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FROM “VICTORIAN” TO “UNMANAGEABLE”: RADICAL IRISH WOMEN IN
THE REVOLUTIONARY YEARS, 1900–1923

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts
History

by
Kayla Marie Cook
May 2022

Accepted by:
Dr. Michael Silvestri, Committee Chair
Dr. Archana Venkatesh
Dr. Tara Wood

ABSTRACT

During the turbulent decades of the early twentieth century, women participated increasingly in the fight for Irish independence, with this level of participation increasing significantly following the 1913 Dublin Lockout, a labor strike which lasted about five months from late summer of 1913 into the early weeks of 1914. Though this was not a nationalist demonstration, many of the participants, both men and women, were also members of various nationalist organizations and would later go on to participate in the various nationalist uprisings in the following years. Historian Fearghal McGarry in particular argues that the Lockout served as an inciting force for the radicalization of women, citing Irish suffragette, nationalist, and labor activist Helena Molony's belief that activist women prior to the Lockout held more Victorian beliefs, but became more radical afterward. It is my belief that McGarry's assessment is one-dimensional and neglects to take into account the nuance and intersectionality of women's activism in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Thus, building on the work of Senia Pašeta, who discussed the overlap between activist women in the suffrage and nationalist movements, adding labor women to this discussion, I have attempted to show that women were not in fact radicalized following the Lockout, but participated in violent acts of protest across the three movements well before the outbreak of violence within the nationalist movement. This thesis is also intended as a contribution to the still-growing study of Irish women, and to the process of historical recovery, as women's participation in the nationalist movement in particular was often omitted from historical literature prior to Second Wave Feminism.

DEDICATION

To Sidney J., for her moral support and help along the way.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research and writing often seem like lonely tasks, but in my experience writing this thesis, I have found that it is—or can be—a community effort. As a result, I would like to offer my humble thanks to the numerous people who have helped me along the way.

I would first like to thank the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Michael Silvestri, Dr. Tara Wood, and Dr. Archana Venkatesh. Without their support, feedback, and flexibility, I would not have been able to complete the project contained within this document, and for that I am grateful.

Further thanks are due to Dr. Douglas Seefeldt. Though no longer a member of my committee, I have learned much from him over the past two years which I will carry with me into my future as a historian, and I am grateful for his consistent willingness to offer help and guidance.

I also offer my gratitude to fellow graduate students Amani Altwam and Carole Thomas for taking this journey with me over the last two years and for sharing their own struggles and successes with me, reminding me that I am not alone. I will miss the community we forged together, and I wish you success as we all continue forward down our own paths.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family. Thank you to Chris, Joe, and Emerson, for being the three best parents I could have ever asked for, and for their unwavering support and love. Thank you to my grandparents, Wayne and Frances, for their encouragement and questions, and for being supportive of my decision to study history (even if they thought I would have made a better engineer or doctor); and to my grandfather Bob, whose interest in history I seem to have inherited. Finally, thank you to my brother, David, whose perseverance in the face of his own struggles and successes on his journey to reach his own goals has reminded to keep dreaming big, and given me hope for our generation and the future.

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INTRODUCTION

On August 26, 1913, the event which would come to be known as the Dublin Lockout began. Members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU), mostly tram drivers and conductors, went on strike, abandoning their vehicles in an act of protest against their employer, the Catholic nationalist William Martin Murphy of the Dublin United Transport Company. Murphy had ordered workers to renounce all union memberships and ties or face unemployment, and these workers, led by socialist activist James Larkin, refused. They demanded safer working conditions and rights for employees, including the right to unionize. As a result, Murphy—and later other employers as well—fired suspected union members and locked strikers out of their workplaces for going against orders, as well as for the disruptions they caused not only to public transport across Dublin, but to relative order across the city as well.

Over the next five months, the strike amassed more than twenty thousand participants and supporters from a variety of social, economic, and employment backgrounds. The Lockout continued into the early months of 1914 and only ended when workers and their families began to face hardships like starvation and eviction. Union funds and supplies dwindled, and starting in January, strikers decided it would likely benefit them more to return to work, or, if they had been blacklisted by their employers, to join the British Army in order to earn money, rather than continue their efforts toward labor reform. Despite the strike's apparent failure and the heavy damages the ITGWU

sustained, the level of unification among unionized workers across Dublin was substantial. Twenty thousand strikers managed to stay afloat for close to five months, and in doing so, their cause gained both national and international attention, and the damage the strike caused to business in Dublin eventually led to the general acceptance of workers' unions.

Also significant was the level of participation by women. When the women of Jacob's Biscuit Factory went on strike, close to one thousand one hundred women joined the effort. By the end of this strike, Rosie Hackett—at the time a member of the ITGWU and later a founder of the Irish Women's Workers Union (IWWU)—was said to have organized an estimated three thousand women who had been employed at Jacob's in joining the strike.¹ Two years later, during the Lockout, women's unions like the IWWU also played a major role in keeping strikers fed and their rent paid, and also gave many women the opportunity to participate in public activism in more visible roles than they had before. Concurrently, some supportive women with no union memberships also played active roles in the strike effort, both witnessing and experiencing the struggle firsthand, whether because they had a male family member who was on strike, or through volunteer work in places like poorhouses or soup kitchens.²

¹ Mark Lawler, "In the Lead-Up to the Lockout," *The Irish Times*, accessed March 10, 2022, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/in-the-lead-up-to-the-lockout-1.1496474#:~:text=However%2C%20the%20exploitation%20of%20women,in%20support%20for%20their%20colleagues.>

² Ibid; and Sineád McCoole, "'Unladylike and Disreputable': Women Activists, 1900–1916" in *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists, 1900–1923* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2003): 25.

The Dublin Lockout is also recognized by some as a major turning point in the history of twentieth century Irish nationalism which marked the shift from cultural to militant nationalism.³ It was during this period that the Irish Citizen Army, a militant organization which would join numerous others in the fight for independence, was formed, and afterwards, others began to form as well, leading up to the 1916 Easter Rising and the many armed conflicts which would follow over the next few years. It is important to note, however, that militancy and the threat of violence was not new to the Lockout or post-Lockout period; prior to this point, numerous radical nationalist organizations were already in existence, including the Irish Volunteers and the Ulster Volunteer Force, which had formed in response to the issue of Home Rule.

Unlike McGarry, Irish women's historian Sineád McCooile acknowledges the importance of the responses to the recent 1912 Home Rule bill in the increase in militant nationalism, notes that after the Lockout, women's participation in various forms of activism increased significantly, and nationalist women's organizations in particular saw a major shift from a cultural scope to a more militant one.⁴ Yet, while claiming to frame her narrative loosely around "activist women," McCooile neglects to acknowledge that prior to the radicalization of women's roles in the nationalist movement, women were already engaged in radical forms of activism outside of the nationalist movement and did

³ Fearghal McGarry, "'Into the Sun': Helena Molony's Lost Revolution," in *The Dublin Lockout 1913: New Perspectives on Class War and Its Legacy*, ed. Pádraig Yeates and Conor McNamara (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2017). In this chapter, McGarry uses statements by labor and nationalist activist Helena Molony to support the idea of an "increasing willingness to use violence," especially among women, thus arguing that women were radicalized following the Dublin Lockout.

⁴ Sineád McCooile, "'Unladylike and Disreputable': Women Activists, 1900–1916," in *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists, 1900–1923* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2003): 25.

not suddenly increasingly adopt violence along with militant nationalism, as both she and McGarry seem to believe. Thus, McCoole's assessment is a somewhat narrow one, which neglects to fully examine the roles of women at large and the full extent of their agency as members of Irish society. In many ways, it also seems unfairly optimistic, making it seem like the women of the nationalist movement found enfranchisement and liberation through their association with nationalist men alone, when in fact, many men were not as accepting of women and enthusiastic about women's equality as contemporary feminist accounts or popular memory would have them be.

Women were not "on equal terms" within the various militant nationalist organizations of the revolutionary period, as nationalist and feminist activist Helena Molony would go on to say, nor did "men fighting for freedom voluntarily [include] women" in every case, as Irish suffragette Hanna Sheehy Skeffington claimed.⁵ Instead, they occupied a much more nuanced set of positions within the movement, as well as without, based not only on their sex, but on the socioeconomic classes they occupied as well, and, further, on their organizational memberships and social connections as well.

It is true that prior to the Dublin Lockout, many nationalist women acted primarily as educators, and that after the Lockout, women began to join and found militant organizations like the mixed-gender Irish Citizen Army or the women-only Cumann na mBan. But this is not the full story, and does not take into account the women

⁵ Helena Molony, quoted in Fearghal McGarry, "'Into the Sun': Helena Molony's Lost Revolution," in *The Dublin Lockout 1913: New Perspectives on Class War & its Legacy*, ed. Conor McNamara and Pádraig Yeates (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2017): 110; and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, quoted in Sadhbh Walsh, "The Sisterhood of the Easter Rising," *The New York Times*, accessed February 11, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/17/opinion/the-sisterhood-of-the-easter-rising.html>.

who were simultaneously active participants in the labor and suffrage movements, wherein they faced violence and engaged in extreme forms of protest independent of their relatively “Victorian” roles as teachers and pamphleteers during the Gaelic Revival.

Also often neglected is the disenfranchisement of women which began less than a decade after Ireland became an independent republic. Historians of revolutionary women in Ireland are quick to celebrate the enfranchisement of women and to celebrate the feminist men who welcomed women as equals, thus making this possible. They are much more hesitant to acknowledge that many were not quite as liberal in their positions on women’s equality, thus making it possible for Taoiseach Éamon de Valera, who had been a key figure in the nationalist movement prior to independence, Fianna Fáil, the nationalist party which he represented, and the Catholic Church to garner support for the passing of legislature which would place restrictions on the rights of women in Ireland, such as the 1932 marriage bar, which disallowed women from working in the public sector after marriage, the legal criminalization of contraception in 1935, and the banning of divorce in 1937. Though all adult women were constitutionally granted full citizens’ rights, including the right to vote, in 1937, Article 41.2.2 of this Constitution stated that the government would ensure that all mothers stay home with their children rather than “engage in labour to neglect the duties of the home.”⁶ Many of these restrictions were not overturned until the 1970s, and in some extreme cases, the 1990s.

⁶ BUNREACT NA hÉIREANN (Constitution of Ireland), article 41, section 2, subsection 2.

Thus, with this thesis, I attempt to not only reintegrate women into the historical narrative of the Irish revolutionary period as historians have been attempting to do over the last few decades, but also to offer greater depth and nuance to the understanding of the roles of women in this period which have often been neglected by historians. My first chapter focuses on the still growing historiography surrounding women in Ireland during the revolutionary years; then, in the following three chapters I present a chronological analysis of some of the roles, experiences, and perceptions of women in the nationalist movement, with the Dublin Lockout of 1913 as the central moment. For this analysis, I draw evidence primarily from surviving reprinted pamphlets and leaflets, newsletters, posters, proclamations and speeches, newspaper articles and columns, diary entries, and memoirs and autobiographies. This was, however, not without its challenges, as many original documents were destroyed or discarded soon after their distribution to keep them from falling into the hands of the authorities or the opposing sides. I also faced the unique challenge of using only digital or reproduced print sources because, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, travel to the archives was nearly impossible.

The first of these chapters is a discussion of activist women—both suffragettes and nationalist women—from the turn of the twentieth century until 1913. The second chapter is about women in the labor movement leading up to and during the Lockout, specifically between 1911, when the Irish Women’s Workers Union was founded, and 1914, when the Lockout officially ended, as a means of determining how much of a shift there was in the level of radicalism among women specifically during this period. The

third and final chapter focuses on the participation of nationalist and suffragist women in the armed conflicts following the Lockout between 1916 and 1923.

Primarily, I argue against the theory posited by Fearghal McGarry that women showed an “increasing willingness to use violence” as a means of achieving their goals.⁷ Instead, I intend to show ways in which women engaged in and experienced violence during acts of protest in the suffrage and labor movements prior to the outbreak of violence within the nationalist movement in 1916.

