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## "And They'll March with Their Brothers to Freedom": Cumann na Mban, Nationalism, and Women's Rights in Ireland, 1900-1923

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

‘AND THEY’LL MARCH WITH THEIR BROTHERS TO FREEDOM’: CUMANN  
NA MBAN, NATIONALISM, AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN IRELAND, 1900—1923

By

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## ABSTRACT

This Thesis examines the concurrence of nationalism with feminism in Ireland during the revolutionary period, 1900—1923. Many authors wish to draw a strict dichotomy between women who became suffragists and women who became nationalists, but it will be shown that such lines became blurred during this period as more suffragists joined the nationalists and more nationalists gained interest in the suffrage movement. I will also seek to show that women's involvement in the nationalist struggle was necessary for their inclusion in politics during the first quarter of the Twentieth century, as suffragists alone would never have made an imprint upon the rapidly militarizing society in Ireland during this time.

Cumann na mBan and Inghinidhe na hÉireann will be the primary focuses of this work because they used their respective places within the nationalist movement to blur gender roles and to argue for women's rights. Some historians praise the suffragists while painting nationalist women as puppets of the male nationalist organizations; however, women in the nationalist movement were able to make more of an impact on the men than suffragists due to their relationship with male revolutionaries. While many historians have noted that Cumann na mBan was started because the Irish Volunteers did not want to include women in their council, few have noted how the women of Cumann used their unique position to increase the visibility of Irish women in the struggle for independence and created a formidable public persona that set them apart as women and revolutionaries.

Cumann na mBan and Inghinidhe na hÉireann both used their voices to demand women's inclusion in politics and public life. Their constant references to the women of ancient Ireland often stated that if they wanted to remain true to their ancient Irish roots, they must include women as equal citizens and give them equal rights. However, it was only when women in Cumann na mBan took part in the risings and military activities that most of the nationalist men began to see them on more equal terms. With women taking the same risks as the men, logic dictated that keeping women out of politics was hypocritical. In fact, Constance Markievicz became the first woman to be elected to Parliament because of her role in Cumann na mBan and her nationalist activities.

The greatest achievement of women's activism in Ireland was their place in the 1922 Constitution, which included women on equal terms. However, women's autonomy and equality met with staunch criticism from the church. Catholic anti-feminism was at its height following the Civil War in 1923. Many nationalist men who had praised the women of Cumann na mBan in previous years blamed them for the Civil War. The fact that women had sided almost unanimously with the anti-treaty forces damaged their political reputation in the Free State. As had happened in Post-WWII America, men began seeing women's activism as dangerous and unnatural; they now attempted to reposition women within the home. While during the revolutionary period, the women had come to demand their equality and had made great steps towards achieving it; the anti-feminist backlash of the 1920s and 30s would result in laws that limited women's activities outside the home. Though women kept the right to vote and to hold office, the 1937 Constitution made it illegal for married women to work outside the home and by emphasizing women's roles as wives and mothers, undermined women's equality.

INTRODUCTION

IRISH WOMEN AND NATIONALISM

The Training of Irish women for the duties of their state in life is, if a less showy matter than high politics, at least as important as they. From a combination of circumstances, Irish girls have received far less training in the domestic arts than the women of most civilized countries...The need for our nation...is not for the Amazon. It is for the conservative woman, careful for all the sanctities, all the securities, all the safeguards of the House of Life.<sup>1</sup>

Profound changes occurred in Ireland during the period 1900—1923; universal suffrage was achieved, wars were fought, and the Irish Free State was established. These dates indicate the start and end of an age of nationalism and revolution; women founded their first organization of the revolutionary era in 1900 and by 1923 they had impacted the gender ideologies of the Irish state and advanced women's position within the government. Women played an integral role in the military campaigns of Ireland during these years, in return, they demanded suffrage on equal terms and their sex's inclusion in politics, both of these demands were granted in the Constitution of 1922. Katharine Tynan penned the above quote in 1924; like other conservatives from her time, she feared that women were too interested in politics and did not spend enough time tending to their "natural" domain, the home. By contrast, papers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been calling for women to leave the home. Women's nationalist newspapers at this time stated their desire that women should have "A voice in directing the affairs of Ireland."<sup>2</sup> So how did women in Ireland move, in the matter of just over two decades, from lacking a voice in the nation to being so highly involved in politics that they neglected the home? The answer requires an analysis of Irish women's activities during the first twenty-three years of the century.

The most prevalent campaigns by women in early twentieth century Ireland were: the suffrage movement, nationalist women's movements (militant and non-militant), and unionist women's movements (militant and non-militant). The nationalist movement had, during the late nineteenth century, come to dominate life in Ireland. There were many phases to the national movement, but the early twentieth century saw two distinct phases: first, the cultural/political portion of the movement, secondly the military component of the movement, which followed the Home Rule Crisis. Women were a party to both of these phases through cultural groups like the Gaelic League and Sinn Fein, through political groups such as Inghinidhe na hEireann, and through the military group Cumann na mBan.

This study will focus on Cumann na mBan and Inghinidhe na hEireann, thus bringing military and political aspects of Irishwomen's lives in the early twentieth century to the fore. The relationship between feminism and nationalism is the major focus of this work. Feminist historians have often shown their disapproval and disappointment with women in these two groups, who were both so very involved in nationalism that they could not become "real" feminists. Jan Canavan, while focusing on

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine Tynan, "A Trumpet Call to Irish Women," in William George Fitzgerald, ed., *The Voice of Ireland: a survey of the race and nation from all angles*, (Dublin : Virtue and Co., 1924), 170, 174.

<sup>2</sup> C. L. Innes, "'A Voice in Directing the Affairs of Ireland': *L'Irlande libre, The Shan Van Vocht, and Bean na hEireann*," in Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells, eds., *Irish Writing: Exile and Subversion*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 146—158, 146.

women and nationalism in 1840s Ireland has noted, “Feminists who privilege sexual difference often fail to understand women’s interest in nationalist or socialist causes, because they understand women’s interests to be entirely gender-related. This can lead to sweeping generalizations about women without historical specificity.”<sup>3</sup> To apply this to twentieth century activism—it is time to look past the failures of these groups and to reassess them in terms of what they accomplished and how they impacted gender roles during the period 1900—1923. In fact, women’s participation in the nationalist movement, military and political, was necessary for women’s inclusion in the Free State politics. The rapid militarization of Irish society meant that only those who were willing to participate in the war won the right to citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, women’s actions in the first part of the Free State period (1922—1937) are incorporated into the final chapter to prove that the nature of the society remained changed to a degree after the wars, rather than simply reverting back to pre-war conditions.

Twentieth century elements of women’s participation in the Irish nationalist campaign related, in many ways, to Irish women’s work in past rebellions and nationalist movements. The historic precedent for Irish women’s contribution to nationalist activities, including active combat, lies in past risings and revolutions. There is proof of women’s involvement in every rising and war to take place in Ireland, with women being conscripted into the army until the Sixth Century.<sup>5</sup> In addition, women’s writings are present in every era of Irish nationalism from Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* in 1800 through the women of Young Ireland and the Celtic Literary Revival. This provides further reason to question the use of a simplistic public/private sphere dichotomy created by women’s historians of the past, at least in relation to Ireland.<sup>6</sup> Even in the nineteenth century, when the rhetoric of the “private sphere” supposedly was

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<sup>3</sup> Jan Canavan, “Romantic Revolutionary Irishwomen: Women, Young Ireland, and 1848,” in Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy, *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, (Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1997), 212—220, 220.

<sup>4</sup> For arguments about war and citizenship see: Jason Knirck, “Ghosts and Realities: Female TDs and the Treaty Debate,” *Eire-Ireland*, XXXII/XXXIII, no. 4/1&2, (Winter 1997), 170—194; Jason Knirck, *Women of the Dail: Gender, Republicanism and the Anglo-Irish Treaty* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004); Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Joan Hoff and Moureen Coulter, *Irish Women’s Voices: Past and Present: Journal of Women’s History Special Double Issue on Irish Women*. Winter/Spring 1995, 6, no. 4/7 no. 1; Frances Gardiner, “Political Interest and Participation of Irish Women 1922—1992: The Unfinished Revolution,” In Ailbhe Smyth, ed., *Irish Women’s Studies Reader*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), 45—76; Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, “Engendering Citizenship : Women’s Relationship to the State in Ireland & the United States in the Post-Suffrage Period,” In Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O’ Dowd, eds., *Women and Irish History: Essays in Honour of Margaret MacCurtain*, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Women in Ireland were not completely barred from combat until 697 when Adomnán combined Saint Columcille’s law exempting women from combat with the Lex Innocentium which forbade women’s taking up of arms. Peter Ellis, *Celtic Women*, p 41; Helena Concannon, *Daughters of Banba*, (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1922), 250; and James Cassidy, *Women of the Gael*.

<sup>6</sup> Much theory questions the legitimacy of the “separate spheres” paradigm or strives to redefine the concept, among these are: Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: 1982); Nancy Fraser “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” *Socialtext*, 8/9, (1990), 56—80; Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” in *The Journal of American History*, 75, no. 1, (June 1988), 9—39; Dana R. Villa, Postmodernism and the Public Sphere, *The American Political Science Review*, 86, no. 3, (September 1992), 712—721.

gaining strength, it was not fully imposed. This is not to say that women were not limited in their opportunities, but to add that women were active agents; many women refused to be relegated to the home and fought attempts to place them there using any resources available.<sup>7</sup>

Women in Ireland took up arms, raised funds, and hid fugitives during the Rebellion of 1798; however, their activities seem to have correlated directly to their class. While women of the higher classes were barred from direct combat, they were encouraged to carry dispatches, raise money, and found organizations such as the United Irishwomen; in the meantime, women of the poorer classes, particularly in Wexford, were marching into battle and dying on the field.<sup>8</sup> While the small number of women who fought in the American Revolution were forced to dress as men to participate in combat, larger numbers of women in Ireland were seen riding into battle sidesaddle, while wearing dresses.<sup>9</sup> A couple of sources speak of “young girls dressed in white, with green ribbons and carrying pikes.”<sup>10</sup> Women fighting in the Rebellion of 1798 did not have to sacrifice ideals of femininity to participate in combat; though later women would see the practicality of changing the modes of dress to improve mobility.<sup>11</sup>

Women were also seen in combat in France during the French Revolution, which, alongside the American War of Independence, was the major influence for Ireland’s rebellion. Women in France served similar purposes to those in Ireland’s rebellion as well: women became protestors, fighters, messengers, and supporters. However, women seem to have gained a greater political influence than those in Ireland.<sup>12</sup> Mary O’Dowd

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine Hall has argued recently that the rhetoric of separate spheres developed later than previously assumed. Several articles in *White, Male, and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge Press, 1992) discuss the creation of the sphere dichotomy in England as well as various women’s attempts to use the spheres argument to their advantage as well as feminist arguments against it.

<sup>8</sup> Séamas Ó Saothraí, *Heroines of 1798*, (Wicklow: The Bray Heritage Visitor’s Center, 1998); Daire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong, eds., *The Women of 1798*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998); John D. Beatty, *Protestant Women’s Narratives of the Irish Rebellion of 1798*, (Dublin: Four Courts, 2001); Sir Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions in Ireland from the arrival of the English: Also, a particular detail of that which broke out the 23d of May, 1798*, (n.p., 1800).

<sup>9</sup> A few books on women in the American Revolution attest to the rarity of these women, for a detailed account see Jill Canon, *Heroines of the American Revolution*, (Bellophron Books, 1995); Lucy Freeman and Alma Bond, *America’s First Woman Warrior: The Courage of Deborah Sampson*, (Paragon House, 1992); Patricia Edwards Clyne, *Patriots in Petticoats*, (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1976). For more info on women in combat in Ireland’s rebellion see A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Summer Soldiers: The 1798 Rebellion in Antrim and Down*, (Dublin: Blackstaff, 1996); Séamas Ó Saothraí, *Heroines of 1798*, (Wicklow: The Bray Heritage Visitor’s Center, 1998); Daire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong, eds., *The Women of 1798*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Mary Leadbeater’s narrative in *Protestant Women’s Narratives*. P. 207. These women are also mentioned at several points in Sir Richard Musgrave’s *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions of Ireland* and in the narrative of “Mrs. M.”, (quoted in *Protestant Women’s Narratives* and in Musgrave’s account) as well as many other sources.

<sup>11</sup> Constance Markievicz often urged the women to wear short skirts.

<sup>12</sup> Women in the French Revolution formed several organizations, including auxiliaries to Jacobin clubs and radical clubs such as the Society of Republican Revolutionary Women. Also, protests by bourgeois feminists gained some pro-women legislation in regards to divorce and inheritance laws, among other rights (though these were short-lived; the Napoleonic code wiped out many of these gains). Women on the lowest social rung led the march to Versailles to protest bread prices and were involved in other riots and revolutionary activities as well. For detailed accounts of women in the French Revolution see Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992);

proved in a recent article that Elite women in Ireland had very political lives by comparison. While France banned women from attending political debates in 1794 and England banned women from the gallery at Parliament in 1778, women in Ireland were not banned until after the act of Union in 1800.<sup>13</sup> Women also took part in political activities such as canvassing for parliamentary debates.<sup>14</sup> Women's participation in informal politics is also evident in the life of Mary Ann McCracken, who berated her brother about women's rights when he was incarcerated in Kilmainham. In one of her letters before his execution, she wrote:

I have a great curiosity to visit some female societies in the town (though I should like them better were they promiscuous, as there can be no other reason for having them separate but keeping women in the dark and certainly it is equally ungenerous and unhandy to make tools out of them without confiding in them.)<sup>15</sup>

Her letter is interesting not only because it speaks of women's equality and rights, but because it is one of the earliest recorded instances of an Irish nationalist woman addressing the issue of women's inequality within the nationalist movement. She also makes note of a women's society, The United Irishwomen, about whom little is known. Many historians believed until recently that the Ladies Land League was the first all-female nationalist society, however, a handful of sources mention these groups and make it obvious that the United Irishwomen discussed political ideas.<sup>16</sup>

The sources on 1798, however, are limited and writings by women from this time period (especially those in the lower classes) are very difficult to come by. In Daire Keogh's edited work, *The Women of 1798*, one author used court's martial reports to prove that women were very active in the battle, as well as showing the importance of the women's testimony in deciding which men would be sentenced or set free (as some women turned informers and others attempted to use character witnesses to save the men). In only two cases were women court-martialed; however women often testified or informed during the men's trials. During their testimony, women often shared their own rebel stories, even "Croppie Biddie Dolan," the most notorious female informer in Irish memory, told of her activities with the rebels despite the fact that she was now informing on one of the same men she had worked with.<sup>17</sup>

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Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Shirley Elson Roessler: *Women and Politics in the French Revolution, 1789-1795*, (New York: P Lang, 1996); and Marilyn Yalon, *Blood Sisters: The French Revolution in Women's Memory*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Mary O'Dowd, "The Women in the Gallery: Women and Politics in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland," in *From the United Irishmen to Twentieth-Century Unionism: A Festschrift for A. T. Q. Stewart*, edited by Sabine Wichert, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Mary O'Dowd, "The Women in the Gallery," 37-8.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Ann McCracken to Harry [Henry Joy McCracken], March 16, 1797, in Laurence Flanagan, editor, *Irish Women's Letters*, 57.

<sup>16</sup> See William Drennan and Martha Drennan McTier, *The Drennan-McTier letters*. (Dublin: Irish Manuscript Commission, 1998); *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801: the letters of Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle*. edited, annotated, and introduced by Thomas Bartlett Dublin: Four Courts, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Bartlett, "Bearing Witness: Female Evidences in Court Martials Convened to Suppress the 1798 Rebellion," in Daire Keogh and Nicholas Furlong, eds., *Women of 1798*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 65.

