with men. They [women] gain their public voices through forms of collective self-determination in the politics of everyday life and in the organisations of civil society. Yet the advances made [by women] during periods of dramatic transition are usually temporary (Sarvasy & Siim, 1994: 249).

What is required is a concerted effort by all parties involved (Northern Irish women and men, as well as the representatives of Northern Ireland, Britain, and the Republic of Ireland at the peace talks) to make sure that women do not continue to lose the advances they often make during times of social upheaval.

Women's political involvement served to build confidence, skills, and experience in lobbying, activist, and leadership roles, so that by the mid-1990s women were demanding that their voices be heard at the negotiating table. This is a beginning. Nevertheless, there is a long way to go and still much more to uncover, as much of women's political participation is difficult to assess because it occurs informally and is not always recorded. Moreover, often women themselves do not consider their activities to be political. Women often dismiss or downplay the importance of their work and do not consider it to be publicly significant, thus marginalizing their own efforts. Also, much remains to be discovered about women's involvement in paramilitaries, especially the Unionist paramilitaries. Finally, there is still a great deal to learn about lesbian women's political involvement, as well as the political participation of women of racial minorities in Northern Ireland.

It is my hope that the enthusiasm and energy women had in the mid-1990s when they demanded representation at peace talks as members of political parties and elected representatives will continue through this period of uncertainty and the various parties attempt to negotiate a settlement to the violence of the last thirty-two years. It is my hope that this time women will not be left out of the negotiations and that their voices will be heard and not marginalized; women have endured too much for that. Finally, I hope that this research may contribute if only a little to the restoring of women to the history of Northern Ireland and the accounts of the Troubles.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Mary Butler's, "Some Suggestions as to how Irishwomen may help the Irish Language Movement" (taken from Gaelic League Pamphlet No. 6, Dublin 1901):

1. Realise what it means to be an Irishwoman and make others realise what it means by being Irish in fact as well as in name.
2. Make the home atmosphere Irish.
3. Make the social atmosphere Irish.
4. Speak Irish if you know it, especially in the home circle, and if you have no knowledge of the language, set about acquiring it at once. If you only know a little speak that little.
5. Insist on children learning to speak, read and write Irish.
6. Insist on school authorities giving pupils the benefit of a thoroughly Irish education.
7. Use Irish at the family prayers.
8. Give Irish names to children.
9. Visit Irish speaking districts. If Irish people who are students of the language go among their Irish-speaking fellow country people in the right spirit and instill the right principles in them, they will be conferring a benefit on the people, and the people will in return confer a benefit on them by imparting their native knowledge of the spoken language to them.
10. Encourage Irish music and song.
11. Support Irish publications and literature.
12. Employ Irish-speaking servants whenever possible.
13. Join the Gaelic League and induce others to do so.
14. Spread the light among your acquaintances.
15. Consistently support everything Irish and consistently withhold your support from everything un-Irish.

(Luddy, Maria. *Women in Ireland: 1800-1918*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1995, pp. 299-300)

Appendix 2

The objectives of *Inghinidhe na hEireann* :

I. To encourage the study of Gaelic, of Irish literature, history, music, and art, especially amongst the young, by organising and teaching of classes for the above subjects.

II. To support and popularise Irish manufactures.

III. To discourage the reading and circulation of low English literature, the singing of English songs, the attending of vulgar English entertainments, theatres and music halls, and to combat in every way English influence, which is doing so much injury to the artistic taste and refinement of the Irish people.

IV. To form a fund called the National Purposes Fund for the furtherance of the above objects.

(Luddy, Maria. *Women in Ireland: 1800-1918*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1995, pp. 300; Ward, Margaret. *In their Own Voice*. Dublin: Attic Press, 1995b, pp.19)

Rules of membership for *Inghinidhe na hEireann* :

I. The *Inghinidhe na hEireann*, remembering that they are all workers in the same holy cause, pledge themselves to mutual help and support, and to stand loyally by one another.

II. Each member must adopt a Gaelic name by which she shall be known in the association.

III. Each member shall pledge herself to aid in extending and popularising Gaelic as a spoken tongue, and to advance the Irish language movement by every means in her power.

IV. Each member shall pledge herself to support Irish manufactures by using as far as possible Irish made goods in her household and dress.

(Luddy, Maria. *Women in Ireland: 1800-1918*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1995, pp. 300-1)

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