⁷ Fearghal McGarry, “‘Into the Sun’: Helena Molony’s Lost Revolution,” in *The Dublin Lockout 1913: New Perspectives on Class War & Its Legacy*, ed. Conor McNamara and Pádraig Yeates (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2017): 108–110.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHY

While women's history as a discipline owes its beginnings to the Second Wave Feminism of the 1970s, the study of Irish women's history is still a relatively new one, having only begun to gain traction during the 1990s. Prior to that point, Irish women existed in the historical canon largely as a footnote or an appendage, with many scholars doing little more than tacking "and women" onto a phrase about what men were doing, if they mentioned women at all. This habit was not only dismissive of the roles of women, but in many ways seemed to imply that the women, particularly those involved in the nationalist movement, were doing much the same things as the men, and in other ways appeared to give these women more or less credit than they were due. Today, historians of the revolutionary period in Ireland generally recognize that this is not the case. The women involved in the nationalist movement had unique experiences which were not only different from those of the men they worked and fought alongside, but also from each other. Elite, middle-class, and working-class women tended to have different goals and values from one another, as well as different experiences within the movement or movements which they were a part of. Similarly, though women appear to have fought on both sides of the armed conflicts which occurred from 1916 to 1923, the experiences of nationalist and unionist women also differed from one another, as did the experiences of different religions and socioeconomic classes.

Over time, these ideas and methods of examining women's roles in the history of the Irish revolutionary period came to be seen as flawed and are now beginning to fall out of practice. As more researchers delved deeper into the primary literature and conducted interviews with surviving participants in these movements, they began to see the unique experiences and roles of women within the various movements of the early twentieth century and beyond, and were able to begin to separate their stories from the stories of the broader, primarily male-dominated movement.

In more recent years, scholars like Senia Pašeta, building on the foundational works of others like Margaret Ward, Mary Jones, and Sineád McCoolle, have begun to examine not only the specific roles and experiences of these women within the nationalist movement, but also the overlaps which existed between the nationalist movement and the feminist movement. This thesis will examine that overlap, and add to it the additional overlap of women's participation in the labor movement.

In 1983, historian Margaret Ward offered the first look into the history of women and the Irish nationalist movement. Her book *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* acknowledges the frequent omission—whether intentionally or not—of women from the traditional historical narrative, and seeks to reintegrate them.⁸ Through an examination of three nationalist women's organizations, the Ladies' Land League, Inghinidhe na hÉireann, and Cumann na mBan, Ward argues that women played a key role in the struggle for Irish independence and were a driving force in Irish politics

⁸ Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1995).

for generations despite their absence from history books. Ward's book pioneered the study of nationalist women in Ireland and continues to inform studies of Irish nationalist women today, with its second edition, updated and released in 1995, gaining even more popularity and influence than the first.

The first influential contribution to the field of Irish women's labor activism was Mary Jones's 1988 book, *These Obstreperous Lassies: A History of the Irish Women Workers' Union*.⁹ Historians Caitriona Clear and Carla King have pointed out not only the importance of Jones's book as the first to examine the Irish Women's Workers Union, but also for its discussion of two "marginalized" and "neglected" topics in historical discussion: women and labor movements.¹⁰ Jones also expertly discusses the intersection between class and activism—as well as types of activism. Jones conducted numerous interviews with former members of the Irish Women's Workers Union, which make up a fascinating body of sources. In addition to this, she utilized the Union's records and meeting minutes heavily; while this is useful in understanding numbers and statistics and the decisions made by Union, it also leads to a rather dry read at times, with much speculation about things that do not relate to numbers and names. Nevertheless, thanks to Jones's in-depth discussion of the interplay between class and gender in early twentieth century labor activism, her book remains both an excellent pioneering work in the field of

⁹ Mary Jones, *These Obstreperous Lassies: A History of the Irish Women Workers' Union* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988).

¹⁰ Caitriona Clear, "Review: These Obstreperous Lassies: a History of the Irish Women Workers Union by Mary Jones," *Irish Economic and Social History* 16 (1989): 136; and Carla King, "Review: These Obstreperous Lassies: A History of the Irish Women Workers' Union," *Saothar* 14 (1989): 67.

Irish women's history and an invaluable source for historians of Irish women and Irish labor movements.

The first comprehensive telling of revolutionary era feminist women's history came in the form of Sinéad McCool's *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists, 1900–1923*. This book was first released in 2003 in the form of a monograph, and subsequently rereleased in 2015 in the form of a scrapbook-style textbook, which featured more women's stories, as well as more primary sources including scans of original documents, photographs of key figures, and pictures of objects which belonged to the women McCool discussed in her book and which were associated with the various movements and organizations of which these women were members. This book does not have a central thesis, but the main theme which McCool has chosen to follow is one of "finding women," which she says had been her mission since her early days as a historian working as a tour guide at the Kilmainham Gaol museum between 1991 and 1993. On that tour, she said only two women were mentioned, Constance Markievicz, Ireland's first female member of parliament and an influential figure throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, and Anne Devlin, a companion of the nineteenth-century United Irishmen leader Robert Emmet.¹¹

The surprising absence of women from Irish revolutionary history led McCool to begin researching the women of the Irish nationalist movement and to try to reintroduce them into the historical canon. However, with so few extant documents pertaining to

¹¹ Sinéad McCool, "Foreword: Finding Women," in *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists, 1900–1923* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2015): 15.

these women, she had to build her own archive of sources from unlabeled photographs of unnamed women, and meeting minutes and sign-in sheets, which often did not contain the participants' real names. Using prison records, she managed to find and conduct interviews with some surviving women activists and their family members in an attempt to gain a clearer and deeper understanding of their actions and motivations. However, this proved somewhat difficult at first as many of these women were still quite secretive even in their old age about the kinds of things they were involved in and found McCooles' questions somewhat suspicious.¹²

After gaining their trust, McCooles eventually compiled enough items and information to curate the first ever museum exhibition on women's history in Ireland entitled *Guns & Chiffon: Women Revolutionaries and Kilmainham Jail, 1916–1923* in 1997, which was funded by the Government of Ireland and concurrently published in a brief book under the same title.¹³ Her findings during this project, as well as her continued research, turned into her *No Ordinary Women* project. In addition, the sources McCooles compiled during her research for these two projects have continued to be useful not only to her, but to other Irish women's historians in years since, myself included.

Building on the works of McCooles and Ward, historian Marnie Hay examined the contributions of the nationalist youth organization Na Fianna Éireann, and especially its female founder, Countess Constance Markievicz, in her article "The Foundation and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Sineád McCooles, *Guns & Chiffon: Women Revolutionaries and Kilmainham Gaol, 1916–1923*. (Dublin: Government of Ireland, 1997).

Development of Na Fianna Éireann, 1909–1916.”¹⁴ Hay engages with a number of primary source documents, primarily focusing on Irish nationalist newspapers at the time, *Irish Freedom* and the *Irish Volunteer*. She also examines the writings of prominent figures like Bulmer Hobson, Markievicz’s Na Fianna Éireann co-founder, and Helena Molony, a Republican activist. Hay’s primary argument has to do with the importance of Markievicz and Hobson both to Fianna and to the revolutionary movement overall. The only aspect of Hay’s article worthy of critique or question is that she does very little to engage with recent historical writings, but more frequently utilizes secondary sources from the 1960s.

Similar to Hay, Irish and British litterateur Lisa Weihman chose to focus on a singular organization: the Bean na h-Éireann in her article “National Treasures and Nationalist Gardens: Unlocking the Archival Mysteries of Bean na h-Éireann.”¹⁵ Though Weihman is not a trained historian, her work functions in concert with the larger historical conversation surrounding women’s nationalist organizations in revolutionary Ireland. She responds to much of the same research which has already been discussed in this essay, including the works of McCoolle and Ward. She also examines and analyzes many of the same primary sources which historians have tended to study, including the writings of activists Maud Gonne and Helena Molony.

¹⁴ Marnie Hay, “The Foundation and Development of Na Fianna Éireann, 1909–1916,” *Irish Historical Studies* 36, no. 141 (May 2008): 53–71.

¹⁵ Lisa Weihman, “National Treasures and Nationalist Gardens: Unlocking the Archival Mysteries of Bean na h-Éireann,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 27, vol. 2 (Fall 2008): 355–364.

Sharon Furlong takes a much more explicitly feminist approach to her chosen nationalist women's organization, the Cumann na mBan. At the time of the publication of her article "'Herstory' Recovered: Assessing the Contribution of Cumann na mBan 1914–1923," Furlong was a Master's student at University College Cork, where she was studying women's history.¹⁶ Her writing and her historical analysis, however, appear to be on par with many other recent academic historical publications. Furlong makes this article's goal clear from the beginning: in this article, she wants to tell the story of the women of Cumann na mBan, and argues that their stories are just as worthy of being told as those of the men who fought in Ireland's "turbulent" revolutionary years.

Furlong also acknowledges in her introductory paragraphs the tendency of many historians telling the stories of women to only focus on women worthies, or women with extraordinary stories, which make them worthy of being remembered by history. In order to counter this, Furlong engages with a number of sources from the 1910s–1920s which discuss women, including local newspapers and Cumann na mBan pamphlets, "manifestoes," and other publications. She also engages with multiple prominent scholars both of Irish history and Irish women's history. Her only notable failings are that she cites websites like Wikipedia with some frequency, and her endnotes are missing information and formatted in a way that makes it difficult to know what exactly she is citing.

¹⁶ Sharon Furlong, "'Herstory' Recovered: Assessing the Contribution of Cumann na mBan 1914–1923," *The Past: The Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society* 30 (2009–2010): 70–93.

In 2010 and 2012 respectively, author Ann Matthews released two related books, *Renegades: Irish Republican Women, 1900–1922*,¹⁷ and *Dissidents: Irish Republican Women, 1923–1941*.¹⁸ Interestingly, though these books are both written about women, Matthews does not consider her work to be women’s or gender history, because she believes these studies to be “narrow lens[es]” through which to view women and their involvement in history.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Matthews’s work is a significant piece of the historiographical puzzle as she was one of the first to seek to “[remove] the story of Cumann na mBan from feminist discourse and [place] it within mainstream history.”²⁰ In other words, while Matthews claims to reject the theories of women’s and gender historians and the “narrow lenses” they present, she has attempted to do what many of them have been trying to do for decades, to integrate women into the traditional or “mainstream” historical narrative, and follows many of the same methods of analysis which they use seemingly unwittingly. Whether or not she is successful in that venture is another matter. While Matthews also claims to be placing women into the “mainstream” historical narrative, her primary focus is, in fact, women, with the “mainstream” narrative used as backdrop. Thus, her work reads very much like many other women’s histories, which may be the result of a lack of understanding of the difference between women’s history and “mainstream” history which features women. That is not to say that this book

¹⁷ Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish Republican Women, 1900–1922* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2010), Kindle.

¹⁸ Ann Matthews, *Dissidents: Irish Republican Women, 1923 – 1941* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2012), Kindle.

¹⁹ Ann Matthews, “Ann’s Biography,” *Ann Matthews: Historian, Author and Playwright*, WordPress, accessed April 17, 2021, <http://annmatthews.ie/anns-biography/>.

²⁰ Ibid.

is not a good source for Irish Republican women's history, only that perhaps Ann Matthews does not quite stick to the route she claims to have followed.

Lucy McDiarmid's *At Home in the Revolution: What Women Said and Did in 1916* takes the same idea Matthews and many others have latched onto, the roles and experiences of women in organizations like Cumann na mBan and the Irish Citizen Army, and adds to it the experiences of women who were not directly or indirectly involved in the Rising at all, but who were nevertheless affected by it.²¹ She also presents readers with the opinions of Unionist women, opinions which have been until this point largely ignored in favor of telling the stories of Republican women. This voluntary omission is understandable due to potential political leanings of some Irish writers and their readers, as well as to the desire to tell previously untold stories, McDiarmid utilizes sources such as the diaries of privileged Unionist women in addition to the accounts of the republican women interned in Kilmainham Gaol and elsewhere for their participation in the Rising. In addition to its apparent political balance, McDiarmid's book also benefits from its engagement with an extensive array of sources, and McDiarmid's thorough but highly accessible writing style and presentation.

In 2016, Mary McAuliffe and Liz Gillis published *We Were There: 77 Women of the Easter Rising*, their addition to the Dublin City Council's Richmond Barracks 1916 project.²² As is stated in the blurb on the back cover of this book, "it is now generally

²¹ Lucy McDiarmid, *At Home in the Revolution: What Women Said and Did in 1916* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2015).

²² Mary McAuliffe and Liz Gillis, *Richmond Barracks 1916: We Were There: 77 Women of the Easter Rising* (Dublin: Dublin City Council, 2016).

acknowledged that women played a vital role in the Irish revolutionary movement,” but that does not mean that the historian’s job is complete, and *We Were There* definitely proves that.²³ This book utilizes newspapers, memoirs, diaries, the personal papers and correspondences of many of the women either directly or indirectly involved in the Rising, military records, and court records in order to piece together the story of women’s involvement in organizations like the Irish Citizen Army and Cumann na mBan, and what happened to them after the Rising in prison and beyond. McAuliffe and Gillis open their book with four chapters which helps to summarize and contextualize the historical event of the Easter Rising as they understand it to have unfolded based on the documents they consulted.