Whatever their sphere of involvement, the women of 1798 had one important goal in common, the separation of Ireland from England. Women in 1798 were, in many ways, upholding tradition by participating in the rebellion. However, as gender ideologies continued to change in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, women's public activism eventually came into question. Mary Ann McCracken lost the two men she loved the most due to the nationalist cause, yet she remained actively politicized until her death in 1866.<sup>18</sup> The women of 1798 were remembered, though not as frequently as the men. A few ballads were written about the women of 1798; Betsy Gray was most often remembered because of her valiant charge alongside the men and for her death on the battlefield:

*Shame on the cruel, ruthless band  
Who haunted down to death their prey!  
And palsy strike the murderous hand  
That slew the lovely Betsy Gray.*<sup>19</sup>

The United Irishmen may not have realized it, but when they wrote down or told these women's stories, they were permanently enshrining these women's names in the minds of the public. This later provided legitimization for women's involvement in the patriotic cause; to counter those in opposition to her involvement, a woman could simply cite one of the names of her female forebears in liberty. In the early twentieth century, for example, these women were frequently mentioned in both historic texts and feminist-nationalist speeches. These stories still evoked emotion when Helena Concannon wrote *The Women of 'Ninety-Eight*. Of course, her thesis was much closer to nationalist propaganda than history. She appealed to the men using their own categorization of women, "The wife of Theobald Tone" or "The Sister of Henry Joy McCracken"; by giving nationalists a famous male name to recognize and using their own images of women as wives, sisters, and mothers, she reached a broader audience and not just her fellow Irishwomen.<sup>20</sup>

Events from 1798 onward had the power to politicize women, and in fact, did. Female nationalists, like suffragists, had to be politically aware to be taken seriously by predominate groups of the day. Only when women had a reason to question policies did they become politically motivated, as happened with Mary Ann McCracken and the United Irishwomen; revolution was the media of discovery of the political, cultural, and social surroundings. Men, while still using women as passive symbols, often commented on the women who helped them in their reminiscences of 1798. Thomas Cloney, Patrick F. Kavanagh, and Joseph Holt all recall the aid given by women making gunpowder, carrying messages, tending camp, and even fighting. 1798 can be considered the progenitor of later relationships between women and nationalists; because of the records of the women left in first-hand accounts, oral tradition, and a few ballads, later

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<sup>18</sup> For more information on her writings in the 1800s see Mary McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken: A Belfast Panorama*, Dublin, 1960. Also see, Laurence Flanagan, ed., *Irish Women's Letters*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 55-67.

<sup>19</sup> "Betsy Gray" A Ballad of Ninety-Eight, quoted in W. G. Lyttle, *Betsy Gray or Hearts of Down*, Reprint, 1896 (Newcastle: Mourne Observers Ltd., ) [http://www.lisburn.com/books/betsey\\_gray/betsy-gray1.htm](http://www.lisburn.com/books/betsey_gray/betsy-gray1.htm)

<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Thomas Concannon, MA Thesis, *Women of 'Ninety Eight*, (Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1919). It was also reprinted in 1920.

nationalists could not deny women's past participation in the political and military realms of nationalism.

This politicization and nationalist upsurge in women lead to their involvement with Young Ireland in 1848. Since Thomas Davis and the Young Irelanders were much more progressive than the United Irishmen had been, it was easier for women to become involved as writers for *The Nation* (Young Ireland's Newspaper) than it had been for them to become involved in the United Irish Societies.<sup>21</sup> Many of these women writers in the 1840s used their nationalist stance as a chance to pitch women's rights. As Jan Canavan stated "Most, if not all, movement for women's rights throughout the world have begun when women who are participating in another cause begin to see that they are not treated equally within their organizations."<sup>22</sup> As the United Irishwomen had noted in 1798, the women of Young Ireland realized that they were not considered equal by some of the men in the organization. During the early years of the publication, the men's attitude towards women tended to be half-hearted, they believed that women should be patriotic, but that woman's direct participation in politics would "unsex" her.<sup>23</sup> However, in 1846, Thomas Davis, noting the massive female participation in the writing and the Young Ireland movement, began a series called *Illustrious Irishwomen*. This publication would focus on women from 1798, though its publication ceased before it ended the serial biography of Matilda Tone (Theobald Wolfe Tone's wife).<sup>24</sup>

Women writers of *The Nation* included "Mary," "Eva," "Speranza" (Lady Wilde), Margaret Callan, and Jenny Mitchel (wife of John Mitchel, one of the Young Ireland leaders). Some of these women also contributed to the *United Irishman*. Overall there were at least fifteen female authors of *The Nation*, though the exact numbers are hard to deduce because men sometimes wrote under female pseudonyms and women sometimes wrote under male names.<sup>25</sup> The Young Ireland movement was based on both Enlightenment and Romanticist discourse. These two discourses "shaped the discussion of women's rights, as well as national rights, in Ireland."<sup>26</sup> The development of women's rights discourse in the nation changed between 1843 and 1848. Jan Canavan has shown that women began the span by speaking in terms of their national duties and ended it by directly asking for their rights and treatment on equal terms.<sup>27</sup> Of the ladies of the nation, Lady Wilde was the most vocal on the matter of suffrage and women's rights; she outlined her feminist beliefs in an essay called "The Bondage of Woman."<sup>28</sup> Wilde further developed her feminist thought over the years and by 1850 was arguing that women not only should have a right to a career, but had the right to prioritize that career over family and marriage.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Jan Canavan, "Revolution in Ireland, Evolution in Women's Rights: Irish Women in 1798 and 1848," in *Studies in 1798 and 1848*. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Canavan, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Brigitte Anton, "Women of The Nation," *History Ireland*, 1, no. 3, (Autumn 1993), 34—37, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Brigitte Anton, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Brigitte Anton, 34.

<sup>26</sup> Jan Canavan, "Romantic Revolutionary Irishwomen," 213.

<sup>27</sup> Jan Canavan, "Romantic Revolutionary Irishwomen."

<sup>28</sup> Lady Wilde, "The Bondage of Woman" and "Irish Leaders and Martyrs" are both reprinted in Marie Mulvey Roberts and Timae Mizuta, eds., *The Rebels: Irish Feminists*, (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Jan Canavan, "Romantic Revolutionary Irishwomen," 219.

Women's participation in the Young Ireland movement reached its zenith in 1848 when "Eva" and "Mary" both wrote articles in *The Nation* addressing women's participation, the former stating that "What is virtue in man is also virtue in woman. Virtue is of no sex. A coward woman is as base as a coward man...It is not unfeminine to take sword or gun, if sword or gun are required..." and the latter asking "Do you believe famine to be milder than the sword?"<sup>30</sup> Brigitte Anton noted that these women were not just writers, they engaged in public activities and joined in the revolution in 1848.<sup>31</sup> The women were present for the short Rising on July 26 in Tipperary; these women caused a great disturbance and acted in an "unfeminine" manner.<sup>32</sup> The women's public activities and the written debates in the periodicals for which they wrote caused them to develop stronger opinions on women's rights issues.

The progression of women's involvement in nationalism and their coincidental pique in interest of women's rights continued throughout the rest of the nineteenth century; after writing and otherwise being involved in Young Ireland, women continued to work with nationalists when allowed. After Charles Stewart Parnell founded the Land League in 1879, his sister, Anna Parnell founded the Ladies' Land League.

The Ladies' Land League was a remarkable organization for its time. The women aided the men by raising funds and doing typical nationalist women's work until the men wound up in prison. During 1881, the women continued the "Land War" while the men were in prison. At this point, the LLL both set up "catering centers" for male prisoners and took over the press of an Irish nationalist newspaper, *United Ireland*.<sup>33</sup> Both the British government and Church officials in Ireland attempted to stop the LLL's work. Anna Parnell spent much of 1881-82 speaking out against the abuses of British authority and for the rights of tenant farmers. In January 1882, the LLL was proclaimed to be an illegal organization, but they chose to publicly continue their work. Many of these women were writers, including Anna's sister Fanny Parnell, who was considered to be the poet of the LLL.<sup>34</sup>

The Ladies' Land League had the backing and support of rural women and the Irish peasantry due to the nature of their work. In fact, Janet K. Tebrake argued that unincorporated women played a vital role in the temporary success of the movement. In fact, many of the poor rural women joined the Land League itself (not the Ladies' society) and faced imprisonment alongside the men. However, Tebrake also notes that numbers of rural women also seem to have played a role in the organization.<sup>35</sup> The Ladies' Land League had allowed women to become a part of mass politics by not only holding large meetings, but by bringing women to the front of the stage during the meetings. Leaders of LLL always asked men to sit near the back or around the outskirts

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<sup>30</sup> Brigitte Anton, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Anton, 37.

<sup>32</sup> Jan Canavan "Romantic Revolutionary Irishwomen," 218.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 541, NAI, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913—21, Statement by Witness, addendum on Ladies' Land League, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 541, NAI, addendum on Ladies' Land League, 1—5.

<sup>35</sup> Janet K. Tebrake, "Irish Peasant Women in Revolt: The Land League Years," *Irish Historical Studies: Joint Journal of the Irish Historical Society and the Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies*, 28, (May 1992), 63—80, 68.

of the meetings. The LLL's use of mass politics brought in contingencies from all classes, including poorer women.<sup>36</sup>

After the most prominent male members of the Land League were arrested, the LLL became even more outspoken. They held a massive protest against the British government's policies in Ireland for which they were heavily rebuked by Irish men, especially the Catholic Church officials.<sup>37</sup> The LLL's revolutionary policies, in the end, forced them to disband. The imprisoned Land League men were released on several conditions outlined in the "Kilmainham Treaty," the most notable was the requisite disbanding of the Ladies' Land League. Male Land Leaguers had to stop their own activities as well, but the British perceived the women to be a great threat. Anna Parnell was greatly upset by the ending of her organization, in *The Tale of a Great Sham*, her history of the Land War and the LLL she reflected on the political position of Irish women:

I say 'Irish men', because whatever the relative values of men and women may be, it is certain that the former cannot be done without, when it is a question of altering the status of a country. If the men of that country have made up their minds that it shall not be done, the women cannot bring it about.<sup>38</sup>

Her book was a cautionary tale to many Irish women who were coming of age during the Celtic Literary Renaissance and other cultural movements of the Fin de Siecle. While the years ending the nineteenth century brought about this literary and educational movement, the early years of the twentieth century used the ideological changes in the literature of that time to promote revolution in the political foreground. Mythology, language, and ancient religions ("fairy faith" and the Golden Dawn were closer to neopaganism than actual ancient Celtic religions) were being brought back by men and women alike. Maud Gonne and Lady Gregory, as well as William Butler Yeats were members of the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Gaelic League.

Women's involvement with literary and cultural movements at the end of the nineteenth century was critical to their changing position in the early twentieth century. After the fall of the Ladies' Land League, women had to, after years of political activity, justify their political position in Ireland. These literary societies allowed the women to voice political opinions and ideas; the fact that these women had many feelings that mirrored those of nationalist men gave them a strong foundation for an intimate relationship. Just as Young Ireland had allowed women's publishing to extend beyond the creative into the realm of law-making and governmental policy; the Gaelic League (the first literary/cultural organization to admit women) allowed women to use stories from the past to comment on the present political complaints.

The Nineteenth century had witnessed a turning toward politics rather than a rebellion as a means of achieving necessary changes; however, in the first quarter of the

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<sup>36</sup> Tebrake, 70.

<sup>37</sup> Tebrake, 71.

<sup>38</sup> Anna Parnell, Original Manuscript from *Tale of a Great Sham*, quoted in Dana Hearne, "Rewriting History: Anna Parnell's 'The Tale of a Great Sham,'" in S. F. Gallagher, ed., *Women in Irish Legend, Life, and Literature: Irish Literary Studies 14*, (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983), 138—149, 149.

Twentieth Century, rebellion and cultural revival became intermarried with politics to create a new breed of nationalists. Men and women of various classes and ranks became involved in the “Cause” of Ireland. A blurring of gendered boundaries, as well as of class boundaries emerged with the 1916 rebellion and continued throughout the revolutionary period. The years prior to 1916 evinced a bitter conflict between some suffragists and female nationalists: each criticized the other for having skewed priorities. However, the Easter Rising and the executions taking place in its wake unified Ireland and turned many people toward the nationalist cause, including suffragists who had previously been unsympathetic. The death of feminist Francis Sheehy Skeffington, husband of Hanna, and the overreaction of British troops forced suffragists to realize that if they wanted their part in the Irish republic, they must aid and support the nationalists. The first all-women’s group to be founded was Inghinidhe na hEireann, a suffragist-nationalist organization. Inghinidhe formed in 1900 and espoused political causes related to nationalism and women’s rights. Inghinidhe united with Cumann na nGaedheal (which absorbed several literary organizations) and then these groups further united with the IRB Dungannon clubs to create Sinn Fein, though the individual organizations still operated separately as well as under their new umbrella of Sinn Fein.

Women founded an auxiliary to the Irish Volunteer Army in 1914; they took up the name Cumann na mBan (Council of Women). Cumann na mBan were more militarily-minded and focused more intently on the nationalist movement than their predecessors. Ireland’s women, through the Irish Citizen Army and Cumann na mBan, became involved during the fighting in 1916, but their involvement intensified during the Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War.<sup>39</sup> This is not completely atypical when compared to other countries. It is impossible for revolution and civil war to occur and not affect a majority of a country’s population.

The women in Ireland’s political offices were highly respected women, mostly veterans of the wars. Some historians criticize the fact that women elected into Dail offices were all important nationalist figures; however, this makes sense because these were the women who had been arguing the broader range of politics all along. Constance Markievicz, for instance, can hardly be accused of being chosen simply because she was an icon; her political works and other writings speak for themselves.<sup>40</sup> Markievicz indicated in her speeches that it was time for women to quit relying on men; she stated that women needed to change their mode of dress to a more efficient one and learn how to handle weapons rather than relying on male escorts for their safety.<sup>41</sup> Mary MacSwiney and Jenny Wyse-Power were also very outspoken women while they were with Cumann na mBan; Wyse-Power later became a very persuasive Senator and MacSwiney became a very articulate member of the Dail Eireann.

A few works have explored gendered perspectives of war and nationalism; however, there are many disagreements between historians over whether war and

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<sup>39</sup> Cumann na mBan had 100 branches following the 1916 Rising, by 1918 there were 600 branches, this increased to around 1000 branches by 1921. Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women*, 65. Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 131 provide the number of women in 1918. Margaret Ward also provides the estimate of 1000 branches for 1921.

<sup>40</sup> Constance Markievicz’s writings exhibit a balance between suffrage/women’s rights and nationalism, for examples see her speeches/articles: “Women, Ideals and the Nation,” “What Irish Republicans Stand For,” “Buy a Revolver,” etc;

<sup>41</sup> For these ideas especially, see Constance de Markievicz’s “Buy a Revolver”.

nationalism actually further feminist or suffrage causes. Too much past feminist scholarship has focused on criticizing the “woman as pacifist and man as warrior” dichotomy or trying to deconstruct the “woman as symbol” ideology.<sup>42</sup> Now that women’s historians have turned toward new questions regarding women and men in warfare; there has been a genuine turning toward interpretation of women’s actions in war (whether passive or aggressive) in recent scholarship.<sup>43</sup> Most of these histories ignore Ireland, or at best focus solely on Northern Ireland. Yet, Ireland conforms in some ways to greater world patterns in relation to women’s rights.

Most historians would agree that feminists attempt to use nationalist activities and groups to their advantage, but disagree about the impact of nationalism on women and their rights. According to many historians, civil and internal wars indeed allowed greater freedom for women, but the gains that women make within these periods are often effaced or rescinded once the military crisis has abated.<sup>44</sup> In America, women were not allowed to fight in the Revolutionary War; thus there was little improvement for their status during, before, or after the war. In the French Revolution around that same time, women had a fairly important part in fighting and other revolutionary activities; a few French women “took up the feminist cause” and their part in politics was very great for a short time following the revolution.<sup>45</sup> As noted earlier, in Ireland’s “great event” of the Eighteenth Century, the 1798 Rebellion, a small number of women fought, though a great number of women were involved in various other ways; however, women’s involvement in this revolution only served to politicize them—it did not have an immediate impact on their rights. Revolutionary women in Ireland were able to act outside of proscribed gender roles, allowing them to disprove theories of feminine weakness. These female revolutionaries’ activities skewed gender roles during the first part of the twentieth century; women used their revolutionary activities to argue that their civil service should be repaid with an equal distribution of civil rights between the sexes.