They dedicate the next hundred and fifty pages to “Biographies,” divided by the regions of Dublin where these women would have been found on Easter week 1916, such as City Hall, the Four Courts, the General Post Office (GPO), Marrowbone Lane Distillery, and St. Stephen’s Green or the Royal College of Surgeons. These biographies are very brief—each no more than one or two pages long—but they give more insight into the lives of these women and their roles during the Rising than any other single historical publication has before.

In 2013, historian Senia Pašeta published a book titled *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918*, which covers the period from the founding of the culturally nationalist organization Inghinidhe na hÉireann at the turn of the century until the enfranchisement

²³ McAuliffe and Gillis, *Richmond Barracks 1916*, back cover.

of Irish women in 1918.²⁴ By placing her historical narrative within this range of dates, Pašeta argues that Irish nationalist women's motivation in allying themselves with nationalist Irish men, who were frequently more conservative than they were, was deeply entrenched with their feminism and desire for women's suffrage. In fighting for a free Ireland, these feminist-nationalist women were also fighting for increased rights for women, including the vote, which they gained in 1918. Pašeta's book is one of the first works which examines the overlap between the feminist and nationalist movements, and thus will be crucial to this thesis as I attempt to further explain the overlap and intersectionality between not only these movements, but the labor movement as well.

Along this same line, historian George Sweeney tackled the history of hunger strikes in Ireland, and what he called the "cult of self-sacrifice," which was upheld by members of all three dominant movements—and by people of both sexes.²⁵ He never directly explains what he means by the "cult of self-sacrifice," but it seems to be related to Irish nationalists' penchant for and romanticization of martyrdom, especially in the period of the early twentieth century as fights for various kinds of freedoms were being made. He explains that the idea of self-starvation as a form of protest in Ireland dates back to the pre-Christian era, but that it became more prevalent in the 1910s among imprisoned suffragettes, both in Ireland and elsewhere.²⁶ Hunger strikes were most common among women, but, of course, women were not the only ones who engaged in

²⁴ Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁵ George Sweeney, "Irish Hunger Strikes and the Cult of Self-Sacrifice." *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 3 (July 1993): 421–437.

²⁶ Sweeney, 424.

this form of protest. Sweeney also discusses James Connolly's hunger strike in September of 1913, at which time Connolly was in prison for his participation in the Dublin Lockout. This particular hunger strike is not a large part of the popular historical memory of Connolly, Sweeney says, but does not go so far as to draw the conclusion that perhaps it is not remembered because hunger strikes are not usually viewed as a very heroic or manly form of protest. Regardless, hunger strikes continued throughout the early decades of the twentieth century among nationalists, labor activists, and suffragettes, with mixed results.²⁷

In 2016, Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry's edited volume *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland*²⁸ does not focus primarily on Irish revolutionary women, but more broadly on the effects of the events of 1916 on Ireland and Irish culture.²⁹ Nevertheless, it is an excellent source which masterfully integrates women into history and memory. One big question among historians of women and gender have been asking for decades is, "How do we include the stories of women in traditional historical narratives?" One common but often flawed response over the years has been to "add women and stir," but Grayson and McGarry, and the other authors featured in their edited volume, do not do that. Instead,

²⁷ Ibid, 429.

²⁸ Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry, eds., *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, The Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁹ Roisin Higgins, "'The Irish Republic Was Proclaimed by Poster': The Politics of Commemorating the Easter Rising," in *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland*, ed. Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 43–61. This chapter focuses the most heavily on women's contributions, especially to the memory, commemorations, and symbols of Irish Republicanism, but not enough for it to be considered strictly "women's history." It is one of the many excellent examples of the way this book helps to integrate and intertwine the stories of women with the traditional historical narrative of revolutionary era Ireland.

their selected works, while not strictly women's history, give readers a contextualized view of women's roles and influence, the ways they interacted with their male counterparts, and their varying roles before, during, and after the revolutionary period. This also gives readers the sense that these authors have a deep understanding of the importance of women to history and of the study of women's history. Grayson and McGarry, and a number of the authors featured in this volume, also take into account the intersectionality of nationalist, feminist, and labor activist women, acknowledging that there was often a lot of interplay between the various organizations of these three movements. These authors do not go into as much detail as Pařeta does in regards to these intersections, but this book has nevertheless proven useful to my examination of the experiences and roles of early twentieth-century nationalist women.

These analyses of the interactions and intersections between the various organizations of the nationalist, suffrage, and labor movements inform the analyses present in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. It is my intention to both summarize and interweave the findings of these authors, and to build upon their work in order to add greater depth and nuance to the roles and experiences of republican Irish women activists of the early twentieth century.

CHAPTER TWO: “VICTORIAN” SUFFRAGETTES, 1900–1913

Throughout the turbulent years of the early twentieth century in Ireland, women participated in active roles in a variety of acts of protest and revolution, and had done so for generations prior. However, until recently, they were almost completely absent from the historiography surrounding this part of Irish history—something which these women seemingly did not anticipate. The large body of evidence they left behind chronicling their experiences during these years shows us that many of these women were keenly aware of their position as historical actors and of the roles they played. Not only that, they were incredibly proud of their status as women activists, and more generally as women who lived during what they were already aware would become a monumental moment in their country’s history. As historian Senia Pašeta wrote in her book *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918*, it was clear that “[the] many Irish women who were active in nationalist circles in the early twentieth century did not expect to be forgotten,” as they were following the revolutionary period, and especially after the 1930s when many women were stripped of previously-earned freedoms like the right to serve on a jury or work in the public sector.³⁰

This sort of semi-disenfranchisement was not absolute, and it did not affect all women equally. Figures like Kathleen Clarke and Constance Markievicz remained active

³⁰ Senia Pašeta, “Introduction,” in *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 1.

in very public roles in Irish politics, and some others like Dr. Kathleen Lynn managed to maintain jobs similar to the ones they had prior to and during the armed conflicts of the late 1910s and early 1920s by remaining unmarried. However, gradually, women were removed from the popular historical narrative, either intentionally or because they were simply forgotten, to the point that by the 1990s, historians had to do some serious work even to “find” women who participated in the various movements and conflicts of the early twentieth century, as historian Sinéad McCoole observes.³¹

Since the 1990s, scholars like McCoole and Pašeta, as well as Margaret Ward and Mary Jones, who offered some of the first histories of activist women in Ireland, have found many of the women who had gone missing from the narrative. They have worked diligently to both reintegrate these women into the historical narrative and to tell their stories as individuals. Many women activists of the revolutionary years, as these historians have found, were not only involved in the nationalist movement, but many of them were labor activists as well, and almost all of these female activists were proud participants in the suffragette movement and came from almost every social class. However, though facts about many of these women’s lives have been gathered and their stories have begun to be told, the scope of many of these retellings has been somewhat narrow, tending to focus on their participation in only one of the three aforementioned movements rather than the overlap or intersection between them. For instance, while popular history remembers Rosie Hackett as a labor activist, few people are aware of her

³¹ Sinéad McCoole, “Foreword,” in *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years, 1900 – 1923* (Dublin: The O’Brien Press): 15.

participation in the 1916 Easter Rising as a member of the Irish Citizen Army. Similarly, while it is common knowledge among scholars and students of Irish nationalist history that Constance Markievicz was a staunch nationalist, surprisingly little has been said about the role she played in the labor movement. Lauren Arrington's dual biography of Constance and her husband Casimir Markievicz is an exception.³²

In the women-oriented studies of recent years, historians like Sineád McCooile and Fearghal McGarry have been more than willing to acknowledge the relatively conservative and indeed seemingly “Victorian” forms of activism performed by women in the name of Irish nationalism in this time, such as leafletting as a form of protest and teaching young girls about abstinence and choosing one’s romantic partners wisely. Yet, aside from Pařeta’s *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918*, few works within the historiography surrounding Irish women have been willing or prepared to acknowledge the complexity of women’s activism beyond the lens of traditionally cultural-nationalist organizations like Inghinidhe na hÉireann and the transition from cultural to militant nationalism. In doing this, even recent influential Irish women’s historians like McCooile, Ward, and Jones, neglect to discuss the experiences of suffragettes and female labor activists both within the movement and without. McCooile and Ward acknowledge that women like Hanna Sheehy Skeffington or Helena Moloney were suffragettes in addition to participating in the nationalist movement, or that many of the women who were active in the Dublin Lockout in 1913 later went on to participate in the armed conflicts from

³² Lauren Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

1916 onward, but they fail to analyze what this might mean in regards to women's goals, desires, and beliefs. Little effort—beyond that put forth by Pašeta—has gone into the discussion of the intersection between these three movements, other than to assume that some must exist because distinct overlaps exist across these three movements. Even less has been done to examine the intersection between gender and social class and how these things determined a woman's role within the movements she was a part of. Pašeta began this task in her book, which I have already mentioned briefly, and thus, with this chapter and the subsequent ones which make up this thesis, I will attempt to build upon the arguments and ideas she has laid out regarding the complexity and nuance of radical Irish women and the connections between the suffrage movement and the nationalist movement in particular.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Irish nationalism was still largely a cultural phenomenon. The violence often associated with the Irish nationalism of the twentieth century had not yet begun in full force. Nationalist and feminist activist Helena Molony, in fact, described the behavior of many Irish nationalists as being “Victorian” in nature because it was so mild-mannered comparatively.³³ Molony's comment was primarily directed at female nationalists, and as such, it has come to inform ideas about the majority of Irish nationalist women of Molony's time, and while we continue to view Irish nationalist men as violent and militant even in the early years of the twentieth century (which, of course, a fair few were), historians like Fearghal McGarry appear to

³³ Fearghal McGarry, “‘Into the Sun’: Helena Molony's Lost Revolution,” in *The Dublin Lockout 1913: New Perspectives on Class War & its Legacy* (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2017): 105.

agree with the idea presented by Molony that Irish nationalist women were more demure and passive. While this was likely true in some cases, it was clearly not so in every case. Examinations of the mainstream, male-dominated nationalist movement show that men were also still by and large acting in a more cultural or social manner than a strictly militant one. It was not until the 1913 Dublin Lockout and the resulting establishment of organizations like the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army that militant nationalism began to increase and advance.

During the early years of the twentieth century, the Gaelic Revival of the late nineteenth century was still in full swing. This “Revival” was a cultural movement which sought to restore the Irish language, which had nearly died out over the course of the previous century as a result of the devastation wrought by the Great Famine of the 1840s. It also sought to revive many other parts of Irish culture which had not been publicly taught or practiced in decades or, in some cases, centuries, including Irish history, sports and games, music, dance, literature, and similar other topics. Much of the culture they were trying to “revive” or “recreate” appears to have been based more in nostalgia or romanticization of the past than in reality, but it is nevertheless significant because it was this desire for a cultural revival which drew people toward the nationalist movement.

As the subjects this movement sought to reintroduce to Irish culture were not taught in public schools at the time, families who wished to have their children educated in them often relied on period programs or after school courses taught by various nationalist organizations or individuals, sometimes in secret, until Irish nationalist

schools were founded. Patrick Pearse's Scoil Éanna (St. Enda's School), founded in 1908, was one well-known option for secondary school age boys.

Within the Gaelic Revival, female participants and activists typically acted as educators and propagandists. Eight years before Pearse's founding of St. Enda's, English-born Irish nationalist Maud Gonne founded Inghinidhe na hÉireann, an all-women's organization which sought to "combat in every way English influence" on Irish culture.³⁴ One primary way they did this was through what Gonne referred to as the "Patriotic Children's Treat," a series of Irish language and history classes offered by Inghinidhe na hÉireann for free to all school age children under the age of nine.³⁵ Children who attended this program also received similarly nationalist lessons regarding enlistment in and affiliation with the British Army. Both boys and girls were warned against any affiliation with the British Army, but girls in particular received pamphlets which included information which could be considered today to be a form of sexual education as they warned young women of the dangers of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy. In the context of these pamphlets as nationalist propaganda, however, this "education" was intended by the women of Inghinidhe na hÉireann to merely serve as a means of deterring Irish girls from associating with English men, supported further by phrases which questioned not only the safety but also the honor of

³⁴ Sinéad McCoolle, "'Unladylike and Disreputable': Women Activists (1900 – 1916)," in *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years, 1900 – 1923* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2015): 21.