In Ireland in the earliest years of the twentieth century, there were genuine changes in women’s status. Several elements caused ideological changes about women’s roles. Socialism had a hand in women’s enhanced participation in the efforts of 1916; the great strikes of 1913 that led up to the Dublin Lockout included many women workers, who later that year founded the Irish Women Worker’s Union. The Irish Citizen Army, founded by Jim Larkin and James Connolly, included women and allowed them to participate on equal terms with the men. Anyone able to keep up with the drills and to complete the required training was allowed to participate in the Rising in 1916. Female snipers and gun-women were mostly members of the ICA.<sup>46</sup> James Connolly, as a

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<sup>42</sup> For examples of literature focused on women as pacifist, see the articles within *Women and War*, 1980.

<sup>43</sup> Susan Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Postwar Britain*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>44</sup> See *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition*. Edited by Rick Wilford and Robert L. Miller. New York: Routledge Press, 1998. “Women, Ethnicity and nationalism: Surveying the Ground” Rick Wilford 1-22, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Darline Gay Levy and Harriet Benson Applewhite, “Women of the Popular Classes in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795” and Barbara Corrado Pope, “Revolution and Retreat: Upper-Class French Women After 1789,” In *Women, War, and Revolution* edited by Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett New York and London: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980; 9—36 and 215—237.

<sup>46</sup> For info on gender in the Irish Citizen Army see Constance Markievicz, “St Stephen’s Green” quoted in Margaret Ward, ed., *In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism*, (Cork: Attic Press, 1995), 73-76;

socialist and feminist, also had a hand in granting women equal citizenship in the 1916 Proclamation of the Provisional Government of Ireland. However, while the Socialist cause certainly gave women advancement opportunities and allowed women of all classes to participate in its activities, its influence does not explain why women's involvement in wartime activities increased during the Anglo-Irish, and Irish Civil War, when socialism (after Connolly's execution in 1916) was dying out in Dublin. Many studies have proven that wars cannot proceed without the work of both men and women; however the early twentieth century conflict in Ireland crossed class and certain ethnic boundaries as well as gendered ones. All classes of men and women were involved in war efforts of various sorts and a significant number of leaders of the rebellion came from an Anglo-Irish background. Revolutions and Civil Wars tend to bring about social, cultural, and intellectual changes that in turn influence a change in class, gender, and ethnic relations.

A few Irish women's historians have stated that nationalist history overshadows all other types of history in Ireland. While traditionally Irish history has focused on nationalism, historians have only explored women's participation in the nationalist struggle recently. Margaret Ward has noted that other feminist historians have argued that the marginalization of suffragists has been the fault of female nationalists:

What Irish feminist historians have criticized is not the clinging to women's rights preoccupations, but rather what they consider to be an excessive concentration upon nationalist history. Cliona Murphy attributes this to the fact that the new independent Irish state lauded those women who helped in the nationalist struggle, creating folk heroines 'comparable only to ancient Gaelic Queens', while the suffragists were viewed as nationalistic traitors for putting women's issues before those of the nation. The latter is undoubtedly true, but it doesn't explain the fact that the nationalistic heroines were also by and large equally ignored by the historians, and it has only been in the past decade that any real assessment of their contribution has begun.<sup>47</sup>

So, while many women's historians and gender historians claim that too many scholars have focused on nationalism and have set their sights on other topics, a few particularly militant female nationalists have either been relegated to the realm of contributory histories with no real interpretation of their actions and motives or ignored completely. There is still much to be said on this topic, as Margaret Ward, Ruth Taillon, and Sinead McCool prove in their books.

Women in Ireland have been regarded as more liberated than women in other countries by historians such as Peter Ellis, while being painted as more repressed by others such as Margaret Ward. Ellis provides one of the first arguments against those who have attributed Irish women's participation in twentieth century warfare and their

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Helena Moloney, WS 391, NAI, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913-21, Statement by Witness; and R. M. Fox, *A History of the Irish Citizen Army*, (Dublin: James Duffy, 1943); For Connolly's unusually supportive policy on women see James Connolly, *The Re-Conquest of Ireland*, reprinted in *James Connolly, Collected Works, Volume I*, (Dublin: New Book Publications, 1987), 238.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Ward, "The Missing Sex: Putting Women into Irish History", p. 18.

“greater freedom” as a remnant of their Celtic roots.<sup>48</sup> However, at the same time, he used the 1690 work *Parliament mBan* (the Parliament of Women) as proof that Irish women wrote and spoke of women’s rights at an earlier time than their English counterparts.<sup>49</sup> He stated that women in the Celtic fringes were the first to protest and fight their diminished statuses, and backs this argument up with the facts that Y Wladfa, an independent Welsh state, was the first to enfranchise women in 1867 and that the isle of Mann enfranchised women by 1881. Ellis’s book leads up to an argument that suffragist histories have overlooked women in the Celtic fringe and therefore overlooked places where women had more liberties; though these had been notably diminished by the rise of Christianity.<sup>50</sup> However, many other historians see the plight of women in Ireland differently.

There are several types of books about Irish nationalist women. First there are pieces dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These histories would be more accurately labeled as mythologies of the republican movement. First-hand accounts and narratives are useful as well. These accounts vary from short articles about the women’s experiences in the revolutionary period to lengthy accounts of their lives from birth to old age. While journals and other biographical works tend to be tainted with bias and, occasionally, self-aggrandizing exaggerations, they are nevertheless very useful in helping to locate the women’s voices. These first two sources are used to glean both information about the time period and to understand revolutionary women’s perspectives. Finally, books and articles written by contemporary historians influence and inform this work. Even modern histories of revolutionary Ireland often shade heavily into pro-British or pro-Irish bias; however, the discourse and tension between these accounts are used here to allow for the modification of old theses and ideas regarding revolutionary women.

Histories of women in early twentieth century Ireland generally focus on socialist groups, suffragists, or nationalist women. The woman’s suffrage movement in Ireland was very different than the suffrage movement in England; the two movements had similarities, but Irish feminists had to keep their movement separate due to the nationalist struggle in Ireland. Suffrage histories focus then on the tensions between Irish suffragists and Irish nationalists, male and female.<sup>51</sup> I will explore these divisions in Chapter Two

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Berresford Ellis, *Celtic Women: Women in Celtic Society and Literature*, (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1995). For a complete discussion of this topic see introduction and epilogue.

<sup>49</sup> Ellis, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ellis, 13-14 and conclusion.

<sup>51</sup> Beth McKillen, “Irish Feminism and Nationalist Separatism, 1914-23,” Parts 1 and 2, *Eire-Ireland* XVII, no. 3 (1983): 52-67, no. 4, 72-90; Louise Ryan, ed., *Irish Feminism and the Vote: An Anthology of the Irish Citizen, 1912-1920* (Dublin: Folens Publishing, 1996); Margaret Ward, “‘Suffrage First—Above All Else!’: An Account of the Irish Suffrage Movement,” in Ailbhe Smyth, ed., *Irish Women’s Studies Reader*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), 20—44; Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, “‘Free Women in a Free Nation’: Nationalist Feminist Expectations for Independence,” in Brian Farrell, ed., *The Creation of the Dail: A Volume of Essays from the Thomas Davis Lectures*, General Editor Michael Litton, (Dublin: Blackwater Press in association with Radio Telefis Eireann, 1994), 75-90; Margaret Ward, “Conflicting Interests: The British and Irish Suffrage Movements,” *Feminist Review*, no. 50, (Summer 1995); Mary Cullen, “How Radical was Irish Feminism between 1860 and 1920?,” in Patrick J. Cornish, editor, *Radicals, Rebels, and Establishments, Historical Studies XV, Papers Read before the Irish Conference of Historians*, Maynooth 16-19 June 1983, (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1985), 185-201. These are just a sampling from a large body of literature about the suffrage movement in Ireland.

and show that suffrage and nationalism did not constantly lead to two diametrically opposed groups, but that the two causes became intermingled, especially in the Irish Women's Franchise League. Only when the nuanced relationship between women's nationalist and suffrage activities are explored can the relationship of nationalism to women's rights be understood fully.

Chapter Three will explore the country-wide shift towards militarization that led to the creation of the Irish Citizen Army, Irish Volunteers, and Cumann na mBan. The two main books about Revolutionary women in Ireland are Margaret Ward's *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* and Sinead McCoole's *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Revolutionaries in the Revolutionary Period, 1900—1923*. These two books give excellent accounts of Cumann na mBan in the revolutionary period, however, Margaret Ward's is ultimately jaded by her life in Belfast and argues throughout that women in Ireland are more oppressed than women in other countries. McCoole's book does not propose to make any strong assessment of women's rights in relation to nationalist activities. However, McCoole generally is not afraid to give Cumann na mBan women credit for changing the relationship between themselves and the male nationalists throughout the period or even to state that their work might have had an impact on women's rights occasionally. I argue that this should be taken a step further: Cumann na mBan women were not merely auxiliaries to the Irish Volunteers; their activism took on new dimensions from the beginning. The identity established for Cumann na mBan was in flux from 1913, when the debates about the founding of the new women's organization raged, to 1916, when the women's equal position in Irish society was guaranteed by the 1916 Proclamation.

Chapter Three will also draw on Ruth Tallion's *When History was Made: The Women of 1916*. In this work, Taillon took a different approach to women revolutionaries. First, she centralized her study of revolutionary women on the single year 1916 and secondly, she looked to the women's achievements rather than their failures: "by including women's experiences and allowing them to interpret these experiences through their own words, it is possible to tell the story of Easter week fully, not partially, and in doing so, to reconsider the social and political significance of events."<sup>52</sup> It has been proven in various works that memory and perspective can be just as important to the shaping of history as actual events.<sup>53</sup> There are numerous first-hand accounts from this time frame and by looking at these, it is possible to gain an understanding of women's motivations for joining the struggle. A great number of primary sources show that women felt that their contribution to the revolutionary struggle was a strike for women's rights. In this vein, I will use Taillon's work to compliment my argument. As she stated, "It was not just because of Pearse's or MacDonagh's or James Connolly's progressive views on women that the Proclamation of the Republic included universal suffrage and equality for all Irish citizens. The Proclamation reflected the very

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<sup>52</sup> Ruth Tallion, *When History Was Made: The Women of 1916*, (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1996), xvi.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Matt Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Alan Radley, "Artefacts, Memory and a Sense of the Past," in *Collective Remembering*, ed. David Middleton and Derek Edwards (London: SAGE Publications, 1990), 46-59; Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1965).

real influence and involvement of women in the national and labour movements of the time.”<sup>54</sup> My own argument about the Proclamation will be similar to this, but I will show during the last two chapters that the Proclamation changed the relationship between male and female nationalists and gave the women a reason to argue for their equal citizenship during the formation of the First Dail Eireann and the Irish Free State.

Chapter Four takes a look at Cumann’s work in the post-Rising period and War of Independence. During this time, many men came to recognize women’s contributions and faithfulness to the cause during the revolutionary years. Margaret Ward, while calling 1916—1921 the “Years of Strength, still stripped Cumann of its merits in her preface:

My account of what took place in during a century of struggle against British rule in Ireland demonstrated not only that Irish women had an important history—and one that had been largely ignored or forgotten—but also that their heroic contribution had in no sense encouraged the majority of their male comrades to recognise women as political equals.<sup>55</sup>

Despite Ward’s exceedingly dismal view of the impact of women’s nationalist activities, research shows that Cumann’s role did change gender ideologies in Ireland, especially in the period 1916—1921 and inspired the men to give women equal citizenship rights. Ward only grants that the women in Cumann, over time, became “experienced activists with a new maturity of understanding, confident of the importance of their work and determined to ensure that the war would be won on their terms.”<sup>56</sup> She bases this comment on the mistaken idea that the women of Cumann were almost unanimously anti-Treaty in 1921. Despite the agendas and the change of organization along military lines in 1918, Ward chalks this up to new members and not a possible progression in the older generation of members.<sup>57</sup> My argument is that both the influx of new women into Cumann plus a progression of ideologies in the older group changed these policies. This argument also aligns with that of Ann Matthews, who, in a short article on “Women in the Civil War” showed that Cumann na mBan was divided over the Treaty and less than half of the organization remained after the anti-Treaty policy went into effect.

The study concludes by exploring Cumann na mBan’s role in the Civil War and Irish Free State. Civil War studies are far rarer than those on the War of Independence, 1916 Rising, and even the Irish Free State. Both McCoolle’s and Ward’s books assess the Civil War. Rather than conforming to Ward’s assertion that Cumann na mBan almost universally refused the Anglo-Irish Treaty, I will align myself with Ann Matthews’s argument that Cumann factioned during the Civil War due to the tensions and debates surrounding the Treaty. This final chapter shall present a more nuanced history of Cumann na mBan in the Civil War. Ann Matthews, Sinead McCoolle, and Charlotte Fallon’s “Civil War Hungerstrikes: Men and Women” will provide the background for this section.<sup>58</sup> Most articles on post-war Ireland follow Margaret Ward’s model of a

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<sup>54</sup> Tallion, xvi.

<sup>55</sup> Ward, preface to 1995 printing, ix.

<sup>56</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 155.

<sup>57</sup> Ward, 131.

<sup>58</sup> For Women in the Civil War see: Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*; Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*; Ann Matthews, “Women and the Civil War,” *The Irish Sword*, XX, no. 82, (Winter 1997), 379—386; Charlotte Fallon, “Civil War Hunger Strikes: Women and Men,” in *Eire-Ireland*, 22, No. 3, (Fall 1987), 75—91; Louise Ryan, “‘In the Line of Fire’: Representations of Women and War (1919—1923)

uniquely oppressive Irish state that is fueled by Catholicism and/or the politicians desire to return to normalcy. Mary Daly has been fairly successful in arguing against this paradigm by pointing out that the new repression of women's rights was a European and American phenomenon as well as an Irish one. Mary Clancy adds to this that feminists (many of whom had been nationalists) inside and outside the government successfully protested several repressive bills and acts, and also noted that female nationalists who had been active in the wars were more likely to speak out against anti-woman legislation. I agree with some of what Clancy, Valiulis, and Daly have said and will show that the anti-women's rights trends in the Irish Free State were similar to those in other countries at the same time. The conclusion of the chapter will show how women, politicized by their involvement in Cumann na mBan in the early twentieth century, continued to live public and political lives even after they left the organization. I also briefly touch on Cumann na mBan's continued activism in the anti-Treaty struggle for the Irish Republic.<sup>59</sup>

The most unsettling aspect of many books and articles on Cumann na mBan, Suffrage, and Women in the Irish Free State, is their use and reuse of the same primary materials; in fact, many studies only cite Ward's or other historian's quotation of primary sources (which are often edited to suit a particular purpose). A few nuanced studies of female suffragists and revolutionaries have been done in the past five years; however, works on outside interpretations of women's activities and female symbology have passed by the women's interpretations of themselves. No scholar has written a truly balanced interpretation of Cumann na mBan's activities and women's motivations for participation. New materials have become available in the last few years, the most

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Through the Writings of Republican Men," in Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward, eds., *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women, and Wicked Hags*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 45—61; Jason Knirck, " 'Ghosts' and 'Realities': Female TDs and the Treaty Debate," *Eire-Ireland*, XXXII/XXXIII, no. 4/1&2, 170—194; Oonagh Walsh, "Testimony from Imprisoned Women," in David Fitzpatrick, editor, *Revolution?: Ireland 1917-1923*, (Dublin: Trinity History Workshop, 1990), 69—85.  
<sup>59</sup> For studies of women in the Irish Free State see: Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, " 'Free Women in a Free Nation': Nationalist Feminist Expectations for Independence," in Brian Farrell and Michael Littleton, eds., *The Creation of the Dail: A Volume of Essays from the Thomas Davis Lectures*, (Dublin: Blackwater Press in association with Radio Telefis Éireann, 1994), 75—90; Mary Clancy, "Aspects of Women's Contributions to the Oireachtas Debate in the Irish Free State, 1922—1937," in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy, eds., *Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women's History in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, (Swords: Poolbeg, 1989), 206—232; Mary E. Daly, "Women in the Irish Free State, 1922—39: The Interaction between Economics and Ideology," in Joan Hoff and Maureen Coulter, eds., *Irish Women's Voices, Past and Present*, (Special Double Issue of the *Journal of Women's History*, 6, no. 4/7, no. 1, (Winter/Spring 1995), 99—116; Mary E. Daly, "Oh, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, Your Way's a Thorny Way!: The Condition of Women in Twentieth-Century Ireland," in Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, eds., *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 102—125; Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, "Engendering Citizenship: Women's Relationship to the State in Ireland and the United States in the Post-Suffrage Period," in Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd, eds., *Women and Irish History: Essays in Honour of Margaret MacCurtain*, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, ), 159—172; Maryann Valiulis, "Neither Feminist nor Flapper: The Ecclesiastical Construction of the Ideal Irishwoman," in Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert, eds., *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, Historical Studies XIX, Papers Read before the XXIst Irish Conference of Historians held at Queen's University of Belfast, 27—30 May, 1993, (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies and The Queen's University of Belfast, 1993), 168—178; and Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*.

valuable of these, perhaps, are the Cathal Brugha Military Archives' Witness Statements. Many of these were not available until fairly recently. These witness statements were taken from various people involved in major political and wartime events 1913—1923, including statements from many nationalist women as well as the men. Other new sources that are available now include reprint editions of many diaries and other primary materials. These sources, written by the women themselves portray a different picture from that presented by many historians; these women's stories speak of many different desires and goals, some more conservative than others. Most importantly, these sources reveal how women were able to use their positions to make advances in women's rights—they show how very important women's contribution to the war efforts and nationalist causes were.