³⁵ Maud Gonne, "Inghinidhe na hÉireann's First Meeting," in *Maud Gonne's Irish Nationalist Writings, 1895–1946*, ed. Karen Steele (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004): 296–297; and Maud Gonne, "Patriotic Children's Treat: National Women's Committee Formed," in *Maud Gonne's Irish Nationalist Writings, 1895–1946*, ed. Karen Steele (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004): 293–295.

such a relationship, such as, “Irish girls who walk with English soldiers, remember you are walking with your country’s enemies, and with men who are unfit to be companions to any girl,” clearly not only criticizing English soldiers, but also shaming any young Irish women who would even dare be caught speaking to them.³⁶

Leafletting was another popular form of “passive,” educational protest practiced by the women of Inghinidhe na hÉireann. Over the course of their fifteen years as an organization, it is estimated that the number of flyers, pamphlets, and leaflets they distributed across Dublin was in the thousands.³⁷ One of the most popular topics discussed within the literature they distributed was the British Army and the ill effects these women believed it had on Ireland and Irish culture. Much like the lessons taught in the “Patriotic Children’s Treat,” the documents these women distributed frequently urged young Irish men not to join the British Army even if they were promised money and benefits for their families, and discouraged Irish girls from entering romantic or sexual relationships with British soldiers.³⁸

The women of Inghinidhe na hÉireann also attempted to reach their goals of countering English influence and advancing Irish culture through the rejection of English dress and the adoption of a new Irish fashion style. This new style was inspired both by ideas about ancient Irish aesthetics and modern French fashion.³⁹ They also abandoned the then-fashionable English updos and instead wore their hair loose around their

³⁶ Gonne, quoted by McCooile, 21.

³⁷ Maud Gonne MacBride, *Servant of the Queen* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1950): 279.

³⁸ McCooile, 21.

³⁹ McCooile, 20–21.

shoulders. In addition, they sometimes chose to wear certain symbols which would have appeared subtle (at least at first) to outsiders, such as blue or green ribbons, or round brooches similar those worn by the ancient Celts.⁴⁰ As an organization, they did not wear uniforms, primarily because there was no need to do so, as they were not a militant organization, but also out of a desire and need for anonymity. Nevertheless, even without uniforms, the women of Inghinidhe na hÉireann were typically easy to recognize because they were often very vocal about their beliefs. As a result, they were sometimes harassed on the streets of Dublin by those who disagreed with them, which led them to need male chaperones when performing even peaceful acts of public protest.⁴¹

Countess Constance Markievicz joined Inghinidhe na hÉireann in 1907, seeming to have learned about it through her connections in the suffrage and labor movements. Despite these connections, however, and despite (or perhaps because of) her enthusiasm for Irish nationalism, her joining was not met without some suspicion due to her aristocratic title, foreign name, and upper-class style of dress. Thus, early on, many other members of the organization thought she might have been an English spy and remained cautious about what they said to her or in her presence. Though Maud Gonne, the founder of this organization, was herself English-born and of considerable social standing, many other members were of a lower class, or of “disreputable” occupations, like actresses, and most likely trusted Gonne because she was also an actress and the wife of a prominent nationalist. Markievicz, however, went on to both fully embrace and embody the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ McCooile, “Women Activists,” 22.

revolutionary movement. She abandoned her upper-class style of dress and encouraged women to wear shorter, more practical skirts and sturdy boots, and to sell their jewelry for guns.⁴² Markievicz is also known for going against not only the expectations of her class, but her gender as well, by wearing trousers and smoking in public in a time when neither of these was socially acceptable for a respectable woman to do.⁴³

In 1909, two years after joining Inghinidhe na hÉireann, Markievicz founded the Dublin-based youth club Na Fianna Eireann, based on an organization by the same name in Belfast founded by Bulmer Hobson, which was similar in many ways to Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts. The foundation of this youth organization marked the beginnings of the shift from cultural to militant nationalism. Na Fianna was nothing like the relaxed, classroom-style education of Maud Gonne's "Patriotic Children's Treat." Instead of linguistics and history classes, the children who joined this organization learned first aid and survival skills and were prepared for potential military enlistment. They wore uniforms, attended structured meetings, and participated in the transportation of guns under Hobson's direction in 1914 and during the 1916 Easter Rising. Tasks like transporting weapons and other contraband were easier for them to do because, as children, they would have appeared less suspicious and therefore would have been less likely to be checked for these items by authorities. Many of the boys who trained with Na Fianna also later went on to join militant nationalist organizations like the Irish

⁴² Countess Constance Markievicz, "Buy a Revolver," in *In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism*, ed. Margaret Ward (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995): 46–47.

⁴³ Fearghal McGarry, "Hard Service: Remembering the Abbey Theatre's Rebels," in *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, The Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland*, ed. Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 102.

Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Volunteers, participating as a result in conflicts from the time of the Easter Rising in 1916 until the end of the Irish Civil War in 1916, while still maintaining their Na Fianna membership.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, while Inghinidhe na hÉireann and Na Fianna Eireann were just two of multiple nationalist organizations which women joined or founded in the early years of the twentieth century, their fusion of a cultural nationalist mindset with increasingly militaristic actions was just one part of the complex web of women's activism in this period of Irish history.

Across the British Empire, women seeking enfranchisement often allied themselves with another subordinate group in order to raise awareness of their own cause, and in some cases in order to add validity to their cause. For instance, during the Boer War in South Africa, many British suffragettes like Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Emily Hobhouse, and Lucy Deane chose to advocate on behalf of Boer prisoners, forming women-led commissions whose job it was to investigate the conditions in the camps where these prisoners were being held, and to draft recommendations for improvement.⁴⁵ In the process, the women's movement, which had been in existence for thirty years already by this point, received increased attention and the hard work of the women involved in these investigations thus helped to bolster their fight for enfranchisement.

⁴⁴ Marnie Hay, "The Foundation of Na Fianna Eireann, 1909–1916," *Irish Historical Studies* 36, no. 141 (May 2008): 56.

⁴⁵ For more information on this topic and for information on the London School of Economics and Political Science's archival collections and exhibits pertaining to British suffragettes and the Boer War, see Gillian Murphy, "Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Lucy Deane and the Boer War," *LSE History* (Blog), London School of Economics and Political Science, March 16, 2016, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsehistory/2016/03/16/millicent-garrett-fawcett-lucy-deane-and-the-boer-war/>.

There is evidence to support the idea that many of these women already felt strongly and genuinely about the advancement of Irish culture and the possibility of Irish independence, rather than becoming nationalists later, or following influential men like James Connolly or James Larkin from the labor movement into the nationalist one. Nevertheless, it is also evident that many Irish suffragettes, like those in other parts of the British Empire, also recognized the need to place themselves in proximity to influential Irish men in order to increase the nation's awareness of the suffrage movement's goals and desires.

Already, by the time of the transition from cultural to militant nationalism, a small handful of Irish nationalist men could be considered feminists by the standards of their day. James Connolly, a staunch socialist activist as well as an Irish nationalist, for instance, was passionate about ensuring equal rights for all Irish citizens regardless of gender and the inclusion of women in the fight for independence. Connolly was an advocate for what he called "sex consciousness," or the need to recognize the struggles of women, and particularly working-class women, in addition to the pre-existing Marxist concept of social consciousness. The concept of intersectionality, or the way a variety of factors interact with one another to create a unique experience, usually in terms of oppression or discrimination, had not yet been named or even fully formulated, but Connolly showed a keen understanding of the ways in which Irish women were impacted not only by their social class, and their position as subjects of the British Crown, but by their status as women as well. In the section of his socialist-nationalist pamphlet *The Re-Conquest of Ireland* on the roles of women in the Irish labor movement, Connolly writes,

The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave. In Ireland that female worker has hitherto exhibited, in her martyrdom, an almost damnable patience. She has toiled on the farms from her earliest childhood, attaining usually to the age of ripe womanhood without ever being vouchsafed the right to claim as her own a single penny of the money earned by her labour, and knowing that all her toil and privation would not earn her that right to the farm...⁴⁶

In other words, a working-class woman was expected to work long, hard hours for nothing in return in order to maintain their families' livelihoods, yet also never be able to inherit their families' home or farm when their fathers died. Her only hope was to continue working until she was no longer fit to do so, or to marry into a position where she, or at least her children, would not have to do the same hard labor.

In this document, Connolly also praises the strong-minded women of the suffrage movement and advocates for the enfranchisement of women. His awareness of the suffrage movement, it seems, comes from the ways these women have firmly allied themselves with the labor movement, bringing themselves to his attention and to that of other men as well. Most suffragettes, he notes, are working class women of the industrial sort who suffer as a result of "the shocking insanitary conditions of the workshops, the grinding tyranny of those in charge, and the alarmingly low vitality which resulted from the inability to procure proper food and clothes with the meagre wages paid."⁴⁷ Thus, to Connolly, their participation in the labor movement is a logical one, as would be the

⁴⁶ James Connolly, "Woman," in *The Re-Conquest of Ireland*, Marxists.Org, accessed February 17, 2022, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1915/rcoi/chap06.htm>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

decision for the men of the labor movement to ally themselves with these women and advocate for their equal rights.

While Connolly's views are interesting and no doubt served as encouragement for at least some Irish suffragettes also involved in the labor and nationalist movements, he was an outlier. For many nationalist men, and the movement as a whole, Irish Home Rule was the priority, and many within the movement—both men and women alike—were somewhat lukewarm on the topic of women's suffrage. Thus, many Irish suffragettes took it upon themselves to make their struggles known across the Irish Sea on the mainland of Britain through their association with English suffragettes. They were not ready, it seemed, to depend fully on Irish nationalist men to enfranchise them, and sought to make their presence known to the British government. As a result, suffragettes from the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) also made a habit of inserting themselves into incidents involving English suffragettes, usually in cases of imprisonment, harm, or mistreatment.

One article published in *The Globe* on 27 September 1912 speaks of the "Irish Suffragette Threat," which came in the form of a letter to Lord Aberdeen. In this letter, the women of the IWFL speak out against the mistreatment of a "Miss Evans," an English suffragette interned at Mountjoy Prison in Dublin. They are also reported to have concluded their letter to Aberdeen with the following warning:

Should you continue to ignore the appeal of Irish public opinion we shall see that the matter not only upon the re-opening of Parliament, but at Irish public

functions whenever your Excellency appears as representative head of an Irish executive that authorises the torture of political offenders.⁴⁸

It is difficult to say how much of a threat these women actually posed, or how much sway they could have had over the Irish public in regards to Evans's apparent suffering, but the intent of this letter was nevertheless viewed as a genuine threat because, as the reporter goes on to say, "As a precaution against suffragette attacks special constables of the Dublin Metropolitan police are being placed on duty at the Government offices and public institutions in Dublin."⁴⁹

The "Miss Evans" in this article is most likely Gladys Evans, an English suffragette who was released the following month from Mountjoy Prison. Gladys Evans was arrested in connection with a case of arson at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, along with an Irish suffragette named Mary Leigh.⁵⁰ The two had received a five-year sentence to work in a penal colony, but were instead released after only about two months after "practising [a] hunger strike" which severely handicapped Leigh.⁵¹ Gladys Evans was re-arrested by Dublin authorities two weeks after her release from Mountjoy for "failing to notify herself under the Penal Servitude Act."⁵² Registered papers at the Home Office in

⁴⁸ "IRISH SUFFRAGETTE THREAT," *The Globe*, September 27, 1912

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001652/19120927/100/0010>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ "RELEASE OF AN IRISH SUFFRAGETTE," *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, September 27, 1912,

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001084/19120927/118/0005>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² "RECENTLY RELEASED IRISH SUFFRAGETTE IS REARRESTED FOR FAILING TO REPORT HERSELF," *Dundee Courier*, October 24, 1912,

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000164/19121024/090/0005>.

England report of Evans's later disappearance, and the subsequent dropping of the charge for the other women involved.⁵³

Little else is known about Evans, Leigh, or their possible involvement in other organizations. However, their trial did garner support from other Irish suffragettes in the Irish Women's Franchise League, members of the Sinn Fein party, and even James Connolly. This support appears to be due to the women's original goal: to assassinate or harm the British Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, who was visiting Ireland at the time, and who Leigh had attempted to hit with a hatchet.⁵⁴ The attempt failed, and it was later that same evening that Leigh and Evans attempted to burn the Theatre.