CHAPTER 2

CONFLICTING INTERESTS? THE SUFFRAGIST-NATIONALIST DEBATE,  
1908—1916

Typically historians studying Irish women's suffrage and nationalism have come to the same conclusion: women from the two movements did not get along. Most historians describe the relationship between the suffragists and nationalists as very antagonistic with little or no cooperation amongst these groups. Contemporary historians have blamed nationalist women for the dissension within the groups and for damaging the suffrage cause in Ireland.<sup>60</sup> However, this chapter shall dispel these notions by providing the reader with a more nuanced understanding of the debates between suffrage and nationalism and showing how the relationship between suffragists and nationalists changed over the first two decades of the twentieth century. It is important to remember that there were many suffragists involved in the nationalist movement as well as nationalists involved in the suffrage movement; the two were not completely separate, nor did all suffragists have the same response to nationalists.<sup>61</sup> There were different groups within the Suffrage Movement including the pacifist, non-radical suffragists of the Irishwomen's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA), and the extremely radical Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL). Smaller county-based suffrage groups came together under the umbrella of the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation (IWSF); however, the IWSLGA and IWFL were the most prominent national suffrage organs. The Nationalist Movement also had several groups that included women: Sinn Fein, pacifists who wished to use culture and politics to regain Irish Independence; Inghinidhe na hÉireann, who were rather militant, but included a number of pacifists; and Cumann na mBan, a militant group of women interested in the liberation of Ireland by violent means, if necessary.<sup>62</sup>

While the IWSLGA and IWSF were still active in Ireland during the early twentieth century, the IWFL was the most visible body during this time frame. Also, the IWFL was more critical and sympathetic to nationalist women than these other organizations. Many women within the IWFL had nationalist sympathies, but their motto was "suffrage first—above all else!"<sup>63</sup> The women of the IWFL were to take issue with nationalists due to the anti-feminist stance by the Irish Parliamentary Party, who refused to include a clause for women's suffrage in the Home Rule Bill. Also, suffrage was not compatible with separatist-nationalists, Inghinidhe na hÉireann and Cumann na mBan especially, because they felt that these groups were placing too much emphasis on the freedom of Ireland rather than the freedom of women. Inghinidhe na hÉireann considered suffrage and nationalist struggles as equally important; however they did not favor asking suffrage from English institutions. Cumann na mBan, by contrast, certainly gave precedence to the nationalist struggle, but that does not mean that they were not suffragists, it is instead an indication that they had chosen a different method for attaining

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<sup>60</sup> Beth McKillen, "Irish Feminism and Nationalist Separatism, 1914-23," Parts 1 and 2, *Eire-Ireland* XVII, no. 3 (1983): 52-67, 59; no. 4, 72-90.

<sup>61</sup> Louise Ryan, ed., *Irish Feminism and the Vote: An Anthology of the Irish Citizen, 1912-1920* (Dublin: Folens Publishing, 1996), 144.

<sup>62</sup> My primary focus will be on the IWFL and nationalist women in Inghinidhe na hÉireann and Cumann na mBan; for a more detailed account of other groups' relationships to nationalists, consult Louise Ryan, *Irish Feminism and the Vote*, 142—177.

<sup>63</sup> Margaret Ward, " 'Suffrage First—Above All Else!': An Account of the Irish Suffrage Movement," in Ailbhe Smyth, ed., *Irish Women's Studies Reader*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), 20—44, 25.

the vote: by their equal part in the struggle, they hoped to gain political legitimacy.<sup>64</sup> The suffragist-nationalist debate was, in fact, a battle over priorities and methods, rather than a true indication of Inghinidhe na hÉireann's and Cumann na mBan's subservience to male nationalists. During the second decade of the twentieth century, there were several events that drastically changed the relationship between separatist-nationalists and suffragists. One major turning point in the suffragist-nationalist debate was the 1916 Easter Rising, which pushed the country irrevocably toward revolution, thereby militarizing most of the country (including many women) in its wake.

Irish gender roles were fairly complex and notions of femininity caused much of the tension between suffragists and nationalists, male and female. Catholicism had for a long time defined ideal womanhood by the standard of the Virgin Mary. A woman was to be chaste, pious, and religious, and subordinate to men.<sup>65</sup> The impact of the Great Famine was still present in social conditions in the early twentieth century; women and men still married at an older age; in 1871, 43% of the country's inhabitants aged 15—45 were married; this fell to 37% in 1911.<sup>66</sup> Ireland was still largely rural and agriculturally based in the early twentieth century. In rural areas, parents or matchmakers arranged marriages, although, either partner could refuse the match if it was not to their liking.<sup>67</sup> Marriage was expected to be between peers of the same class, religion, and political views. Women in the city were better able to live independent lives because they had access to better jobs outside the home which also gave them the ability to find their own marriage partners.

According to post-famine inheritance patterns, only the eldest brother and sister were given land or dowry; younger daughters often emigrated or worked in the homes of their male relatives. Women's place was primarily in the home in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Kathleen Behan stated that although she brought her sons up to do housework, the average Irishman:

wouldn't wash a cup. The Irishman's proudest boast is that he can't boil an egg. Their mothers bring them up like that...I always believed that women should be free and servants to no man. I never knew a man that could really afford to keep a woman as a housekeeper. If he had to pay her every hour on the hour he'd be broke.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Constance de Markievicz, *Women, Ideals, and the Nation*, A lecture delivered to the Students' National Literary Society, (Dublin: Inghinidhe na hÉireann, 1909); this opinion is also expressed in numerous columns of *Bean na hÉireann*, the official paper of Inghinidhe na hÉireann, particularly the November 1909 issue; Cumann na mBan expressed this same idea in a statement issued at the 1917 Convention, but tied their right to participate equally as citizens on their work during the 1916 Easter Rising and the place promised to them in the Proclamation by the Provisional government.

<sup>65</sup> Maryann Valiulis, "Neither Feminist nor Flapper: The Ecclesiastical Construction of the Ideal Irish woman," In Mary O'Dowd and Sabine Wichert, eds., *Chattel, Servant, or Citizen? Women's Status in Church, State and Society*: papers read before the XXIst Irish Conference of Historians, held at Queen's University of Belfast, 27-30 May 1993, (Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies, the Queen's University of Belfast 1995), 168-178, 169

<sup>66</sup> Maria Luddy, ed., *Women in Ireland, 1800—1918: A Documentary History*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland*, 27-30.

<sup>68</sup> Brian Behan, *The Mother of All Behans: The Story of Kathleen Behan as Told to Brian Behan*, (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 70.

Joann Bourke stated that women in Ireland had greater authority in the home; these women often argued with the householder over various issues and refused to work in protest of his actions.<sup>69</sup> James MacPherson added that there was an “increasing perception of the home as the cornerstone of the Irish nation, with Irish women being assigned the role not only of homemakers but also of nation builders.”<sup>70</sup> Women used this rhetoric to their advantage, as the mothers and wives of the nation, they were capable of doing work for the nation that men would not be able to perform. Because of the assertive role that women took, this ideology, “far from limiting women to the home, gave them a role in public life.”<sup>71</sup> While their work was in the home, they did not have to stay there. Because women in the country were less likely to be employed or to have social meeting places where they were welcome, they created ladies’ societies, such as the United Irishwomen (1911) for the purpose of socialization, but also to discuss the reinvention of the Irish nation.

Irish women’s roles, then, were roughly similar to those of women in America and England, although their marriage rate was lower than that of the other countries. They primarily worked in the home or in other acceptable work zones: factories, shops, or as domestic servants in homes of non-relatives.<sup>72</sup> However, there were also women in professional occupations by this point, albeit in lower numbers, and university girls, who were training for better occupations (though these tended to come from the middle classes).<sup>73</sup> Marriage was different for the Irish; many women and men remained single throughout their lives. Lower class women in Ireland were more likely to work outside the home because of this unusual marriage trend, although the percentage of women working outside the home had dropped to 19.5% by 1911.<sup>74</sup> Some women were working toward attaining a dowry, while others were leading financially independent lives.<sup>75</sup> However, as Bourke and MacPherson have shown, even women inside the home were not restricted to dull drudgework, nor were their contributions completely ignored by male members of the household.

Women were not supposed to be directly political, but like women in England and America, they influenced their husbands, brothers, and father’s decisions. Yet, the communal nature of Irish society allowed women in the home to have a very important

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<sup>69</sup> Joanne Bourke, “‘The Best of All Homerulers’: The Economic Power of women in Ireland, 1880—1914,” in *Irish Economic Social History* XVIII (1991), 34-47, 45. Bourke uses the term “houseworker” instead of housekeeper because she argues for the implicit economic importance of these women’s activities.

<sup>70</sup> James MacPherson, “‘Ireland Begins at Home’: Women, Irish National Identity, and the Domestic Sphere in the *Irish Homestead*, 1896—1912,” *Eire/Ireland* XXXVI: III and IV, Fall/Winter 2001, 131-152, 132.

<sup>71</sup> MacPherson, 151.

<sup>72</sup> Aideen Sheehan, “Cumann na mBan: Policies and Activities,” in David Fitzpatrick, ed., *Revolution? Ireland 1917—1923*, (Dublin: Trinity History Workshop, 1990), 88—97, 89.

<sup>73</sup> Eibhlín Breathnach, “Women and Higher Education in Ireland, 1879—1914,” *The Crane Bag* 4, 1980, 47-54, 47-8.

<sup>74</sup> Mary E. Daly, “Women in the Irish Workforce from Pre-Industrial to Modern Times,” *Saothar*, 7 1981, reprinted in Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart, eds., *The Irish Women’s History Reader*, (London: Routledge Press, 2001), 192—198, 193.

<sup>75</sup> Marie O’Neill, *Grace Gifford Plunkett and Irish Freedom: Tragic Bride of 1916*, (Dublin, Ireland Academic Press, 2000), 44. Grace Gifford was a caricaturist and her sister was a journalist, both were able to support themselves financially without the help of their parents from whom they were estranged.

role in decision-making processes.<sup>76</sup> Women also took part in informal political activities: they took part in riots and canvassed for elections.<sup>77</sup> However, nationalists did not want women taking an overtly political role.

While Young Ireland and the events of the Great Famine had allowed women to become integrated into the nationalist movement, this was to end in 1882 when The Ladies' Land League which had been organized to aid the imprisoned men in fighting the Land War were betrayed by the men of the Land League under the terms of the infamous Kilmainham Treaty. The men agreed to disband the LLL if they were freed from prison. Members of the LLL and contemporary historians both suggested that the men were bitter at the women's success and their transgression of feminine roles.<sup>78</sup> The unfortunate legacy of the Ladies' Land League was the barring of women from all nationalist organizations. In *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A Servant of the Queen*, Gonne tells of her attempts to join nationalist organizations in the late 1880s and early 1890s;

The Celtic Literary Society produced a Manuscript Journal *An Seanachie* which I found very interesting. I was so delighted with the Club and its activities that I told the secretary I wanted to become a member. He looked embarrassed. Willie Rooney was called to explain, as politely as he could, that the rules of the Club excluded women from membership.<sup>79</sup>

She next tried to join the National League (the later incarnation of The Land League) and while one of the secretaries, a man named Quinn, congratulated her on some recitations she had done before many literary and nationalist organizations, when she asked to join The National League: "He also looked embarrassed and said: 'There are no ladies in the National League.' 'How strange,' I replied. 'Surely Ireland needs all her children.' Decidedly there was no place for women in the National Movement."<sup>80</sup> Maud Gonne argued against the barring of women from nationalist groups by using the example of the LLL and their "wonderful work;" the men replied that the LLL's work had been done "too well" and that some of the men felt that these women "could not be controlled."<sup>81</sup> Women's formal reentry into the nationalist sphere was contingent not only upon their being allowed to join other groups, such as the Gaelic League, which would readmit women in 1893, but also on the formation of an independent women's group that would give them a political voice.

Irish Women in the earliest part of the twentieth century did become somewhat divided into two camps: nationalist and feminist; however, some women overlapped both groups and were involved in both causes, even then. While the abolition of the

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<sup>76</sup> Maria Luddy, "Women and Politics in Nineteenth Century Ireland," in Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd, eds., *Women and Irish History: Essays in Honour of Margaret MacCurtain*, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997), 89-108, 89.

<sup>77</sup> Maria Luddy, "Women and Politics," 92.

<sup>78</sup> See Margaret Ward's articles on the Land League and Unmanageable Revolutionaries. Maud Gonne also notes that Harrington, one man with the National League, referred to the LLL with "bitterness" when she pointed out how well they did their work. Maud Gonne, *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A Servant of the Queen*, eds. Anna Bride McWhite and A. Norman Jeffares, (1938; Reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 96.

<sup>79</sup> Gonne, *op. cit.*, 94.

<sup>80</sup> Gonne, *op. cit.*, 95.

<sup>81</sup> Gonne, *op. cit.*, 96.

Ladies' Land League had temporarily shut women out of political and nationalist activity, women's past involvement with nationalists had given them precedence for further work with such organizations, and on this basis women demanded the reentry of their sex into these groups. Young Ireland and the Land League days had given women the ability to prove their value as something more than an idealized collective womanhood to be defended. Women who desired membership in nationalist organizations were rewarded for their efforts in 1893 with the founding the Gaelic League. The Gaelic League was the first organization to admit women into its ranks after the LLL ban; they were once again a part of the cultural movement, and through this group and related publications they were able to voice political ideals. However, the only way to politically mobilize larger numbers of women in the nationalist movement was to create a new organization that would bring women to fore.

Maud Gonne had told male nationalists that she was going to start an organization for women and would ask their "wives and sweethearts" to join.<sup>82</sup> She fulfilled this promise when she founded Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Ireland) in 1900. Maud Gonne had originally invited women to meet on the issue of opposing Queen Victoria's visit to Ireland in 1899. While these women did protest the Queen's visit; they were unable to put on any sort of mass protest due to the number of British troops. They were also unable to stop Irish children from attending Queen Victoria's "Children's Treat," a great picnic with games and treats for the children of Ireland. To counteract the British influence on the children, Maud Gonne and her female friends put on their own "Patriotic Children's Treat" for the children who had not gone to Victoria's official treat. Maud Gonne and the women enlisted the help of The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Gaelic League. The men helped the women pass out green tree boughs and marshaled the children's parade to the park. Over 20,000 children were part of the festivities, and was so successful that the women decided to form a society especially for de-anglicizing Ireland.<sup>83</sup>

Women from this original protest act founded Inghinidhe na hÉireann with the goals of spreading education, especially the Gaelic language, Irish music, history, literature and art; the spread of Irish manufacture; and the discouragement of "vulgar" English entertainments.<sup>84</sup> They held classes in Irish Gaelic and acting, raised money for their own nationalist campaigns, and were instrumental in the founding of the National Theatre. Inghinidhe members also wrote articles for various nationalist newspapers and spoke publicly on nationalist and women's issues. They even launched a campaign to keep Irish women from walking with British soldiers by distributing pamphlets about birth control, venereal disease, and consorting with their countries enemy to women when they saw them with soldiers. Handbilling of this sort was illegal, but the Helena Moloney noted that the soldiers and unionist citizens of Dublin were apt to attack members of Inghinidhe and that the police did not intervene.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Maud Gonne, *A Servant of the Queen*, 96.

<sup>83</sup> The descriptions of the Children's Treat come from Maud Gonne, *A Servant of the Queen*, 269-270. The green tree boughs carried by the children were symbols of their alignment with the nationalist cause. Agrarian societies in the Eighteenth Century often wore or carried green tree boughs because the green was the color of nature; it had by 1798 become the "national color" of Ireland.

<sup>84</sup> Inghinidhe na hÉireann, annual report, MS 35262/27 Acc 4529, NAI.

<sup>85</sup> Helena Molony, WS 391, NAI, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913-21, Statement by Witness, 3-4.

Despite Inghinidhe's place as a women's organization, they had help from many men such as Arthur Griffith and Willie Rooney; Griffith even helped edit *Bean na hÉireann*.

Although *Bean na h-Eireann* was meant to be a magazine for women, it was so well written and so outspoken on national and social questions, that it was soon circulating through Ireland, and even in the United States, and had as many or more men readers as it had women. Its editor was Miss Helena Molony, the Abbey actress who later fought with the Citizen Army in 1916, and its staff included Madame Markievicz, Madame Gonne MacBride, Bulmer Hobson, Dr. Patrick MacCartan, Sean MacGarry, Miss Madeleine French-Mullen and myself.<sup>86</sup>

Czira's statement shows that although a large number of nationalist men were opposed to women joining their organizations, there were also some men who supported and admired these women. As well as having many men on the publication's staff, they also had a great number of male contributors. Many men also were patrons of Inghinidhe's theatrical pieces, speeches, and ceilidhes.

Theatrically, Inghinidhe na hÉireann's made great cultural and nationalist contributions. Their actresses and actors performed tableaux and plays that inculcated nationalist sentiment in the crowds. This artistic movement was immensely political in nature; one tableau that was commonly performed by the troupe was called "Erin Fettered and Erin Free". In this tableaux, the character of Erin was played by one of Inghinidhe's famous actresses, Maire Ni Shulaigh or Mary Quinn; in the first scene, Erin is seen kneeling at the foot of a Celtic Cross. The curtain would then fall and rise on a scene of Erin "standing triumphant, her chains broken, and holding aloft a shining sword. This tableaux became our signature there. Its affect on the audience was electric. We had to include it in every programme, and even to take it on tour"<sup>87</sup> Using both longer plays and short, simplistic pieces, they captured the popular imagination and inspired the people of Ireland.

Inghinidhe's theatre troupe and its idealized ancient Ireland, as well as their many other cultural contributions, had a major impact upon the creation of "Irishness." The Celtic Literary Renaissance marked a new phase in nationalist ideology. Through the media of writing and performance nationalist men and women spread their idealized Irish identity to the popular crowd. Inghinidhe was not alone in this, but, like the Gaelic League, they played an integral role in this cultural revival, which impacted nationalist ideologies throughout the revolutionary period. As Maryann Gialanella Valiulis described them: "Inghinidhe na hÉireann was part of a relatively small group of intellectuals who quite self-consciously attempted to define the cultural, intellectual, and social parameters of the new state. They were an integral part of the cultural and intellectual re-vitalisation of Irish life."<sup>88</sup> The Daughters of Ireland also played the important part of defining

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<sup>86</sup> Alan Hayes, ed., *The Years Flew By: Recollections of Madam Sidney Gifford Czira*, (1974; Reprint, Galway: Arlen House, 2000), 43.

<sup>87</sup> "Inghinidhe na hÉireann, Part 3" Introduction by Maud Gonne MacBride, p. 4., MS 18817 (6), NAI.

<sup>88</sup> Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, " 'Free Women in a Free Nation': Nationalist Feminist Expectations for Independence," in Brian Farrell, ed., *The Creation of the Dail: A Volume of Essays from the Thomas Davis Lectures*, General Editor Michael Litton, (Dublin: Blackwater Press in association with Radio Telefís Éireann, 1994), 75-90, 76.

women's roles in the coming nationalist struggle. The nationalist Irish woman was to take an active role in politics; Inghinidhe believed that through their work for the nation, they would earn their right to participate as equal citizens in a free Ireland.<sup>89</sup>

Inghinidhe had been involved with the Gaelic League during the creation of the theatre, these organization both became part of the National League in 1906. The National League's goal was to unite cultural organizations, and from the beginning of the League, women were elected into offices. The National League soon joined with the IRB Dungannon clubs to create Sinn Fein; this group was also very open to women and elected them to its executive committee; in fact Sinn Fein elected its first female vice-president in 1911. However, Inghinidhe also continued to work independently and began their own newspaper in November 1908 as a "women's paper, advocating militancy, separatism, and feminism."<sup>90</sup> Inghinidhe wanted an equal portion of suffrage and nationalism; this would lead to contention with other suffragist organizations in Ireland. The militant women of the Irish Women's Suffrage League would be the first to speak out against nationalism.

Suffrage ran a very different course in Ireland than it did in England; this was partially due to the fact that suffragists in Ireland had very limited contact with the English suffrage societies but also because Ireland's political climate was completely different from that of England. Irish politicians had been agitating for self-determination since the nineteenth century; this was to cause problems for Irishwomen, many of whom had strong feelings about Irish separatism, unionism, or self-determination. A Quaker couple, Anna and Thomas Haslam formed the first suffrage organization in Ireland in 1874. The Haslams devoted their entire lives to campaigning for women's rights. The Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA) was the result of their hardwork and sacrifice. Although the association was non-militant, the Haslams had many revolutionary ideas, and Thomas even wrote a pamphlet in 1868 campaigning for birth control.<sup>91</sup>

Some women had grown tired of the IWSLGA's policies and felt that they were not agitating strongly enough for suffrage causes. After seeing militancy emerge in the English suffrage movement, they felt that it was time to create a more proactive suffrage organization, one suited to the unique political climate of Ireland. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins founded the IWFL in 1908. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in England had been a major inspiration to them both. However, Cousins made it clear that she did not want to work under English leaders, nor did she want their organization to mirror the WSPU completely, What she wanted was "a militant suffrage society suitable to the different political situation of Ireland, as between a subject country seeking freedom from England, and England a free country."<sup>92</sup> Loyalties of the women in suffrage movement were divided. The women of the IWFL for the most part supported separatist-nationalists, a few others preferred self-determination via Home

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<sup>89</sup> Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, "Free Women in a Free Nation," 77.

<sup>90</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 66-67.

<sup>91</sup> Carmel Quinlan, *Genteel Revolutionaries: Anna and Thomas Haslam and the Irish Women's Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>92</sup> James H. Cousins and Margaret Cousins "We Two Together," (Madras: Ganesh, 1950), 164, quoted in Margaret Ward, "Conflicting Interests: The British and Irish Suffrage Movements," *Feminist Review*, no. 50, (Summer 1995), 127-147, 130.

Rule (though this number would decline after their conflict with Irish Parliamentary Party).

The older suffrage organization did not cease to exist, “the IWSLGA was at its strongest numerically in 1912 and some prominent suffragists were simultaneously associated with both organizations (the IWFL and IWSLGA).”<sup>93</sup> However, the IWSLGA members tended to be unionists and were not militant; whereas the women of the IWFL had created a more aggressive suffrage organization that was not afraid to use the tactics of the WSPU.<sup>94</sup> While Cousins and Sheehy-Skeffington were inspired by the work of the English suffragettes under the leadership of the Pankhursts, there could be no real correspondence between British and Irish suffragists. Men and women in the nationalist movement considered any sort of camaraderie with the British, even within the suffrage, labour, and (at a later date) the Red Cross movements, to be treasonous. Relations between Irish nationalists and suffragists was further complicated by Christabel Pankhurst’s placement of a poster in Parliament square which stated “ ‘No Votes for women’, ‘No Home Rule.’ ”<sup>95</sup> This angered the anti-feminists within the Irish Parliamentary Party, which was hard at work drafting yet another Home Rule Bill at that time. Sylvia Pankhurst, in the meantime, had asked the WSPU to “leave the Irish question to Irish women.”<sup>96</sup> This might have been a wiser policy, but it angered Irish nationalists because it showed that suffragists were disinterested in national problems. In the end, the WSPU followed Christabel’s advice and declared war on the IPP; the WSPU also asked the IWFL to establish contacts in London. Of course, the WSPU took up this Home Rule/Suffrage fight because they knew that if the Irish woman won the vote through Home Rule, then parliament would be forced to give the same to British women.<sup>97</sup> The IWFL did send a few women to England, and a few WSPU members came to Ireland, but neither organization made much of an impression in their new environs.<sup>98</sup> While the English women’s suffrage activities ceased with World War I, the Irish suffragists continued their campaign. Like the nationalists, the IWFL did not support the war and did not subscribe to the social peace after its outbreak as the WSPU did.

The issue that caused the greatest wedge between suffragists and nationalists was Home Rule. The Irish Parliamentary Party’s refusal to include women in the Home Rule Bills turned some suffragists away from involvement in nationalist organizations.<sup>99</sup> The Irish Parliamentary Party continued to anger suffragists by defeating a bill for women’s suffrage in 1912 and suffrage amendments to the Home Rule Bill in 1913 and 1914.<sup>100</sup> The fact that even the third draft of the Home Rule bill did not include a clause for women’s suffrage angered the IWFL and the IWSLGA. The IWFL had attempted to

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<sup>93</sup> Quinlan, *Genteel Revolutionaries*, xi.

<sup>94</sup> Rosemary Owens, “ ‘Votes for Ladies, Votes for Women’: Organised Labour and the Suffrage Movement, 1876—1922,” *Saothar*, Vol. 9 (1983), 32—47, 33.

<sup>95</sup> Margaret Ward, “ ‘Suffrage First—Above All Else!’: An Account of the Irish Suffrage Movement,” in Ailbhe Smyth, ed., *Irish Women’s Studies Reader*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), 20-44, 28.

<sup>96</sup> Margaret Ward, *op. cit.*, 28.

<sup>97</sup> Margaret Ward, “Conflicting Interests,” 132.

<sup>98</sup> Margaret Ward, “Conflicting Interests,” 138.

<sup>99</sup> Beth McKillen, “Irish Feminism and Nationalist Separatism, 1914—23,” *Eire-Ireland*, XVII: 3 & 4, pt. 1, 54.

<sup>100</sup> Beth McKillen, Pt. 1, 54.

change the men's minds by holding protests and later, with the support of the IWSLGA, sent a deputation to John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Redmond responded to the deputation that he would "never under any circumstances support female suffrage."<sup>101</sup> Even Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington's brother-in-law, Thomas Kettle, backed down on his intent to introduce a women's suffrage resolution to the IPP.<sup>102</sup>

Suffragists within the IWFL began producing their paper during their struggle with the IPP; *The Irish Citizen* was founded in 1912 to spread the IWFL's ideologies concerning suffrage and to give Irish suffragists an organ through which to communicate with one another. Another reason for the appearance of *The Irish Citizen* was the IWFL's desire to quit relying on Irish nationalist papers and English suffrage papers to carry their news to the masses.<sup>103</sup> *The Irish Citizen* enjoyed a wide readership among nationalists and suffragists alike. Female nationalists often sent articles and editorials to the paper, though this became more frequent as the suffragist-nationalist debate became more heated during the years 1912—1916.

The IWFL believed that only when women put suffrage first could they gain any part in politics, however, the IWFL's primary problem was its exclusion of interest in the lower classes. "The Suffragists' Catechism" an article posted in *The Irish Citizen* of May 17, 1913, the author explains that not all suffragists are in favor of universal suffrage, "Because every man has not got a vote. Men have to qualify for the vote in certain ways—they have to be owners or occupiers of certain property, or lodgers in rooms of a certain value. What we ask is that women who qualify in the same way should have the same right to vote as the men who qualify...Equal voting rights for the sexes is our demand."<sup>104</sup> For this reason, a fair number of women in Ireland had no real reason to get involved with the suffragists and in fact, did not. Women who were not included in the enfranchisement goals did not wish to work in vain.

While the suffrage campaign was, for the most part, class-specific, twentieth-century nationalism cut across class lines. The cultural nationalist movement began with the educated upper and upper-middle classes, but it spread rapidly to the lower-middle and working classes. Many office-workers, shop-assistants, and later, factory girls, joined Inghinidhe na hEireann and Cumann na mBan. While suffrage groups might or might not include the lower classes in their agenda, the nationalists of Inghinidhe na hEireann and Cumann na mBan desired the return of Irish destiny to "the Irish people."<sup>105</sup>

Unlike the lower classes, the "Protestant Ascendancy" (usually socially elite families who were of English origin, but lived in Ireland) played a pivotal role in both movements. Maud Gonne, who had founded a suffragist-nationalist organization, and Countess Markievicz, who was a member of virtually every nationalist and suffrage organization in Ireland, were both from upper class Anglo-Irish backgrounds. While these upper-class women's participation in the suffrage movement could be expected, their part in the nationalist movement is surprising because of the nationalists' tendency to identify "Irishness" in opposition to "Englishness." Both Markievicz and Gonne

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<sup>101</sup> Margaret Ward, "Suffrage First," 29; Marie Mulvey Roberts "Introduction" in Marie Mulvey Roberts and Tamae Mizuta, eds., *The Rebels: Irish Feminists*, (London: Routledge, 1995), xix.

<sup>102</sup> Margaret Ward, *op. cit.*, 29.

<sup>103</sup> Margaret Ward, "Conflicting Interests," 133.

<sup>104</sup> "The Suffragists' Catechism, *The Irish Citizen*, 17 May 1913 quoted in Louise Ryan, ed., *Irish Feminism and the Vote: An Anthology of the Irish Citizen Newspaper, 1912—1920*, (Dublin, Folens, 1996), 33.

<sup>105</sup> This phrase appears multiple times in speeches and writings by nationalist women.

devoted much of their time to the cause of Irish freedom despite their English ancestry. Ethnicity and class barriers broke down, especially after the nationalist movement militarized in 1913.<sup>106</sup>

As class lines show, the suffragist and nationalist societies had overlapping constituencies, but each also contained women who were only involved in one of the two groups. The greatest difference between the two groups was one of priorities—activists did not have to choose between suffrage and nationalism, but the debate that would follow the founding of the IWFL in 1908 forced women to take sides and identify with one group or the other. The suffragist-nationalist debate began after a lively argument about women’s rights and the anglicization of Ireland began. Constance de Markievicz of Inghinidhe na hÉireann summed up the organization’s belief that England was to blame for the subordinate position of Irishwomen, while Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington of the IWFL argued that Irishmen were also guilty of subjugating women.<sup>107</sup> The debates first appeared in Inghinidhe’s paper, *Bean na hÉireann* which shows that women were becoming involved in nationalist movements because they felt that only by getting involved in politics in Ireland would they get the vote. The front page of the January 1909 issue includes an article which states that women must become involved in the nationalist struggle because all the men have done is talked about it, while the women want action:

This then is, broadly speaking, the position of the women of England; but in Ireland the question becomes more complicated, and it is here that I would ask Irish women to pause and consider long and earnestly their sex and their nationality in their relations to each other. From the moment a child is conceived it is male or female, Irish or foreigner. It brings these two attributes into the world and can never escape from the responsibilities they entail. No one should place sex before nationality, or nationality before sex. They are co-equal and co-existing in one’s individuality as indivisible as the three persons of the Trinity. Unthinking people may give prior importance to one or the other as their sympathies are most touched, but to the thinking mind they are both equal and integral parts of the great ideal of liberty, and no right-thinking Irishman should put the freedom of a sex before the freedom of a nation, or the freedom of a nation before the freedom of a sex.<sup>108</sup>

The goal, then, was not to put the needs of Ireland before the needs of women, but to put both needs side by side because they were bound together. Many women in Inghinidhe believed that the only way to change women’s suffrage was to work with the men to establish an independent Ireland. Some nationalist women undoubtedly feared that they would hurt their chances of being included as citizens in the republic if they petitioned their enemies, the English, for suffrage rights. The Inghinidhe na hÉireann were working

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<sup>106</sup> Ethnicities that became subsumed into the Irish identity included the Scotch-Irish, Anglo-Irish, and American-born Irish, each group having played a major role in Ireland’s struggle for independence.