The joined action and sentencing of Evans and Leigh, and the subsequent support they received from not only the IWFL, among others, is significant because it shows the interconnectedness of the women's movements across the British Isles, and it points to at least some Irish women activists being suffragettes first and foremost, or at least that their determination to achieve their goal of enfranchisement outweighs in some cases their nationalist goals. On the other hand, perhaps these women believed that if they achieved enfranchisement first, through whatever means necessary—even working with women they might very well have believed to be the wives and daughters of their country's enemy, to call back to Maud Gonne's terminology—then, with their increased political

⁵³ “Two suffragettes (Mrs Mary Leigh and Miss Gladys Evans): disappearance of Evans and case...” in National Archives, Kew, Ref. no. HO 144/1223/227166, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C4151730>.

⁵⁴ Margaret Ward, ““Suffrage First, Above All Else!”: An Account of the Irish Suffrage Movement,” *Feminist Review*, no. 10 (Spring 1982): 28.

power, they could either vote for the changes they would like to see happen in Ireland, or they could potentially enact those changes themselves as some of the first Irish female politicians, as Constance Markievicz would become by the end of the decade, shortly after the enfranchisement of Irish women in 1918.

CHAPTER THREE: LABOR ACTIVIST WOMEN IN THE DUBLIN LOCKOUT, 1913

The Dublin Lockout of 1913 is remembered as one of the largest and most significant labor disputes in modern Irish history. It was a major turning point for Irish labor history, resulting in the eventual acceptance of labor unions, thus prompting numerous reforms for years afterward. The Lockout also saw the development of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), a small militia-like organization initially founded to combat police brutality on strikers during the Lockout but which would go on to become one of several paramilitary organizations which would help Ireland to break away from Britain. In addition, nationalists within the labor movement would go on to use this as an opportunity to advance their agendas and increase support for their movement. Two ways they did this were by highlighting the diametric opposition of Irish strikers and British police, and the supposed dangers of accepting aid even from seemingly kind English working class families—thus twisting the Lockout into a nationalist struggle as well as a class struggle, whether it really was or not. Thus, some historians, like Fearghal McGarry and Sineád McCoole, seem to think of the Lockout as a turning point in nationalist history, particularly when it comes to the radicalization of nationalist women, and in some cases to argue that the Lockout allowed women of a variety of social classes to see the full scale of oppression in Ireland, prompting them to take action.

McGarry in particular subscribes to this theory of post-Lockout radicalization, citing Helena Molony's accounts of Irish women's activism as proof of an "increasing

willingness” among women to resort to violence.⁵⁵ In the years immediately following the Lockout, we begin to see the formation of radical militant women’s organizations, like Cumann na mBan. Shortly thereafter, we also see the absorption of Inghinidhe na hÉireann, an organization typically viewed as peaceful due to its education-driven purpose, into Cumann na mBan. Though these events did not occur in direct response to the events of the Lockout, some historians, like McGarry, appear to argue that the Lockout was thus the turning point.

Molony believed that women prior to the Lockout were more reserved or conservative in nature, saying, “the suffragette movement had not been heard of and women and girls were still living in a semi-sheltered Victorianism,” and believed that following the Lockout, women became more radicalized.⁵⁶ These developments, in addition to Molony’s opinion as a woman who was active in this period, seem to support McGarry’s belief that women were in fact radicalized following the Lockout. However, a more careful examination of contemporary evidence shows us that this was not necessarily correct. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there was indeed an active suffrage movement in Ireland, and through this movement, women participated in acts of feminist protest, often facing harsh consequences for their actions. Similarly, militancy and the potential for violence already existed among previously predominantly male

⁵⁵ Fearghal McGarry, “‘Into the Sun’: Helena Molony’s Lost Revolution,” in *The Dublin Lockout 1913: New Perspectives on Class War & its Legacy*, ed. Conor McNamara and Pádraig Yeates (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2017): 108–109.

⁵⁶ Helena Molony, quoted in Fearghal McGarry, “‘Into the Sun’: Helena Molony’s Lost Revolution,” in *The Dublin Lockout 1913: New Perspectives on Class War & its Legacy*, ed. Conor McNamara and Pádraig Yeates (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2017): 110.

organizations like the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Volunteers. But once women began allying themselves with the militant nationalists, they carried that “willingness to use violence,” as McGarry describes their behavior, with them into the nationalist movement, seemingly just in time for the outbreak of some of the first violent nationalist uprisings of the twentieth century.⁵⁷

As discussed in the previous chapter, suffragettes, united across the British Isles, were increasingly extreme both in action and beliefs prior to the First World War. They committed crimes like arson, threatened violence against state officials who refused to offer any sympathy for their struggle or make any changes despite their efforts. They faced difficult prison time and threat of penal colony transportation, and subsequently engaged in forms of protest such as hunger strikes—sometimes to the point of incapacitation—all in the name of women’s enfranchisement and liberation.

Many suffragettes also were active in the early labor movement, gaining the attention of people like writer James Connolly, a Marxist socialist who believed in incorporating women into the labor movement and advocating for their equality. As women’s public and social presence increased, so too did their presence in industrial labor activism. Women were employed in factories and shops all over Dublin, making up just over twenty-three percent of the industrial workforce leading up to the First World War.⁵⁸ It only makes sense, then, that soon after male workers began unionizing, so too

⁵⁷ Ibid, 108–109.

⁵⁸ Fionnuala Walsh, “Working Lives,” in *Irish Women and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 127.

did their female counterparts. However, despite Connolly's determination to include women within the movement as equals, most women active in the labor movement participated as members of women's only unions and frequently—with a few exceptions—served in more traditionally feminine background positions compared to those taken on by men, such as working in soup kitchens or working in or for the benefit of childcare.

Women had also already begun striking as early as two years before the Dublin Lockout. In August 1911, the workers of Jacob's Biscuit Factory went on strike, with over three thousand female participants and supporters of the strike, who were not directly involved in protest but who offered help in places like soup kitchens.⁵⁹ Many of these women were not, at first, advocating for any reforms in their own workplaces, but came out instead in support of male workers who were on strike.⁶⁰ Rosie Hackett, an eighteen-year-old messenger who worked for Jacob's, is said to have organized these three thousand women strikers. Purportedly, it was also thanks to Hackett's negotiating skills that the workers of Jacob's finally got the increased wages and relatively safer working conditions that they wanted.⁶¹ Rosie Hackett would go on to be a major figure in Irish labor history and national memory for her activism in this strike and in the Dublin

⁵⁹ Mark Lawler, "In the Lead-Up to the Lockout," *The Irish Times*, accessed March 10, 2022, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/in-the-lead-up-to-the-lockout-1.1496474#:~:text=However%2C%20the%20exploitation%20of%20women,in%20support%20for%20their%20colleagues.>

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; and Pádraig Yeates, "1913: The Cinderella Centenary," in *The Dublin Lockout 1913: New Perspectives on Class War & its Legacy*, ed. Conor McNamara and Pádraig Yeates (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2017): 172–173.

Lockout two years later, and to a lesser extent for her participation in the 1916 Easter Rising as a member of the ICA.

Hackett's story is one of Irish popular history and memory, told in countless sources, but interestingly, only repudiated in one: Pádraig Yeates's "1913: The Cinderella Centenary." In this essay, Yeates argues that it was not Hackett, but instead socialist activist and leader of the Irish Transport and General Worker's Union (ITGWU), James Larkin, who organized the three thousand women strikers and won the workers of Jacob's the rights they had been asking for.⁶² Yeates's argument is based on the fact that Hackett's name does not appear in the *Irish Times* report about the incident, which only names Larkin.⁶³ However, Yeates, as a journalist and not a trained historian, may be assuming that Hackett's absence in the report is evidence of her lack of involvement because today, journalists are more compelled to name all key players in an event, but in the early twentieth century, this was not always the case. Readers would have recognized Larkin's name and known his reputation as a labor activist, and therefore the level of his participation in this strike, which of course did occur, might have been exaggerated in newspapers as it would have been more easily received and sold more papers than news about an unknown teenaged girl complaining to company bosses about poor working conditions and unfair pay.

⁶² Yeates, "1913: The Cinderella Centenary," 173.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Two weeks after the resolution of the Jacob's Biscuit Factory strike, the Irish Women Worker's Union (IWWU) was founded. This union was founded by Delia Larkin, the sister of James Larkin, who was, like her brother, avid socialist and labor activist in her own right, and a number of the women who had participated in the Jacob's Biscuit Factory strike—Hackett included—joined or lent their support to the union. These women came from all walks of life. Not all were factory workers; some were aristocratic women as well, such as Constance Markievicz, who was sympathetic toward the cause of the women workers and spoke at some of their early meetings.⁶⁴ The union was well-organized, and when the ITGWU went on strike in August 1913, the IWWU was prepared to join them, likely due at least in part to the Larkin connection and James Larkin holding leadership positions in both unions.⁶⁵

Women played an active role in the Dublin Lockout, not only as supporters of the men on strike, but also as strikers themselves. They stood on the streets alongside the male strikers in solidarity, arguing for many of the same rights and privileges and coming into direct contact with many of the same opposing forces, from negotiations with employers to brutal police forces to sometimes heated disagreements with returning or replacement workers. In fact, one of the few strike-related deaths was that of Alice Brady, a sixteen-year-old striker and member of the IWWU who was shot in the hand during a riot in which she was not directly involved, and died of tetanus as a result in

⁶⁴ Lawler, "In the Lead-Up to the Lockdown."

⁶⁵ Despite the fact that the IWWU was and remains an exclusively women-only union, James Larkin was the organization's first president because a law in Dublin at the time required all organizations such as this one to be run by men.

early January 1914. Though Brady's death was most likely an accident and not done maliciously, her fellow strikers made a martyr of her, a decision seemingly validated by the fact that the shot which ultimately killed her was fired by a strike-breaker.⁶⁶ Brady's funeral, attended by James Connolly, both Larkin siblings, and Constance Markievicz, as well as nearly five hundred IWWU members, received press coverage and notice from both supporters and opposers of the strike, thus establishing Brady as a martyr for the soon-to-be-over Lockout and making the cause for which she supposedly died more widely known.⁶⁷

While many women were on the front lines, so to speak, many others took on more supportive roles as well, focusing on the immediate needs of the strikers rather than fighting directly against oppressive employers for workers' rights. Delia Larkin and Constance Markievicz, for instance, set up a soup kitchen in Liberty Hall, ensuring that workers and their children were fed even if they could not afford to buy food during the Lockout.⁶⁸

Along this same line, though she was absent from Ireland during most of the Dublin Lockout, Inghinidhe na hÉireann founder Maud Gonne contributed funds to help pay for children's meals, something which she was adamant about doing not only during the Lockout, but for years before and after.⁶⁹ Gonne never fought in any battles and did

⁶⁶ Senia Pašeta, "Social Activism," in *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 124.

⁶⁷ Shaun Harkin, "Introduction," in *The James Connolly Reader*, ed. Shaun Harkin (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018): 51.

⁶⁸ Lawler, "In the Lead-Up to the Lockout."

⁶⁹ Between the late 1890s and the early 1910s, Gonne wrote numerous letters, articles, and pamphlets regarding children and families living in poverty, what should be done about these issues, and what she was

not hold membership in any militant organizations, but she remained an advocate for Irish Home Rule, as well as for women, children, and families for the rest of her life. In the five months the Lockout spanned, she also wrote about the conditions children and families were living under as a result of the city-wide strikes and published opinions and advice in the forms of letters, news columns and articles, and pamphlets.⁷⁰

On October 23, 1913, about midway into the Lockout, Gonne wrote a letter to the *Irish Times* about an option which many parents had begun to consider as the Lockout wore on: whether or not to send their children to England, where families in places like Liverpool, which had a high population of Irish Catholics, had offered to take care of the children of strikers until they got back on their feet. In her letter, Gonne, despite her confident word choice, seemed to implore Irish parents not to accept this tempting offer. Gonne wrote:

Sir – While recognising the kindness which prompts English workers to offer homes to 350 Irish children during the lock-out, most Irish people must realise that it is a terribly dangerous thing to send children across the sea to unknown homes, and, after the letter of His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin, I feel sure few, if any, Irish mothers will consent to part with their children.⁷¹

Gonne, taking the side of the Catholic Church rather than the strikers, appears concerned about the potential influence these English families might have on Irish children, as well as about the dangers of separating families. Warranted or not, Gonne does not trust that

trying to do about these issues, A selection of documents can be found in Maud Gonne, “PART THREE; THE DOWNTRODDEN,” in Maud Gonne’s *Nationalist Writings, 1895–1946*, ed. Karen Steele (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004): 109–158.