<sup>107</sup> Articles by both women dominate the *Bean na hÉireann*, 1908—1911; the debate continues after the creation of the IWFL’s organ, *The Irish Citizen* in 1912, though the participation in the debate had become much broader by that time.

<sup>108</sup> “Free Women in a Free Nation,” *Bean na hÉireann* (Dublin), February 1909. This Particular piece was written under the Countess Markievicz’s pen name, Maca.

toward gaining the vote in an imminent Irish Ireland. They believed that the men of Sinn Fein and other Irish organizations would give Irish women the vote when Ireland was free to do so; women in Ireland would be granted the franchise alongside women in Britain in 1918. Nationalist women, particularly the women of Inghinidhe na hEireann, were not opposed to the suffragist movement, they were opposed to asking England for suffrage.<sup>109</sup>

Suffragists feared that women in Inghinidhe na hEireann were overly confident in the men and wanted them to take a more active role in women's rights movements<sup>110</sup>, in an article on Irishwomen's disabilities, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington wrote:

...The result of Anglicisation? This is but partly true; much of the evil is, however, inherent in latter-day Irish life. Nor will the evil disappear, as we are assured, when Ireland comes to her own again, whenever that may be. For until the women of Ireland are free, the men will not achieve emancipation.

The Irishwoman has far to go before achieving her destiny. At present she counts for less in her own land than does the Englishwoman in hers (time and again the Englishwoman has forced her point of view on reluctant legislators, and we may expect her one of these days to wrest the vote similarly from her countrymen). First, as the Englishwoman counts less to the nation than does the Frenchwoman, and as the Frenchwoman is a harem-slave compared with her American sister, so in the scale of civilisation the Irishwoman comes somewhere between the Oriental woman and her more advanced Western sisters.<sup>111</sup>

Sheehy-Skeffington feared that women getting overly involved in the nationalist movement were going to wind up disappointed in the end. She felt that if nationalist men were going to be interested in the progress of women's rights and suffrage that they would have been more vocal on the subject. Sheehy-Skeffington was careful to use the nationalist women's rhetoric in this response; she wanted women to ask themselves if their prostration was really the result of English rule or if the Irish men agreed with their subjugation.

The debates between Inghinidhe and the IWFL raged on in this pattern throughout the years 1908 to 1911, when *Bean na hEireann* ceased publication. Though the debate continued in *The Irish Citizen*, which began publication in 1912. The formation of nationalist armies such as the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army prompted the creation of a new women's organization, Cumann na mBan (the Council of Women). Cumann was originally the Irish Volunteer Army's female auxiliary, however, many of the women in its ranks were suffragists as well. Cumann na mBan considered suffrage to be an integral part of the national struggle; they maintained Inghinidhe's vision of an Ireland in which equality and freedom reigned.<sup>112</sup> Inghinidhe united with Cumann na mBan to show solidarity. Whereas the debate between Inghinidhe and the IWFL had focused on prioritization of Ireland's freedom over women's rights, the debate between

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<sup>109</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 69-70.

<sup>110</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 71-2.

<sup>111</sup> Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, "Editorial" *Bean na hEireann*, November 1909

<sup>112</sup> Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, "Free Women in a Free Nation," 81.

Cumann na mBan and the IWFL was focused on several different issues. Firstly, the IWFL questioned women's equality within the Volunteer movement because of their relegation to a separate organization, Cumann na mBan.<sup>113</sup> The IWFL also feared that Cumann was not taking an active interest in the suffrage movement; like Inghinidhe before them, they were accused of putting nationalism before feminism.<sup>114</sup> The final point of debate was Cumann's choice to stay with John Redmond's leadership prior to the Volunteer Split. The IWFL was not just blindly criticizing Cumann, they saw real injustices in the way the women were treated and wanted them to support suffrage actively, proving to the men that Irish women really wanted the vote.<sup>115</sup>

The sex segregation of the armies angered the IWFL even though both the Irish Volunteers and many women had agreed that Cumann na mBan should be a separate and auxiliary organization. In an issue on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1914, as the IWFL was advising Cumann about its relationship with John Redmond, the author recalled, "When the 'Irishwomen's Council' or 'Cumann na mBan' was formed, with the object of collecting money for the Volunteers, we protested against women allowing themselves to be used for the purpose of helping a men's association over which they had no effective control..." The fact that women could allow themselves to work with an organization that refused them a place on its Executive disgusted the authors of *The Irish Citizen*. The concern was that women were nothing more than fund-collectors for the Volunteers, who refused to acknowledge their contribution. However, the most scathing criticism towards Cumann na mBan came when they agreed to stay with the Volunteers under the leadership of John Redmond, despite the fact that he had denounced women's suffrage on several occasions. In the May issue of the *Irish Citizen*, an article referred to Cumann na mBan as "The slave women."<sup>116</sup> The editorial was directed to Mary McSwiney, a nationalist and suffragist. The article indicated that like the other Cumann na mBan, MacSwiney allowed nationalism to keep her "tied to the chariot wheels of Mr. Redmond."<sup>117</sup> This particular article was full of animosity because the IWFL felt that the women of Cumann were, by supporting Redmond, also backing the anti-feminism of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Through such contemptuous critiques, IWFL members hoped to mobilize Cumann na mBan's feminist constituent in questioning sexual equality in the nationalist movement. However, Cumann na mBan was angered rather than moved by this depiction of their group and Mary McSwiney responded that to "characterise our point of view as 'slavish' and a display of 'crawl-servility to the men' is the very best anti-suffragist campaign you can carry on in this country."<sup>118</sup> MacSwiney's article indicated that the suffragists' animosity for nationalist organizations, particularly female groups, was damaging their campaign in Ireland. They were insulting the very women they wished to recruit. Helena Moloney, a member of Cumann na mBan, wrote:

The Volunteers, men and women, have been called into being to defend the liberties of all Irish citizens. ...Every Nationalist knows this to be true.

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<sup>113</sup> Beth McKillen, "Irish Feminism and Nationalist Separatism, 1914-23," Part I, 57.

<sup>114</sup> Mary Cullen, "How Radical was Irish Feminism between 1860 and 1920?," in Patrick J. Cornish, editor, *Radicals, Rebels, and Establishments, Historical Studies XV, Papers Read before the Irish Conference of Historians*, Maynooth 16-19 June 1983, (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1985), 185-201, 194.

<sup>115</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 95-6.

<sup>116</sup> "Editorial. The Slave Women," *The Irish Citizen* (Dublin), 2 May 1914.

<sup>117</sup> "Editorial. The Slave Women," *The Irish Citizen* (Dublin), 2 May 1914.

<sup>118</sup> "Correspondence," *The Irish Citizen* (Dublin), 2 May 1914.

You do not alter the facts of a case by dubbing other people's principles "party" and calling your own party "freedom". ... You say truly, "there can be no free nation without free women", but neither can their be free women in an enslaved nation, and it seems to me sound citizenship to put the welfare of the whole nation before any section of it.<sup>119</sup>

The women of Cumann did not consider themselves to be subordinate to John Redmond. They were much more concerned with nationalist activities as a whole. They felt that the only way they could qualify for citizenship in the nation was if they helped to free Ireland.

Some members of the Cumann na mBan who supported Redmond's leadership soon regretted their position. Redmond did not give women a place on the Volunteer Executive Committee. Miss Rosamund Jacobs wrote an article in the 11 July Citizen that stated in response to "Women and the Irish Volunteers": "I am quite ready to admit that 'the position has materially altered' since Mr. Redmond has obtained control of the Volunteers, and I deplore extremely the silent acquiescence of the executive of Cumann na mBan in the present altered state of affairs."<sup>120</sup> The only way for women to escape these new states was to break with Redmond. In October of 1914, Redmond began insisting that Irish men had to fight in World War I to gain their autonomy from England. Some Volunteers chose to side with him and they became known as "Redmond's Volunteers," while the anti-Redmond contingent continued on as "The Irish Volunteers." Cumann na mBan was divided between those who felt that the women should help both Volunteer groups and by those who only wanted to aid the Irish Volunteers. Cumann na mBan split over the decision as well, but the women who wanted to side with the Irish Volunteers won the debate and assumed control of the organization.<sup>121</sup>

While the IWFL were interested in Ireland's freedom, and were by no means anti-nationalist, they felt that women could not be a part of nationalist and political causes until they gained the vote. Despite Cumann's stand in the Volunteer split, the IWFL felt that Cumann was not taking suffrage and women's rights issues seriously. In an article in *The Irish Citizen*, the IWFL asked nationalist women to join them in their suffrage activities:

Larger and increasing numbers of Irish women, Nationalist and Unionist alike, have thrown in their lot with the suffrage movement, recognizing that until their citizen rights were conceded, they could do nothing effective for the political causes they had at heart, or for causes of deeper human significance, which lie behind the facade of the politicians.<sup>122</sup>

The Irony of this comment is that they were speaking to politically active women in Cumann na mBan, who had, by this point redefined their position within the nationalist movement and were now taking up military drills and other leadership

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<sup>119</sup> "Correspondence," *The Irish Citizen*, 9 May 1914, quoted Louise Ryan, *op. cit.*, 163.

<sup>120</sup> "Correspondence," *The Irish Citizen*, 11 July 1914.

<sup>121</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 101.

<sup>122</sup> "An appeal to nationalist women," *The Irish Citizen* (Dublin), Oct. 3, 1914.

activities.<sup>123</sup> The suffragists of the IWFL were telling nationalist women to focus on suffrage because they would not be able to make a political impact until they got the vote. However, the women in Cumann na mBan were in the process of disproving this idea, in fact, they were to have more impact than the suffragists on women's rights in the next decade.

However, though Cumann were stalwart in their defense of nationalism, the question of equality in the nationalist movement lingered even after the Volunteer split. To clarify this issue some members of Cumann asked the men about their inclusion of women in the Irish Volunteer's policies. They were proud to inform the *Irish Citizen* in November of 1914:

We have inquired into the matter referred to by our correspondent [whether women are included in the Volunteer definition of people] which at first sight was sufficiently disturbing. ...Mr. Thomas MacDonagh, one of the leading members of the Provisional Committee of the organisation, who had a large share in drafting the constitution, and who submitted it clause by clause to the meeting, in doing so told the Convention that by the words "people" and "nation" he for his part meant women as well as men. This statement was generally applauded by the Convention, and there was no expression of dissent from any quarter.<sup>124</sup>

While MacDonagh was one of the more liberally-minded nationalist men in regards to suffrage and women's equality, he had the acquiescence of the rest of the Volunteers in his statement that women should be included in the definition of people and nation. The IWFL began to critique the nationalists less harshly after this.<sup>125</sup> During 1915, suffragists were becoming increasingly divided over the matter of World War I and Irish independence. The suffragist-nationalist debate began dying out during this time as well. Unionists, pacifists, nationalists, were all at odds following the outbreak of World War I. Tensions increased as the 1916 Rising broke out. In the end, it was difficult for the suffragists to remain focused on suffrage alone. Dissension, which had always been an underlying element in suffrage organizations, particularly the IWFL, was now splitting these groups.<sup>126</sup>

The Provisional Government, which was composed of members of the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers, began the 1916 Easter Rising by posting their Proclamation of the Republic in public areas in Dublin. The men in this provisional government included the word "women" in the proclamation and defined them as equal

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<sup>123</sup> Eithne Ni Chumhaill (Eithne Coyle), "the History of Cumann na mBan," *An Phoblacht*, 8 April and 15 April, 1933, Quoted in Maria Luddy, editor, *Women in Ireland 1800—1918*, 304-309.

<sup>124</sup> "An Unofficial Declaration," *The Irish Citizen* (Dublin), 7 November 1914.

<sup>125</sup> Mary Cullen, "How Radical was Irish Feminism between 1860 and 1920?," in Patrick J. Cornish, editor, *Radicals, Rebels, and Establishments, Historical Studies XV, Papers Read before the Irish Conference of Historians*, Maynooth 16-19 June 1983, (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1985), 185-201; Dana Hearne, "The Irish Citizen 1914—1916: Nationalism, Feminism, and Militarism," in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, XVIII, no. 1, (July 1992), 1-14; Mary Cullen, "How Radical was Irish Feminism between 1860 and 1920?," 195.

<sup>126</sup> Dana Hearne, "The Irish Citizen 1914—1916: Nationalism, Feminism, and Militarism," in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, XVIII, no. 1, (July 1992), 1-14; Mary Cullen, "How Radical was Irish Feminism between 1860 and 1920?," 194-5.

citizens of the newly proclaimed Irish Republic.<sup>127</sup> Had it not been for the women of Cumann, as well as open-minded men like James Connolly and Thomas MacDonagh, the 1916 proclamation would not have been so implicitly egalitarian.<sup>128</sup>

After the 1916 Easter Rising, the IWFL began to rethink its position on women's nationalist organizations. The Easter "Sacrifice" of the rising leaders affected the suffragists strongly; they mourned the depletion of suffragists by Easter Week. One woman stated that, "the Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army were suffragists almost to a man, and the women prominent in the movement were all convinced and practical exponents of the doctrine of equality of the sexes and, like Chaucer's Parson, what they preached was always what they practised in themselves."<sup>129</sup> Obviously this is quite a leap from the "slavish" women mentioned just two years prior. Scoffing suffragists finally believed that the nationalist women were more than "camp followers."

Another event within 1916 that shocked suffragists into reaction was the arrest and murder of Francis Sheehy-Skeffington. English troops arrested Sheehy-Skeffington on April 25, 1916 and then shot him without a trial. The murder of Francis Sheehy-Skeffington was a call to many suffragists. Because Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington believed it would have been her husband's wish for her to remain a pacifist rather than to take revenge, she continued her suffragist and nationalist efforts, but did not join the militant nationalists. She joined Sinn Fein because of its goal to restore Ireland to the Irish without violence.<sup>130</sup> While Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington remained a pacifist, other suffragists took great exception to the events of the Rising and began to converge more with the nationalist organizations.

Many suffragists were interested and involved in the anti-conscription campaign as well. In fact, Francis Sheehy-Skeffington had been heavily involved in anti-conscription campaigns and had spoken and written many times on the subject prior to his death.<sup>131</sup> *The Irish Citizen* published a commemorative issue on Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, which stated,

He saw the Suffrage Movement, I think, in its right perspective, in its relation to all forward and progressive movements; and he was a Nationalist because he was a Suffragist and a Suffragist because he was a Nationalist. He thought so much of suffrage that he put it before home rule, not because he loved Ireland less, but because he loved humanity and freedom more. He simply could not conceive a constitutional freedom that left out half the nation.<sup>132</sup>

While Sheehy-Skeffington's feelings may have been the norm before 1916, following the Easter Rising, many suffragists were now equating suffrage with nationalism.

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<sup>127</sup> The Provisional Government of Ireland, Proclamation of the Republic, 24 April 1916.

<sup>128</sup> Ruth Taillon, *When History Was Made: The Women of 1916*, (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1996), xvii.

<sup>129</sup> "Editorial: Suffrage Casualties," *The Irish Citizen*, September 1916, quoted in Louise Ryan, *Irish Feminism*, 171.

<sup>130</sup> Margaret Ward, ed., *In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism*, (Cork: Attic Press, 1995), 92.

<sup>131</sup> "Francis Sheehy-Skeffington," *The Irish Citizen*, Special Memorial Number, July 1916.