⁷⁰ Maud Gonne, “Meals for School Children,” in *Maud Gonne’s Nationalist Writings, 1895–1946*, ed. Karen Steele (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004): 157–158.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 157.

these children will be safely returned to their families, and, leaning on the Catholic faith of most Irish citizens, asserts that it would neither be likely nor within the best interest of families to send their children to England. Gonne's activity here not only demonstrates one example of the kinds of activism women engaged in during this moment in history, but also demonstrates that the Dublin Lockout was not the radical nationalist turning point—at least, not to all nationalists—which others, like Helena Molony, would later argue that it was, if Gonne, a staunch nationalist in her own right, was not on the same page as her fellow nationalists within the labor movement.

Nevertheless, despite the hardships that strikers and their families faced, especially near the end of the Lockout, strikers continued their fight for workers' rights due in part to the support, assistance, and participation of women and women's unions because although women were not among those who would have directly benefited from the strike, had it been successful, they nevertheless did all that they could to aid the men of the ITGWU in their fight for fairer work conditions and the right to unionize, risking their own employment and employability in the process.

Though women played prominent roles in the Dublin Lockout, many women found that after strikes like the ones in 1911 and 1913, they had no jobs to which they could return, and no ability to gain employment. Hackett, for instance, though she was instrumental in both the Jacob's factory strike and the Lockout, lost her factory job. Nevertheless, she found work as a printer and messenger who would later be involved in

the printing of Patrick Pearse's *Proclamation*.⁷² Other women who could not return to work were able to find employment in Helena Molony and the IWWU's shirt factory located at Liberty Hall.⁷³ Thus, many women active in the labor movement understood the importance of equal rights for women, and the IWWU was inextricably linked, though not officially or organizationally, with several suffragist organizations.⁷⁴

Not all suffragist labor activists were unified, often finding themselves divided when it came to issues across movements, much in the same way Gonne and Hackett viewed the Lockout in different lights as an upper-class and working-class woman respectively, though they were both Catholics and nationalists. As the three prominent movements of this turbulent period—suffrage, labor, and nationalism—often overlapped, it is somewhat difficult to place where this division occurred, but it appears to directly correlate with how radical one's nationalist ideals were, a division which would become clearer as the period progressed, and with social class. Those women who were more nationalist tended to believe that the fight for freedom should come first, while others who were somewhat less nationalist and more feminist tended to believe that there was no point in fighting for a free Ireland if in that free Ireland they were still disenfranchised.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, it seemed obvious to some feminist nationalists that under British rule, Irish women were viewed in many ways as second- or third-class citizens, and that

⁷² Lawler, "In the Lead-Up to the Lockout."

⁷³ Pašeta, 126.

⁷⁴ Joseph E.A. Connell, Jr., "Irish Women's Franchise League and Irish Women's Workers' Union," in *History Ireland* 21, no. 1 (January/February 2013): 66.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

under their then-current conditions, they had a better chance of attaining liberation and enfranchisement if they limited the number of oppressive institutions over them. As a result, they chose to place the freedom movement first. One contributor to the Irish nationalist women's newspaper *Bean na hÉireann* thus wrote, "Hitch your wagon to a star. Do not work for the right to share in the government of that nation that holds Ireland enslaved, but work to procure for our sex the rights of free citizenship in an independent Ireland."⁷⁶

⁷⁶ *Bean na hÉireann*, "Hitch Your Wagon to a Star," quoted in Anne Haverty, "'Live Really Irish Lives...': Nationalist Awakening," in *Constance Markievicz: Irish Revolutionary* (San Francisco: Pandora Publishing, 1988): 80.

CHAPTER FOUR: MILITANT NATIONALIST WOMEN, 1913–1923

In the final weeks of the Dublin Lockout and the months that followed, many Irish nationalists appeared to become significantly more radical and extreme in their actions and ideals. This seemed especially so among Irish nationalist women. Helena Molony, an active participant in the suffrage, labor, and nationalist movements, argued that the Lockout had “profoundly affected the whole country,” thus prompting a “sort of social and intellectual revolution.”⁷⁷ It is clear, then, that even at the time, at least some participants in the nationalist movement recognized the Lockout as a turning point for the Irish nationalist movement, despite this not being a nationalist protest. Molony appears to significantly exaggerate the impact that the Lockout had at the time, and especially its role in radicalizing the nationalist movement. Nevertheless, over the next century, the Dublin Lockout certainly became the sensational event which Molony described. The media and contemporary activists like Molony elevated it to the status it has today in popular memory, and shifted its impact to incorporate a greater sense of nationalism, instead of just its impact on Irish labor history.

Molony also points out the increasing number of women joining militant organizations, and in particular, the Irish Citizen Army, of which she was also a member. Historian Fearghal McGarry interpreted this as an “increasing willingness to use

⁷⁷ Helena Molony, quoted in Fearghal McGarry, “‘Into the Sun’: Helena Molony’s Lost Revolution,” in *The Dublin Lockout 1913: New Perspectives on Class War & Its Legacy*, ed. Conor McNamara and Pádraig Yeates (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2017): 108.

violence,” among women, exemplified by Molony, who became head of the women’s unit of the Irish Citizen Army.⁷⁸ With promises of equality in a free Ireland from leading radical men like James Connolly, the suffrage movement became secondary, and female activists placed most of their efforts into the nationalist movement, and, as Molony’s experience shows, nationalist women’s activities became increasingly more violent and more militant, as did those across the movement more broadly. As we have already seen, prior to the Lockout, women who chose to participate in the nationalist movement typically took on traditionally feminine roles of educating women and children, or caring for children and families. Even during the Lockout, some women who were not on the front lines of the strike maintained roles as caregivers, advocating for children and families as Maud Gonne and feeding the masses like Delia Larkin and Constance Markievicz.⁷⁹ In the months following the Lockout, however, many nationalist women began volunteering for militant organizations.

The Irish Citizen Army (ICA) was initially a militant all-male organization, founded by socialist labor activists James Connolly and James Larkin during the Lockout. Its original goal was to act as a means of “defence [...] against the conduct of the police,” who had a habit of brutalizing strikers.⁸⁰ Shortly after the conclusion of the Lockout, women began to join the ICA as well. Many of these women had been

⁷⁸ Ibid, 108–109.

⁷⁹ Mark Lawler, “In the Lead-Up to the Lockout,” *The Irish Times*, August 19, 2013, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/in-the-lead-up-to-the-lockout-1.1496474#:~:text=However%2C%20the%20exploitation%20of%20women,in%20support%20for%20their%20colleagues.>

⁸⁰ Kathleen Clarke, “Laying the Foundations, 1911–1915,” in *Kathleen Clarke: Revolutionary Woman*, ed. Helen Litton (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 2018): 59.

participants in the Lockout and had by that point gained a reputation among leaders such as James Connolly, for their dedication to the movement and their tenacity. Most notable among these women was Constance Markievicz. Markievicz was the only woman to be named among the enlisted soldiers, while all other female members of the ICA were listed as being a part of the auxiliary “women’s unit” despite having similar armed conflict participation and equal first aid training.⁸¹ This distinction indicates that women were not quite as equal as women like Molony and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington would later claim, and that perhaps Markievicz’s position as an elite woman, as well as her strong personality, allowed her to cross the boundaries which other women could not. Similarly, despite Connolly’s feminism, which was certainly unique among Irish nationalist men of his time, his feminist beliefs did not extend quite as far as to grant the women in his ranks full equality to their male counterparts within the confines of the ICA. Nevertheless, Connolly’s ICA was more inclusive than other predominantly male militant organizations, such as the Irish Volunteers, who refused to allow women to join at all, thus prompting the rejected female volunteers to create their own militant organization, Cumann na mBan.

Founded in August 1914, the women of Cumann na mBan belonged to an organization whose “activities and aims [were] solely national.”⁸² Many of the women

⁸¹ Margaret Ward, “Cumann na mBan, 1914–1916: The Early Years,” in *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1995): 99.

⁸² “MANIFESTO FROM CUMANN NA mBAN, (IRISHWOMEN’S COUNCIL): THE WOMEN’S SECTION OF THE VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT,” Mary MacSwiney Papers, UCD Archives, reprinted in RTE History’s *Portraits and Pamphlets: A Cumann na mBan Gallery*, <https://www.rte.ie/history/the-ban/2020/0401/1127789-cumann-na-mban-a-photo-essay/>.

who joined also had ties to the suffrage and labor movements, but chose to set those goals aside, due at least in part to the promises of men like Connolly, a leader whose socialist and feminist ideals seemed to assure equality for all in a free Ireland. Unlike other more culturally oriented, primarily educational organizations like Inghinidhe na hÉireann, the women of Cumann na mBan, like the all-male Irish Volunteers, carried guns and wore uniforms, sending a bold message about their intentions as a militant nationalist organization. As tensions increased and the nationalist movement as a whole began to gain traction, these women began to give more and more of their time, attention, and effort to the radical militant side of the movement, supporting McGarry's idea of an "increasing willingness to use violence."⁸³ In 1915, Inghinidhe na hÉireann, which had gradually become more militant, was officially absorbed into Cumann na mBan as a Dublin-based branch.⁸⁴ This further demonstrated the distinct shift from cultural to militant nationalism among many Irish nationalists at this time. Prior to this absorption, many women already held dual membership and had formed a tightly knit community, the bonds of which only appeared to strengthen over time, so the merging of the two groups probably felt like the natural thing to do.

Surprisingly, despite their rejection by the Volunteers, the women of Cumann na mBan still chose to refer to themselves as the "women's section" of the Irish Volunteers in their August 1914 Manifesto and throughout their career, and are today remembered as such.⁸⁵ It should be noted, however, that though they referred to themselves as the

⁸³ McGarry, "Into the Sun," 108–109.

⁸⁴ McCooie, "Women Activists," 29–31.

⁸⁵ "MANIFESTO FROM CUMANN NA mBAN."

women's section of the Volunteers and claimed that they had "been working side by side with them from the beginning," there is no evidence that the Volunteers ever viewed them as such.⁸⁶ In particular, during the 1916 Easter Rising, many men notably refused to allow the women of Cumann na mBan to join them until the men's ranks were significantly depleted due to deaths or injuries, and even then were hesitant to allow women to fight and typically delegated first aid duties to female volunteers.⁸⁷ Also interesting is the fact that Cumann na mBan had its own unique uniforms and separate chain of command from any other similar or associated nationalist organization, despite their desire to link themselves with the Volunteers. Thus, their connection to the Volunteers was purely symbolic, an attempt to add legitimacy and validity to Cumann na mBan's organization.

Another important marker of this shift from cultural to militant nationalism was the founding of Constance Markievicz's Na Fianna Eireann, a nationalist youth organization similar in many ways to Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts and based on a boys' group by the same name which was founded in Belfast by Bulmer Hobson, a member of both the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The children of Na Fianna learned survival skills, prepared for enlistment in Irish militant organizations like the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and participated in the transportation of weapons as early as 1914, as well as in combat as early as 1916. The

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷For more on this see Sineád McCoolle, "'Of All Ranks from Titled Ladies to Shop Assistants': The Women of the Rising," in *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years, 1900–1923* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press): 34–58.

extremeness of this organization was a staunch contrast from the comparatively mild Irish language and history lessons of Maud Gonne's Patriotic Children's Treat, which existed under the guidance of Inghinidhe na hÉireann. Interestingly, Na Fianna's existence and its premise show the limits of female participation and gender roles, as this organization was purely a boy's scouting organization, and girls were not permitted to join and there was no such similar organization for girls.

Parallel to the nationalist movement, the women's suffrage movement also saw many advancements over the next few years. Thanks to the increasing role that women played in the freedom movement, influential nationalist men became both aware of and more sympathetic toward their fight for equality. James Connolly, for instance, dedicated a significant portion of his writings in the years following the Lockout to persuading men to support Irish women in their fight for equality in Irish society, the workplace, and in marriage, and to promoting not only the class consciousness common among Marxists of his day, but also something he called "sex consciousness," an early form of intersectional theory which challenged socialist men to recognize the multiple layers of oppression faced by working class women.⁸⁸ Irish suffragette Hanna Sheehy Skeffington called Connolly "the soundest and most thorough-going feminist of all the Irish labor men," and "one of [Irish feminists'] first and warmest advocates," and argued that thanks to men like Connolly, for the first time in modern Western history, women were considered

⁸⁸ James Connolly, "The Re-Conquest of Ireland: Woman," in *The James Connolly Reader*, ed. Shaun Harkin (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018): 426.

equals in battle in a fight for freedom.⁸⁹ While this is a somewhat optimistic and exaggerated view, Sheehy Skeffington is partly right in her acknowledgement of the support of some men like Connolly; however, unfortunately, many other men were not quite as welcoming as he was, and his Irish Citizen Army was the only militant nationalist organizations which allowed women to join.

In “The Re-Conquest of Ireland: Woman,” originally printed in 1915, Connolly wrote of women as dedicated fighters and hard workers who were nevertheless held down as the “slaves of slaves,” forced to be subservient to their employers, husbands, brothers, and fathers, who were in turn also forced to be subservient to the British-run state.⁹⁰ Connolly further praised nationalist women for their eagerness to “march out with pinched faces, threadbare clothes, and miserable footgear, but with high hopes, undaunted spirit, and glorious resolve shining out of their eyes.”⁹¹ In the same paragraph, he also told Irish men that they should be “happy” and “blessed” to live and fight alongside these women, and to have them as romantic partners.⁹²

Connolly also argued time and time again that the liberation of women was key to the liberation of the working class from corrupt employers, and of the Irish people from British rule. Thus, it is thanks to Connolly’s insistence on the inclusion of women in the

⁸⁹ Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, quoted in Mary Smith, “Women in the Irish Revolution,” *Irish Marxist Review* 4, no. 14 (2015): 34; and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, “Unpublished Memoirs,” in *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Suffragette and Sinn Féiner: Her Memoirs and Political Writings*, ed. Margaret Ward (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2017): 12.

⁹⁰ Connolly, “The Re-Conquest of Ireland: Woman,” 426.

⁹¹ James Connolly, “Glorious Dublin!” in *The James Connolly Reader*, ed. Shaun Harkin (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018): 348.

⁹² *Ibid.*

revolution and assuring their equality to men once Ireland was free, as well as to many Irish women's own unwavering determination and resilience, that all adults over the age of twenty-one years in Ireland, regardless of sex, marital status, or property ownership, gained the right to vote at the same time in 1922. These things also paved the way for women like Constance Markievicz to be elected as the first female Member of Parliament in 1918—at which time all women over the age of thirty received enfranchisement—and for Kathleen Clarke to be elected as the first female Lord Mayor of Dublin in 1939.

Both in and out of combat, the women of the Irish revolutionary movement were extremely dedicated, as Connolly argued.⁹³ The women of the ICA and Cumann na mBan showed up to every possible demonstration or event where nationalists were present that they were aware of—in part often thanks to women like Kathleen Clarke, who were closely related to men in the movement and able to gain insider information about when and where the men would be meeting. Nationalist women tended to be present and punctual even if their husbands, fathers, and brothers forbade them from attending.⁹⁴ In one instance leading up to the Easter Rising, after some men from the Irish Citizen Army expressed their concerns about bringing female soldiers along with them to the fight, Connolly reportedly responded that even if no men participated in the Rising, the women would have carried the fight.⁹⁵

⁹³ McCoolle, “The Women of the Rising,” 41.

⁹⁴ Ibid; for more information on this also see Kathleen Clarke, “Laying the Foundations, 1911 – 1915,” in *Kathleen Clarke: Revolutionary Woman*, ed. Helen Litton (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 2018).

⁹⁵ Roger McHugh, *Dublin 1916: An Illustrated Anthology* (London: Arlington Books, 1976): 68.

Outside of demonstrations and military aid, women also played an important role as messengers during the Rising and the War of Independence. Of the messengers who served during the revolutionary period, it was also said that women were the most dedicated to delivering the message, or to destroy or hide it before any apprehenders could gain information from it. If stopped on the way to delivering a message, many women would not hesitate to eat the paper or chew it up to an irreparable state and spit it out on the ground, having already memorized the message in preparation for such an apprehension.⁹⁶ They were also excellent at hiding these messages in places on their persons which surprisingly few men would have thought to look. Patrick Pearse, for instance, was impressed and astonished to see one messenger, Catherine Byrne, roll up a note and hide it in her hair.⁹⁷ Even many of the original flyers containing Pearse's Proclamation of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic to the People of Ireland were destroyed the same day they were distributed, chewed up and spat on the ground or ripped up into small pieces after they were read. Those involved in the Rising understood that in the event that the Rising did not succeed (and, of course, it did not), carrying such a document would be dangerous not only for the person found with the document in their possession, but even more so for the men whose signatures were at the bottom of the flier.⁹⁸ Thus, many of the "original" Proclamations found in museums and collections today are actually reprints from the year after the Rising, ordered for an early

⁹⁶ McCooile, "The Women of the Rising," 42.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Roisín Higgins, "'The Irish Republic Was Proclaimed By Poster': The Politics of Commemorating the Easter Rising," in *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 48–49.

commemorative “demonstration,” planned by Helena Molony and two other women who had participated in the Easter Rising a year before, Jinny Shanahan and Winnie Carney.⁹⁹

At the end of Easter Week 1916, nearly one hundred female participants were arrested and taken to the Richmond Barracks. From there, many of them were later taken to Kilmainham Gaol, where the male prisoners were also being held. No women were executed for their participation in the Rising, although Constance Markievicz, as the only woman enlisted in the Irish Citizen Army and a major player in this conflict, was initially sentenced to death. Her sentence was later commuted to life in prison instead, likely as a result of her being a woman. Markievicz also became ill while in prison, which could have been another contributing factor, but it should be noted that of the sixteen men executed for their roles in the Rising, several were in even worse health and did not receive the same commuted sentence as Markievicz. Most notably, Irish Citizen Army leader James Connolly was said to be in such a battered condition that he was unable to stand or even sit up for his execution and had to be strapped to a chair.¹⁰⁰

Despite the apparent mercy given Markievicz, these seventy-seven women did not receive any special treatment within the walls of the prisons where they were held. They were packed in, sometimes six or seven women to a single filthy cell, brutalized by guards, humiliated, and in some cases given dog biscuits for food.¹⁰¹ When they were moved from Richmond to Kilmainham, marching on foot surrounded by guards, they

⁹⁹ Ibid, 49.

¹⁰⁰ “People of 1916: James Connolly,” *The Irish Times*, Accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.irishtimes.com/1916/people-of-the-1916-rising>.

¹⁰¹ Mary McAuliffe and Liz Gillis, “Introduction: The 77 Women of Richmond Barracks,” in *Richmond Barracks 1916*, 4.

received mixed reactions from the people they passed on the streets, from booing to cheering, but according to one woman among them, Pauline Morkan, the remarks made by the crowds were “mostly uncomplimentary.”¹⁰² Nevertheless, Markievicz, who was still among them and still acting as a leader and commanding officer of sorts, tried to keep their spirits up along the way.¹⁰³ The eventual sentences of these women ranged from continued imprisonment to deportation, mostly to English prisons. Other women were released—even Markievicz, whose life sentence was later further commuted in 1917 after a brief stay in an English prison.

While conditions within these prisons were far from ideal, and many women became ill while in prison, punishments for women were much less harsh compared to those of male prisoners, even those of male prisoners found guilty of lesser crimes. The authorities executed sixteen men, and others died in the weeks that followed from the wounds they sustained in the skirmish. Yet, no women were killed, and those who were not deported or further detained were quickly returned to society while the authorities dealt with the male prisoners, who were viewed as the more important and more dangerous perpetrators. In some cases, women avoided punishment altogether if the officers detaining them became convinced that they were insane or that they only committed the crimes they did because a man convinced them to join the movement, and therefore had no real understanding of what they had done. Dr. Kathleen Lynn, the Chief

¹⁰² Pauline Morkan, quoted in McAuliffe and Gillis, “Introduction,” 4.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Medical Officer of the ICA, for instance, was released after her family convinced the authorities that she could not have possibly been acting of her own volition.¹⁰⁴

Though the Easter Rising ultimately failed, the harsh treatment of prisoners and the speedy and inhumane execution of the leading figures of the Rising spurred Ireland toward an even more radical form of nationalism. But despite the rapid spread of nationalist ideals, the movement was in relative disarray without strong leadership. They had their martyrs and their motivation, but they had no clear leaders left to guide them or spur them to action. Women's organizations like Cumann na mBan continued to function, but had essentially gone underground, halting all demonstrations or open activity while the rest of the movement also fell dormant. Constance Markievicz, one of the most radical women and most likely leaders, was in prison across the Irish Sea in England for the first year following the Rising. Not only that, it was doubtful that the movement's remaining men—the majority of whom tended to be much more conservative than men like Connolly or Pearse, and many of whom still refused to allow women among their ranks—would have followed a woman, even one such as Markievicz.

Another potential strong leader for the movement would have been Kathleen Clarke, a founder of Cumann na mBan and participant in the Rising who came to enjoy an elevated status among Irish nationalists as the surviving wife and sister of two signers of the Proclamation who were executed as leaders of the movement, Tom Clarke and Ned Daly. However, directly following the Rising, Clarke spent a lot of time in hospitals and

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, "Rebellious Womanhood, 1912–30," in *Kathleen Lynn: Irishwoman, Patriot, Doctor* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006): 19–31.

nursing homes as she had become severely ill during her prison stay, suffered a painful miscarriage, and found herself disabled and therefore in no condition to serve in any leadership positions for some time. It was not until much later that Clarke acted in any formal capacity, when she entered politics and in 1939 became the first female Lord Mayor of Dublin, interestingly after the retraction of many women's rights by Fianna Fail. It is important to note, however, that the elevated status of women like Clarke was often not the result of their own actions, but due to their familial associations with prominent male nationalists (in this case, Clarke's brother and husband).

Thus, with few evident available leaders and no one stepping forward, Michael Collins, a veteran of the Easter Rising and a member of the Dáil Éireann, rose from relative obscurity to revive the movement between 1918 and 1919.¹⁰⁵ Collins rebranded the Volunteers as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and quickly took the lead. On January 21, 1919, a group of IRA members attacked and killed two officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary who had been transporting arms. Historians, like authorities at the time, disagree on whether or not these killings were intentional, or if this was simply meant to be a close scare; regardless of intent, however, many historians point to this attack as the event which kickstarted what would soon become a two-and-a-half-year long guerilla war now known as the War of Independence, or the Anglo-Irish War.

While Collins rebuilt and refashioned the movement and reassembled the men, women continued their work within the movement as recruiters, messengers, spies, and,

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Coohill, "Nationalism, Unionism and Irish Identity, 1891–1922," in *Ireland: A Short History* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015): 124.

when the time came, soldiers, their numbers also ever increasing. Cumann na mBan, too, rejoined the fight, making up the majority of the female soldiers, while the women of the ICA were still often left with kitchen and nursing duties. Michael Collins, while still not as radical as James Connolly had been in his feminist beliefs, was much more willing to allow the women of Cumann na mBan to accompany and aid the IRA in their tasks. There were, in fact, female versions of the IRA's Cyclist Corps, often referred to as Collins's "bicycle gangs," who participated both as dispatchers and messengers, and in guerilla warfare and Cumann na mBan's Cyclist Corps could often be seen traveling alongside the IRA's, or nearby.

Women's communities had also grown and tightened since the Rising, with many women who had met in nationalist organizations acting almost as second families to one another. This was especially common among women who had lost male family members in the Rising, either from combat or execution. Kathleen Clarke told a story in her memoir, *Kathleen Clarke: Revolutionary Woman*, of a raid on her house late one night early in the War of Independence. Constance Markievicz was living with her, and one evening they received a message from Michael Collins to say that authorities were coming to raid the house in search of weapons, information, or harbored revolutionaries at large, like Markievicz. Thinking quickly, Clarke sent her young sons out after the mandatory curfew to warn Margaret Skinnider, a Cumann na mBan sniper from Glasgow and former school teacher who lived nearby, that Markievicz would be making her way around to her house shortly because of the impending raid. Markievicz made it to

Skinnider's home and the boys made it back home and back into bed just in time for the raid.¹⁰⁶

Throughout her memoir, Clarke speaks of the women of Cumann na mBan with great familiarity and fondness, telling countless stories like this one, in which women went to great lengths to help one another and support one another through good times and bad, just like a family would. Clarke lost her husband and brother in the Rising, the two of them having been executed as signatories of Pearse's *Proclamation*, and was herself disabled following the Rising due to her experiences in prison. Nevertheless, she found comfort and assistance through the women whom she worked and fought alongside, like Markievicz and Skinnider, among others. Interestingly, though she goes into great detail about her interactions and relationships with the women (and less frequently the men) of the revolutionary movement, she speaks very little of any armed conflicts at which they had been present or involved and the violence in which they were frequently involved or found themselves entrenched. These things do make appearances, but they do not seem to be much more in her memories than an exciting backdrop for the greater story: one of feminist advancement and kinship among women in what was to her a tumultuous but invigorating time for Ireland. Great men like Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera make appearances in Clarke's book—which was meant to be one of the first histories of the Irish revolutionary period—but they are little more than supporting actors and plot devices as she dedicates much more time to discussing her interactions with women like

¹⁰⁶ Kathleen Clarke, *Kathleen Clarke: Revolutionary Woman*, ed. Helen Litton (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2008): 222–223.