<sup>132</sup> "Correspondence," *The Irish Citizen*, July 1916 (quote from Miss Evelyn Sharp at the Memorial Meeting by the United Suffragists in London)

Beth McKillen has argued that due to the differing priorities of nationalists and suffragists, “the leadership qualities in both groups were wasted in personal vindictiveness. Like the struggle between the Irish Parliamentary Party and the IWFL, the contests between the IWFL and Cumann na mBan hindered the development of an effective feminist movement in Ireland prior to 1916.”<sup>133</sup> However, the 1916 Proclamation shows that women made some feminist effort, otherwise their citizenship rights would not be so prominently included in the document.

Many historians agree that 1916 was the point at which suffrage as a separate movement began its decline. Suffragists and nationalist women worked together more frequently after the Rising. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington personally carried a message to President Wilson in the United States at the bequest of Cumann na mBan.<sup>134</sup> Amnesty concerns drew the suffragists and nationalists together, as well. Women from both suffragist and nationalist organization protested the conditions in Kilmainham, Mountjoy, and other Irish detention centers. Their goal was to procure better conditions for political prisoners through appeals to England and other countries. They sent a request to women in America and Europe asking that they “use their influence to demand the formation of an International Committee of inquiry, composed of men and women, who in the interests of humanity would send Delegates to inspect the prisons used for the detention of Irish political prisoners.”<sup>135</sup> Civil causes and the disparate political climate of post-rising Ireland were uniting women from various organizations.

In 1918 after the Representation of the People Act had passed, the IWFL and Cumann na mBan both agreed that they needed to run female candidates. In the end, they were only able to gain male support for two female candidates, significantly, both of these were women who had fought in Easter Week, Winnifred Carney and Constance Markievicz. The IWFL and Cumann na mBan both aided women in their campaign efforts for parliament. The suffragists wholeheartedly backed both of the proposed female nationalist candidates. Both women were veterans of the Rising and both had spent time in prison; they were ideal candidates since they were immensely public figures with many male and female supporters. Countess Markievicz’s campaign had help from both organizations, as did Winifred Carney’s. Both Cumann and the IWFL openly criticized Sinn Fein for not putting more women up for election. Meg Connery, vice-chair of the IWFL, stated during the campaigns that Cumann na mBan should be in charge of running Markievicz’s campaign, “surely it is their special duty to concentrate on the election of their own president! Why should the work be left to the chance care of “outsiders” as they are so fond of calling us. They are too busy running after the men the sea camp followers.”<sup>136</sup> Hanna Sheehy Skeffington disagreed, as did most of the IWFL. Since they had not been able to run any of their own candidates, she felt that they needed to help the women who were running. The women of Cumann were not idle during this election; they did most of the campaign work for Carney and Markievicz. Their success in getting Constance de Markievicz elected was a cause for the celebration. They had

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<sup>133</sup> Beth McKillen, “Irish Feminism and Nationalist Separatism, 1914-23,” *Eire-Ireland*, Volume XVIII, no 4, (1983)

<sup>134</sup> Ward, *In Their Own Voice*, 97.

<sup>135</sup> Ward, *op. cit.*, 99-100.

<sup>136</sup> Meg Connery to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, *Sheehy Skeffington Papers*, MS 22684, NLI, quoted in Ward, *In Their Own Voice*, 92.

accomplished what almost no other European country had—they had gotten a woman elected as an MP. The *Irish Citizen* remarked that “And so Ireland again leads the way, and while Britain wallows in reaction and turns her back on women MPs.”<sup>137</sup> However, Markievicz did not take her seat in Westminster; like other nationalist MPs elected that year, she chose to take a seat in the newly formed Dail Eireann. Both Cumann and the IWFL also had reason to celebrate the utter defeat of the Irish Parliamentary Party who had been putting down suffragist efforts since the beginning and had defeated every suffrage bill proposed for Irish women.<sup>138</sup>

In April of 1918, Anna Haslam of the Irish Women’s Suffrage and Local Government Association held a conference for women activists asking whether the different groups could amalgamate and fight for other women’s reforms. The answer was a resounding no: “The feeling of the conference being that political differences are at present so strong in Ireland that a closer union in a society or federation would be out of the question.”<sup>139</sup> Many political tensions derived from the fact that some suffragists, such as Anna Haslam, were Unionists, while others were Nationalists. Also, social issues such as birth control and divorce divided women’s groups, both suffragist and nationalist. Suffragists chose different pursuits after this, some joined other social organizations, while others joined the nationalist cause at this point, and others joined multiple organizations.

Irish suffrage organizations began losing power in 1916 as the nation turned towards military activity. Many former suffragists now had the vote and some of these felt that they no longer needed to be involved in the movement. Ireland’s focus on militarization also had split suffrage movements across the nation. The 1918 Conference, did not result in a women’s rights coalition of some sort, nor did it unite the remaining suffragists in support of women’s causes. Instead, suffrage organizations realized how little they had in common and several disbanded because they felt that the fight was over. Suffrage was no longer a centralizing goal for women, and because so many factors divided them, suffragists were forced to find new organizations and goals. British soldiers smashed *The Irish Citizen*’s press in 1920. However, the paper was only a sounding board for trade unions and other women’s organizations by this time.<sup>140</sup> The IWFL disappeared from the records around this time, though individual members remained activists and became involved in other causes.<sup>141</sup>

The Irish suffragists’ inability to become a united body hampered the success of their campaign. The IWFL had remained “independent of all political parties,”<sup>142</sup> but this meant that they were not supported by other groups. The consequence of the IWFL’s non-involvement in other political causes was that no suffragist candidates were able to stand for election in 1918 because they had no party to back them. Ireland’s almost unique position of fighting the suffrage and independence wars simultaneously meant that the suffragists’ refusal to support any other causes or parties resulted in a limitation on their ability to affect changes in women’s status in the militarized and nationalized

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<sup>137</sup> “Bravo Dublin!” *The Irish Citizen* (Dublin), January 1919.

<sup>138</sup> Ward, *In Their Own Voice*, 93.

<sup>139</sup> Louise Ryan, *Irish Feminism and the Vote*, 154; The April 1919 Issue of the *Irish Citizen* mentioned that the women could not reach a common consensus on anything.

<sup>140</sup> Margaret Ward, “Suffrage First—Above All Else!,” 42.

<sup>141</sup> Margaret Ward, *op. cit.*, 42.

<sup>142</sup> Consitution of the IWFL, quoted in Beth McKillen, “Irish Feminism and Nationalist Separatism,” , 53.

environment of the early twentieth century.<sup>143</sup> Had the suffragists chosen to invest more in other causes in the politically tumultuous Ireland, they might have accomplished more.

Female nationalists, though branded before as tools of the men, proved themselves through their actions in 1916 to be anything but that. They were courageous women who challenged gendered boundaries. After 1882 and the demise of the LLL, men refused to countenance women's involvement in the nationalist sphere; while Inghinidhe's work in the first decade of the twentieth century brought about some change, women's freedom greatly increased during the period 1916 through 1923. They would continue to prove their courage and bravery, on the battlefield and off, throughout the coming revolutionary period, and many men would come to praise their work and reconsider their stance on women's suffrage and citizenship. Women within both suffragist and nationalist groups, as well as women who were members of both, came to realize that if they could work together on some projects that their goals and aims were not altogether different. In addition, remaining suffragists became so intertwined with nationalism post-1918 that the two movements were nearly indistinguishable in many aspects. In fact, women involved in all of the many Irish women's groups would later band together to fight against the 1937 Constitution's role for women.

The suffragist-nationalist debate also contributed to Cumann na mBan's refusal to accept the Treaty; their desire was not just for creation of the Republic, but for the freedom and equality promised to Irishwomen in the 1916 Proclamation. By refusing the Treaty, women were remaining true to suffrage and women's interests, as well as the martyrs of 1916. The greatest impact of the debate was that it forced Cumann na mBan to stay focused on women's rights and to be wary of the promises made by their male compatriots.

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<sup>143</sup> Research indicates that Finland experienced similar struggles with nationalist and feminist issues; however, efforts to research the matter have been thwarted thus far by the author's inability to read Finnish.

CHAPTER 3  
CUMANN NA MBAN AND THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS, 1913—1916

Irish Nationalist politics had been in a state of flux since the turn of the century; the women of Ireland took a militant position early on, but around 1913, nationalist politics took a new direction. The nationalist labour movement agitated for better conditions for workers and continuing the politicization of the lower class men and women of Dublin, while another group of men planned the organization of an army for the Irish people. Two different armies with very different philosophies emerged at this time: the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) and the Irish Volunteer Army. Women faced a new dilemma, the militarization of the country. The women had been active in political, cultural, and social spheres, but did they want to extend their activities to include military ones? The presence of women at the first meeting of the Irish Volunteers indicated that some were willing to take their participation further than they previously had. This new turn of events forced women to redefine their role within nationalism as well as the nation. The years 1913—1916 was a time in which Cumann na mBan women created a new public persona and forged an identity for themselves.

The ICA and the Volunteers met women's desire to join in contrasting ways. The Volunteers would not allow women into their organization; though there had been some discussion on the matter, it was decided by women as well as men that it would be best if the women formed an auxiliary. The women from that meeting founded Cumann na mBan several months later, but the new organization had to decide upon a program which would fall within the traditional feminine role. While the ICA accepted women into its main body and articles related to the ICA's organization stress women's equality, the women of Cumann na mBan supposedly remained in a subservient role to the men as their auxiliaries.

Margaret Ward has argued that Cumann na mBan "was neither to have the freedom of the Ladies' Land League nor the autonomy of Inghinidhe na hEireann."<sup>144</sup> However, a reinterpretation of their work even in these early years shows that many women were unhappy with the deferential nature of the women in control of the organization. Some of the Volunteers attempted to use Cumann's separate auxiliary status to keep them in the traditional woman's roles of camp following and fund-gathering; however these women fought efforts to relegate them to "acceptable" feminine roles. In actuality, the fact that Cumann na mBan was a self-governed assembly of women acting publicly and independently of the men did not fall within the normal bounds of feminine activity.

Women's participation in politics and the military also threatened the use of women as symbols in the Irish nationalist movement; the Erin painted by the men was often fettered, oppressed, abused and in need of a male rescuer. Irishwomen did not seek to undermine this use of feminine symbology altogether because it was of great use to them in some ways. The symbolic use of females enabled women to legitimize their political and military activities through previous Irish women's activities in the "Celtic" past. Cumann na mBan used the men's rhetoric against them, rather than focusing on women's need for protection, they told the stories of powerful female warriors from Ireland's past. They also used Inghinidhe na hEireann's argument about the rights of women in ancient Ireland to support women's suffrage and other feminist causes

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<sup>144</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism*, (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 88.

Ward argued that “The history of Cumann na mBan is, above all, an account of the tensions generated by this subordination and of the repeated attempts by some women to establish a degree of autonomy for themselves.”<sup>145</sup> While the tensions are definitely present, between men and women as well as between women within Cumann, many Cumann women’s accounts do not indicate any sense of subordination to the men. Ward interprets the women’s choice to aid the men as a symptom of servility. However, I view this as the women’s way of getting men to endorse their participation in nationalist events while they carried out their own agenda. As the movement grew, it became less subject to the men and more independent. Rather than relying on Volunteers to run their drills, they began running their own drills and shooting practices despite the fact that many of the Volunteers opposed the notion of women shooting or drilling.<sup>146</sup>

While the women of Cumann na mBan demonstrated independence in their political actions, it was their response to the Easter Rising of 1916 that changed the attitudes of men towards the participation of women. The Rising was decisive in shifting male and female nationalist relations; during the Rising, many women performed roles that were considered to be male work. Cumann na mBan and Irish Citizen Army girls showed that they were capable of carrying out a wide range of military activities.

The Irish Citizen Army and The Irish Volunteers embodied different attitudes toward women. The formation and principles of each group somewhat explains their different approaches to women’s inclusion. The Irish Citizen Army’s constitution stated that their purpose was to restore the ownership of Ireland to the “people of Ireland” by arming and training “all Irishmen capable of bearing arms to enforce and defend its first principle.”<sup>147</sup> In the ICA’s vision, the definition of the term “Irishmen” was the feminist one which included Irish women as well. James Connolly, encouraged women to participate when they were able to perform all duties of their post; he even made Countess Markievicz his “Ghost” (second-in-command of the ICA) during the Easter Rising.

Connolly believed that society made women “the weaker vessel” through a lack of training and education, and for this reason, women struggled more from the exploitation of the industrial revolution. However, he congratulated women, most especially suffragists and labour activists, for their work in the “women’s war” and stated that “In Ireland the women’s cause is felt by all Labour men and women as their cause; the Labour cause has no more earnest and whole-hearted supporters than the militant women.”<sup>148</sup> He referred to women workers as “the slave of that slave [the male worker]” and called Irish peasant girls the “cheapest slaves in existence” because they were the slaves of their families who were slaves to the landlords and community.<sup>149</sup>

Connolly included women workers in the strikes leading up to The Dublin Lockout, even though their part in the strikes marked them as unsuited for future

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>146</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years 1900–1923*, (Dublin: O’Brien Press, 2003), 30-31.

<sup>147</sup> Document # 75: The Constitution of the Irish Citizen Army quoted in Arthur Mitchell and Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, eds., *Irish Political Documents, 1869–1916*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989), 146-147, 146.

<sup>148</sup> James Connolly, *The Re-Conquest of Ireland*, reprinted in James Connolly, *Collected Works, Volume I*, (Dublin: New Book Publications, 1987), 238.

<sup>149</sup> James Connolly, *The Re-Conquest of Ireland*, 239.

employment by many factories and businesses. The women of the strike, along with the women of the Irish Women Worker's Union and some members of Inghinidhe na hEireann, became part of the Irish Citizen Army. Helena Moloney, former Hon. Secretary of Inghinidhe na hEireann, had just returned from France in 1914 when Connolly asked her to "organise the girls as a unit of the Citizen Army." He also suggested that she set up classes first aid classes for the women.<sup>150</sup>

Connolly's leadership, alongside Jim Larkin, created a greater acceptance of women's equality, as did their program of making the women and men take lectures and first-aid classes together. Men and women drilled together as well. Women were expected to be in the same physical shape as the men.<sup>151</sup> Since the ICA had the same expectations of both sexes, ICA men were more likely to treat the ICA women as equals. Helena Moloney, like Countess Markievicz, noted that "Connolly—staunch Feminist that he was—was more than anxious to welcome women into the ranks on equal terms with men, and to promote them to such rank and position as they were suited for."<sup>152</sup> However, women may not have been equal in practice. The fact that the women were organized as a separate unit and the fact that they formed an ambulance corps (typical women's work) casts some doubt on this theory of equality.

The Irish Volunteers also formed in 1913, but the organizers staged a meeting as a result of the Home Rule Crisis in Ireland. More specifically, they planned to oppose Edward Carson's Ulster Volunteers, who were campaigning for Ulster's exclusion from the Home Rule Bill. The Volunteers did not immediately give women a place in their organization; historians claim that this was because of their roots in the Irish Republican Brotherhood, an organization that had always been primarily male in membership, and the tradition of Volunteerism, which in 1782 was also a male-dominated role in eighteenth-century society.<sup>153</sup> At the Volunteer's inaugural meeting in November 1913, many women attended, but they were forced to view the meeting from a separate gallery. The men spoke in very masculine terms throughout the meeting and in their manifesto. Padraic Pearse reminded the men that the founders called the meeting to defend, "The rights common to Irish men and Irish women."<sup>154</sup> Pearse was more liberal in his views towards women than many of the other men; other men generally agreed that women should not behave too radically. But due to the women's interest in their group, the Volunteers Manifesto made a vague reference to women's involvement: "There will also be work for the women to do, and there are signs that the women of Ireland, true to their record, are especially enthusiastic for the success of the Volunteers."<sup>155</sup> However, neither

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<sup>150</sup> Helena Moloney, WS 391, NAI, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913-21, Statment by Witness, 21.

<sup>151</sup> Constance Markievicz, "St Stephen's Green" quoted in Margaret Ward, ed., *In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism*, (Cork: Attic Press, 1995), 73-76, 73.