Maud Gonne, Constance Markievicz, and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington than with most other prominent men. This is possibly the result of both Clarke's foresight and understanding that as great men, their positions within Irish history were assured; their stories would be almost guaranteed to be told one day and she need not repeat what others would already know. It is difficult for us to know what Clarke's true motivations or reasoning might have been, but her decision to place her focus on women and the relationships between women throughout this period is no doubt a significant one, especially considering no other such histories of this period had yet been written at the time when she wrote her book in the 1930s and '40s.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps, considering this timing, her decision to focus on female participation within the nationalist movement was a political one, as it was in this period that a conservative administration began to retract some key rights from Irish women, including but not limited to the right of a married woman to serve on a jury and to serve in the public sphere—restrictions which Clarke was staunchly against.

Following the War of Independence, Ireland entered a Civil War, prompted by disagreements about the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Eighty-six percent of the women at the Cumann na mBan national convention in February of 1922 voted in disagreement with the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which had ended the War of Independence just two months before, and pledged to join the war on the side of the anti-treaty IRA

¹⁰⁷ Though Clarke's book was written roughly across the 1940s, it was not published until 1991, nearly twenty years after her death, by her niece, Irish political historian Helen Litton.

contingent, while Michael Collins, founder of the IRA and now commander in chief of the Irish National Army, wished to ratify the treaty.¹⁰⁸

Such raids as the one experienced by the Clarke family continued even after independence, now at the hands of the Irish Free State rather than Crown forces. Of course, not every woman whose home was raided during this period seemed quite so amused and excited by the event of having their homes ransacked by their own countrymen, or so willing to boast about any successfully executed plans of deception made on the fly in such a moment. Maud Gonne, for instance, wrote to the *Newspaper of the Republic of Ireland* in September 1922 expressing her displeasure at the fact that her home had been raided five times in the last three months, and that this time things had been taken without either permission or written receipt. She also stated firmly that she condemns both sides of the war, a statement which seems rather evasive or disingenuous considering her previously strong opinions regarding Irish nationalist politics.¹⁰⁹

It is evident, then, that despite the apparent camaraderie which developed between many of the women involved in the nationalist movement, not all women had the same political views, ideals, or goals by the end of the revolutionary period, an idea which is discussed further in Mo Moulton's article "'You Have Votes and Power': Women's Political Engagement with the Irish Question in Britain, 1919–23" (2013). In this article, Moulton discusses the opinions women of varying social classes and political parties held

¹⁰⁸ RTE History, *Portraits and Pamphlets: A Cumann na mBan Gallery*, <https://www.rte.ie/history/the-ban/2020/0401/1127789-cumann-na-mban-a-photo-essay/>.

¹⁰⁹ Maud Gonne, "MacBride House Raided," in *Maud Gonne's Irish Nationalist Writings*, ed. Karen Steele (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004): 218.

about the Irish War of Independence and Civil War, and the ways in which they voted and campaigned throughout this period for the changes they wanted to see in regards to Britain's relationship with Ireland. Particularly interesting is Moulton's revelation that not only was Constance Markievicz not the only woman vying for a seat in Parliament in the 1918 election, she was also not the only Irish woman who presented extreme leftist ideals while running under the name of a party whose policies tended to be less liberal than her own ideals.¹¹⁰ This seems to further support the idea that many nationalist women, while clearly in support of a free Ireland and the advancement of Irish nationalism, also carefully and strategically positioned themselves within Irish politics in a way that they knew would have allowed them to advance their own feminist and socialist agendas.

At the same time, however, for other women like Sighle Humphreys, the national Vice President of Cumann na mBan, the nationalist movement came first, and "nothing else mattered."¹¹¹ To Humphreys, solidarity came through a shared "idealism" about Irish nationalism and desire for Irish independence, and that she and many of the women she knew did not think at all of promoting the women's movement over the nationalist one, and did not think of uniting forces with British feminists across the Irish Sea as was common before the outbreak of the War of Independence.¹¹² It is difficult to tell whether

¹¹⁰ Mo Moulton, "'You Have Votes and Power': Women's Political Engagement with the Irish Question in Britain, 1919–23," *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 1 (January 2013): 179–204.

¹¹¹ Sighle Humphreys in an interview with Hilary Orpen for *Women's Today* (March 19, 1984), quoted in RTE History's *Portraits and Pamphlets: A Cumann na mBan Gallery*, <https://www.rte.ie/history/the-ban/2020/0401/1127789-cumann-na-mban-a-photo-essay/>.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

this was a majority view, as Humphreys claims that many of the women she knew held the same beliefs as herself, yet women like Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Helena Molony continued to speak about feminist ideals within the nationalist movement for years after the revolutionary period.

Thus, it is impossible to generalize or assume the level of radicalization of Irish nationalist women as a whole. If we measure radicalization in terms of violence and activism, we do not see much change at all over the course of the first three decades of the twentieth century because the women of the suffrage movement were active in various kinds of protest for years before war broke out. However, if we were to measure radicalization in terms of the spread of nationalism and the indoctrination of women into the nationalist movement, a change is much more evident, especially among women like Humphreys, for whom nothing else “even entered their minds,” save for the advancement of the nationalist movement and freedom for Ireland.¹¹³

¹¹³ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Nuance and intersectionality are two key themes which arose more and more frequently during my research while writing this thesis. The women of the nationalist movement were not simply just nationalists. Many were suffragettes or labor activists, too; some were all three. Things like social class and religion also played major roles in the choices women made about which movements with which to associate themselves, and how deeply they decided to engage with those movements. In some cases, as well, women involved in one movement often gravitated towards another out of both a belief of the importance of the movement and in hopes of gaining more traction for the movement in which they were already engaged. One example of this was the decision of some Irish suffragettes, despite their international alliance with other suffrage movements, to ally themselves with nationalist organizations in hopes of increasing their chances of liberation and enfranchisement in a free Ireland.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, I found that suffragism never made much of an impact on the nationalist movement beyond a handful of individuals, most of whom did not live to see Irish independence and therefore had little lasting sway over women's rights in an independent Ireland. Irish women received voting rights at the same time as the rest of the women in Britain in 1918, allowing influential nationalist women like Constance Markievicz and Kathleen Clarke to enter the political sphere. While this is certainly an

¹¹⁴ This issue is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

accomplishment for these women and a great stride for women as a whole, the decision to elect them did not appear to be a feminist one, but rather one which reflected the nationalist ideals of the people they went on to represent, as Markievicz was a well-known nationalist activist, and Clarke was a relative of two Easter Rising martyrs; their cases as female political representatives were also unique, as Irish women's participation in political arenas waned following the revolutionary period.

Still in a rather turbulent state, Ireland entered a Civil War shortly after the conclusion of the War of Independence. This subsequent war began over the treaty which had ended the War of Independence, which granted Ireland independence from the United Kingdom, but under the condition that Ireland remained within the greater British Empire. The war lasted under a year and ended with the pro-treaty victory, thus confirming the validity of the Irish Free State. One major lasting effect of the Irish Civil War was the emergence of what are today two of Ireland's most prominent political parties: the nationalist Republican party Fianna Fail, and the "progressive centre" Fine Gael.¹¹⁵

Throughout the Civil War, women continued in their roles as soldiers, medics, spies, and cooks on both sides of the conflict, and at an increasing rate. Lists of enlisted personnel and prison records of the time show women's participation increased nearly ten times from the time of the Easter Rising to the Civil War just six years later. After the war, these women went on to jobs in a variety of areas of Irish society, from the home all

¹¹⁵ "Fine Gael: Our Values," accessed March 24, 2022, <https://www.finegael.ie/the-party/our-values/>.

the way to Oireachtas (the Irish Parliament). Women also took on the task of preserving the memory of those who died in the revolutionary period. They composed memoirs and autobiographies about their time as soldiers and activists, as well as biographies of other soldiers, both male and female. They organized celebrations and commemorations of different conflicts and events from the revolutionary decade, and at the same time helped in creating and popularizing many symbols which are associated with Irish nationalism even today, such as the Irish Easter Lily, a symbol used to remember those who died in the Easter Rising.¹¹⁶

Despite women's extensive participation in and contributions to the nationalist movement, and early twentieth century Irish society, not everyone viewed them as equal or deserving of the same rights as men. As Leader of the Opposition and later Taoiseach of Ireland in the 1930s, Eamon de Valera worked in the Oireachtas with the support of the Catholic Church to gain support of and pass legislation that limited women's rights. Some of these included the "marriage bar" of 1932, which prevented married women from working in the public sector or participating in politics, the 1935 Criminal Law Act/Amendment, which banned sale and use of contraception without a doctor's prescription, and a ban on divorce in 1937. Also in 1937, an article of the new Irish Constitution made the marriage bar constitutional and also said that it was a mother's

¹¹⁶ The usage of the lily is similar to how the poppy is used in Britain and some parts of the United States to honor those who died in the First World War. For more information on the Irish Easter Lily see Roisín Higgins, "The Irish Republic Was Proclaimed By Poster': The Politics of Commemorating the Easter Rising," in *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 53; and Laura K. Donohue, "Regulating Northern Ireland: The Special Powers Acts, 1922 – 1972," *Historical Journal* 41, no. 4 (December 1998): 1096.

“right” as a patriot to stay in the home, and that the government would go to any means necessary to ensure that they did stay in the home.

It is important to note that de Valera’s low opinions and expectations of women were not new to the 1930s, nor was he alone in his beliefs. During the Easter Rising, de Valera notably turned the women of Cumann na mBan away from his outpost at Boland’s Mill despite needing additional help because he did not want soldiers who he viewed as unfit, undertrained, and “unmanageable” to hold his battalion back.¹¹⁷ There were other outposts in the Rising that took a similar stance, turning women away with excuses like a lack of room or lack of need for additional forces, until either room was made (usually due to deaths and injuries and a need for medics and nurses) or until the men relented after seeing that their uninvited female allies were determined not to leave and had begun to make themselves useful as they saw fit with or without approval. While men like James Connolly and Patrick Pearse admired and respected the tenacity of these nationalist women, it was clear that others did not—enough for de Valera and the conservative Catholic Fianna Fail to be able to pass oppressive legislature. The damage done to women’s rights during de Valera’s administration was, in many cases, not undone until the 1970s, and in other more extreme cases, the 1990s, with the rise of Second Wave Feminism in Ireland. Some of these changes included the repeal of the marriage bar in

¹¹⁷ Sineád McCoolle, “‘Of All Ranks from Titled Ladies to Shop Assistants,’ : The Women of the Rising,” in *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years, 1900–1923* (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 2015): 38.

1973, the Health/Family Planning Act in 1985, and the Employment Equality Act of 1998.

Academic historians began focusing on the Irish revolutionary period in earnest in the early 1960s. However, women made few appearances in the early historiography of the Irish revolutionary period despite their participation and considerable impact. Prompted by questions brought on by the absence of women from the historical narrative, historians like Margaret Ward, Sineád McCoole, and Senia Pašeta, whose works this thesis builds upon, began in the 1990s and 2000s to really delve into the question of what women were doing at all during the war. Thus, the late 1990s were a time of what McCoole went on to call “finding women,” of piecing together their stories from bits and pieces of—not always readily available—information. It was not an easy task, as many original documents had been destroyed, discarded, and many surviving activists and soldiers viewed historians with suspicion due to their experiences with the kinds of people who used to ask the same questions many historians came to ask them.¹¹⁸

Since McCoole, Ward, and Pašeta began their research, the lists of books and articles and museum exhibits focusing on female activists has grown to such an extent that one could feasibly write a book on the historiography alone. Still, the historian’s job is never done, and there is still much to be discovered and much to be said about women’s experiences and the roles they played in the revolutionary period in Ireland—

¹¹⁸ McCoole, “Foreword,” 14–16. For a more in-depth discussion of the historiography of Irish revolutionary women, please see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

and in other periods as well. Thus, this thesis is intended as a contribution to the still-growing study of Irish women, and to the process of historical recovery.

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