<sup>152</sup> Helena Moloney, WS 391, NAI, 20.

<sup>153</sup> Kevin Whelan, "Introduction to Section VI," in Thomas Bartlett, ed., *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, (Dublin: Four Courts, 2003), 469-477, 470-471. The original Irish Volunteers originated in 1778, they were politically active men who protected Ireland while the troops were away in America; after Theobald Wolfe Tone joined they changed their name to the United Irishmen. 1782 was the year of the first Volunteer Convention.

<sup>154</sup> F. X. Martin, *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections and Documents*, (Dublin: James Duffy and Co. Ltd., 1963), 114. Also quoted in Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 90.

<sup>155</sup> "Manifesto of the Irish Volunteers" quoted in F.X. Martin, editor, *The Irish Volunteers*, 98-101; 100.

Pearse's statement nor their mention in the manifesto gave the women a well-defined place in the organization, nor did they provide women with a guarantee of citizenship in the new Ireland.

Women demanded both their place within the Volunteer movement and their rights as citizens. After the Volunteer meeting, women discussed their visions for their incorporation into the Volunteers; many of them desired a separate organization. An article by "Southwoman" in *Irish Freedom* in November 1913 stated that "there is no country in the world, Ireland included, where women have not fought." She also reminded women that, "whether you can fight or not, you are to the full as important to Ireland and as much bound to her service, as your brothers and husbands are. ...But if you want to be of use to Ireland you must not shy at the word 'politics'."<sup>156</sup> The author of this article wanted women to take whatever actions they felt comfortable with; and more importantly, she wanted the women to assert themselves and demand equal status. On the other hand, not all women desired a militant organization. Caitlin De Brun felt that the women needed to remain domestic in their duties and desired their subordination to the men. The women's training, in her mind, suited them for specific types of work such as first aid and the making of uniforms and flags: "They will have a chance of putting their knowledge to practical use now in the making of flags for Volunteers. To a patriotic Irishwoman could there be any work of more intense delight than that?"<sup>157</sup> Debates over the nature of the organization continued until the Cumann na mBan had its inaugural meeting in April of 1914.

Cumann na mBan started in the middle ground of these conservative and radical opinions. In the inaugural address, its first President, Agnes O'Farrelly, painted the ideal women's nationalist organization as an extension of the domestic sphere where women could participate and maintain their femininity.<sup>158</sup> The first meeting of the Cumann na mBan took place on April 5, 1914 in Dublin at Wynne's Hotel. Several women of the executive distributed circulars which declared Cumann na mBan's goals:

1. To advance the cause of Irish Liberty.
2. To organise Irishwomen in furtherance of this objective.
3. To assist in arming and equipping a body of Irish men for defence of Ireland.
4. To form a fund for these purposes to be called the "Defence of Ireland Fund".<sup>159</sup>

There was nothing particularly radical in these goals, nor did any of them fall outside the feminine norms of the time. Adhering to standards of femininity was important to some of the women, especially since Cumann's first meeting took place during daytime hours

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Eoin MacNeill supposedly had stated at the Rotunda Meeting for the Volunteers that the women could "form an organisation to co-operate with the Volunteers, as the Ulster Women's Council was organised to help the Ulster Volunteers." Aine O' Rahilly, WS 333, NAI, Roann Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913-21, Statement by Witness, 1. Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 541, NAI, 9, stated that she understood the idea had come from Thomas MacDonagh.. Eoin MacNeill.

<sup>156</sup> 'South Woman', "To the Young Women of Ireland" *Irish Freedom*, November 1913 quoted in Margaret Ward, *In Their Own Voice*, 39-41; 40.

<sup>157</sup> Caitlin De Brun "Women's Work in the Volunteer Movement" in Margaret War, *In their own voice*, 41-42.

<sup>158</sup> Agnes O'Farrelly, "Inaugural Address" quoted in Margaret Ward, *In their Own Voice*, 42-46.

<sup>159</sup> Circular from First Cumann na mBan meeting in Dublin quoted in Lil Conlon, *Cumann na mBan and the Women of Ireland, 1913—1925*, (Kilkenny: Kilkenny People Ltd, 1969), 8.

and targeted middle and upper-class women. The organization needed women who would not be distracted from their nationalist calling by work or family.<sup>160</sup> However, working class women did become involved in the movement, especially after the Volunteer Split. Cumann's main priority in the beginning was to raise funds for the men, a very traditional role for Irish women, who had been fund-raisers since at least 1798. However, the fact that these women persisted and gained their place, even if it was in an auxiliary capacity, was impressive since so few women's revolutionary organizations had existed prior to this point. In fact, the women's adherence to strict feminine roles did not last long in practice; many branches of Cumann na mBan were drilling and shooting by the end of 1914.

Most historians of women's organizations focus their works on the equality, or lack thereof, Cumann na mBan women. Dorothy Macardle, author of *The Irish Republic*, claimed that, even in 1914, "Their organisation [Cumann na mBan] was an independent one with its own constitution and executive. They were allies, not subordinates, of the Volunteers."<sup>161</sup> At least some of the men viewed them as equals, but others, male and female, did not. Rather than focus on absolute equality, I suggest it is more important to note how interactions between women and men throughout the formative years of the revolutionary period challenged inequalities and raised doubts about what women could and could not do.

Not all women were satisfied with the roles set out for Cumann at these early meetings, Áine Ní Rathaile's (Aine O' Rahilly) record of the 1914 meeting showed great contempt for the leaders of the group: "At the first meeting one of the women present, Miss Agnes O'Farrelly, suggested that we should start making puttees for the Volunteers. I was disgusted. I came away and told my sister-in-law I was not going there again."<sup>162</sup> Some women refused to accept a place in Cumann na mBan because of its conservative stance. However, at the same time many women compromised in hopes of gaining their place in the coming Republic. Nancy Wyse-Power stated that "The promoters [of Cumann na mBan] may have had in mind an auxiliary association of women acting under the general instructions of the Volunteer Executive but the organisation immediately declared itself to be an independent organisation of women determined to make its own decisions."<sup>163</sup> Many women recalled the decision to make Cumann independent in their memoirs, statements, and interviews. The one thing that made Cumann stand apart for many of these women was the fact that they made the statement that they were "an independent body of Irishwomen."<sup>164</sup> Maire Nic Shubilaigh joined Cumann na mBan in 1914. In her memoir she stated: "At the beginning, before belief in the wisdom of insurrection rather than debate became widespread, it was not the military organisation it later became."<sup>165</sup> Nic Shubilaigh believed that Cumann na mBan was not yet forming along military lines because there was little work to be done—first aid and collecting

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<sup>160</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 92.

<sup>161</sup> Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic: A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland, with a Detailed Account of the Period 1916—1923*, (Reprint, 1965, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1937), 108.

<sup>162</sup> Aine O' Rahilly, WS 333, NAI, 1-2.

<sup>163</sup> Dr. Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 541, NAI, 9.

<sup>164</sup> Mary Colum in Margaret Ward, *In Their Own Voice*, 50-52.

<sup>165</sup> Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years: Recollections of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh; as told to Edward Kenny*, (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., Ltd., 1955), 159.

funds were the only necessary actions until events leading up to the rising changed the political climate.

Cumann's absorption of some members of Inghinidhe na hEireann later in 1914 added certain elements of feminism to the group overall. However, Inghinidhe joined the movement only when allowed to form their own branch. The fundraisers of Cumann na mBan were very similar to the ones held by Inghinidhe na hEireann in the earlier years; they raised money by organizing concerts, lectures, ceilidhes and tableaux in celebration of and to raise funds for the nationalist cause. Tableaus performed on January 22, 1915 included "Erin and her daughters" and "the Heroine of Ross,"<sup>166</sup> titles that indicated one ideological change that would occur after the Volunteer Split. Erin was no longer the symbolic maiden form of Ireland being freed and defended by the men; the women of Ireland were now coming to rescue the motherland. While they still used women in an emblematic way, it was a more active representation. Indeed, the women of Cumann used Irish heroines of the past to argue for various rights and inclusions, just as Inghinidhe na hEireann had.

Though conservative women controlled Cumann na mBan in its early days; other women agitated for a more militant stance from the society. Most women chose to change the organization from within rather than dismissing it outright for its all-too-domestic flavor. Each branch was different within Cumann; the militancy and radicalism of each branch depended heavily on its constituency. The Inghinidhe na hEireann branch, for instance, became one of the strongest because it absorbed many feminists from the old group. Not having a voice in the Volunteer's executive limited Cumann's ability to influence the men's policies, nonetheless, their presence as an unincorporated body allowed them a certain amount of freedom. Many of the men held certain ideals of how the women should run their organization, but they could not control that organization outside of the trope of war, and even then, the men had limited control over what the women chose to do. The women were the most important factor in what the branches accomplished; which explains why the Inghinidhe branch, which included some of the most notorious suffragist-nationalists, was ahead of its sisters in the organization. Cumann na mBan's ideological changes centered around three basic events prior to the Easter Rising: The Howth Gun-running, the Volunteer Split, and the Funeral of O'Donovan Rossa.

The first major event related to the rising was the Howth Gun-running. The women of Cumann na mBan were in charge of gathering the Defence of Ireland Fund to finish paying off the guns, though two women, Molly Childers and Mary Spring Rice, had already donated a large portion of the necessary funds. Subscribers to the gun-running fund involved a number of people without a definitive link to the nationalist movement, but at the same time the secretary of Cumann na mBan, Min Ryan was heavily involved both in subscribing to the gun fund and in the secret committee started by Sir Roger Casement. Several women were present at these meetings, but the only Cumann na mBan member present in the records was Min Ryan. In the meantime, Molly and Erskine Childers provided the Asgard, a yacht for running the guns. Alice Stopford Green, Molly Childers, and Mary Spring Rice all worked aboard the Asgard and aided

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<sup>166</sup> Conlon, 13.

the men in the gun-running; these women, though not members of Cumann na mBan, played an active role in getting guns for the Volunteers.<sup>167</sup>

Cumann na mBan's most crucial part in the gun-running was not their funding of the project; but rather their part in distributing and hiding the guns. Ina Heron, one of James Connolly's daughters who was a member of Cumann na mBan, camped with her sister, Nora, the Countess Markievicz and some of the na Fianna hÉireann boys.<sup>168</sup> The Fianna boys all left Sunday Morning stating that "they had been invited out and no girls were welcome." Although the men never banned Countess Markievicz from any activity, nationalist or otherwise, they did not invite her along. Ina was very hurt and angry until later that night when the Countess asked the two sisters to perform a very dangerous and important mission: "The dear Countess said: 'You are the first women to run guns up to the north. Show Eddy Carson what you can do. Deliver them safely is all I ask and I have every confidence in you.'" Ina added, "In a couple of days we knew how to handle a gun." They even held a shooting competition for women that Christmas.<sup>169</sup> Countess Markievicz also asked Margaret Skinnider, a member of the Glasgow Cumann na mBan, to run detonators and wires to Dublin; she carried the detonators in her hat and wrapped the wires around her body under her clothes.<sup>170</sup> Women also helped by storing ammunition and arms, as well as aiding the men by making cartridges before the Rising.<sup>171</sup>

Men and women in Ireland accepted Cumann na mBan's roles as fund-raisers, but the fact that they were running guns indicated that women's roles expanded in response to the militarization of the country. In addition to this, the men finally accepted the women's help in a more unanimous way.<sup>172</sup> Ina Heron, who had run guns with her sister stated that "Father was there to greet us and clap us on the back, 'Bravo and well done. I could not have done it any better myself.'" <sup>173</sup> The men thought that women were more likely to succeed in the gun-running business since the British knew that the guns had landed in Howth harbor and intelligence agents were keeping the Volunteers under close surveillance. However, the fact that the men allowed the women to run guns, and the fact that they provided many women in Cumann with revolvers for their personal protection, showed at least a slight change in the men's attitudes.

The second major event to change the Volunteers-Cumann relationship was John Redmond's change in policy for the Volunteers. Redmond began involving the Volunteers in his own political activities within the Irish Party in July 1914. Both the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan accepted this; however, a huge split occurred in October of 1914 when Redmond began a campaign in order to convince Irish men to sign

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<sup>167</sup> F. X. Martin, *The Howth Gun-Running and Kilcoole Gun-running, 1914*, (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1964), xiv—xxii.

<sup>168</sup> These girls were also part of na Fianna hÉireann, the Irish nationalist boy scouts. The group had not intended to allow girls in, as the Baden-Powell scouts did not, but because there was no comparable organization for girls and because of their respect for Countess Markievicz, they created the Betsey Grey Sluagh for girls who wanted to join.

<sup>169</sup> Ina Heron, WS 919, NAI, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913—21, Statement by Witness, 90—92.

<sup>170</sup> Margaret Skinnider, *Doing My Bit For Ireland*, (New York: Century co., 1917), 9.

<sup>171</sup> Margaret Skinnider, 76.

<sup>172</sup> F. X. Martin, *The Howth Gun-running*, xx.

<sup>173</sup> Ina Heron, WS 919, NAI, 92.

up with Irish Regiments in the British Army. He claimed that if they helped England in World War I, that they would expedite the deployment of the Home Rule Bill. It was at this point that both the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan split. The male majority sided with Redmond, but Cumann na mBan chose to side with the Irish Volunteers rather than Redmond's group, and many women left the group. Cumann released a statement on the matter:

We came into being to advance the cause of Irish liberty and to organise Irishwomen in furtherance of that object. We feel bound to make the pronouncement that to urge or encourage Irish Volunteers to enlist in the British Army cannot, under any circumstances, be regarded as consistent with the work we have set ourselves to do.<sup>174</sup>

Kathleen Clarke mentioned in her autobiography that Cumann lost some girls over the split, but that their organization's numbers doubled very shortly afterwards.<sup>175</sup> It became more difficult for women and men both to join the Volunteers and Cumann after this because many families had sons away in World War I and were opposed to the stance of these organizations had taken on the matter. Cumann na mBan's stance was admirable from the nationalist's perspective, and the Irish Volunteers noted that the women were more iconoclast in their convictions than many of the men. Agnes O'Farrelly resigned as president after this decision, which freed the women from conservative leadership. In fact, the women who left the organization during the split were mostly the conservative women who felt that Cumann na mBan should not choose sides, but help both the Redmondites and the Irish Volunteers. The nationalist-feminist constituency of the group thus won the battle against the most conservative members.

After the split, the women drew up a scheme of activities that included:

1. First Aid. Lectures.
2. Home Nursing
3. Signalling and arms
4. The use, care, cleaning, loading of rifles and revolvers was taught
5. A Rifle practice in the Father Matthew Hall in Fairview and at the Inghinidhe Hall in Camden Street was keenly taken up by some of our members. [a very significant change]
6. Physical drill was practised at each branch meeting because Cumann na mBan realised that discipline was one of the most essential things in the organization.
7. Irish Classes were held and our members were requested to acquire a knowledge of their own language. Punctuality was insisted upon, and

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<sup>174</sup> *The Irish Volunteer* 17 October, 1914 quoted in Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 101.

<sup>175</sup> Kathleen Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman: My Fight for Ireland's Freedom*, edited by Helen Litton, (Dublin: O'Brien Press, Ltd., 1997), 45.

misfortune overtook anyone who dared to turn up one minute after the hour fixed for a parade.<sup>176</sup>

This was a major change from their previous policies which stressed fund-raising and first aid. With radical women like Mary MacSwiney leading the organization, Cumann finally became more radical itself. However, the individual members of each branch still chose which of the more radical principles they adopted. Some branches, for instance, did not take up rifle practice. However, the drilling for Cumann became universal not only in Dublin, but across Ireland.

Many women within the various branches of Cumann began writing. There are many articles by these women and many of them indicate that women of these organizations did not, in practice, subscribe to all of Cumann na mBan's more conservative ideals. Mary Colum, for instance wrote:

From the start we of Cumann na mBan decided to do any national work that came within the scope of our aims. We would collect money or arms, we would learn ambulance work, learn how to make haversacks and bandoliers, we would study the question of food supplies, we would practise the use of the rifle, we would make speeches, we would do everything that came in our way—nothing is too high or too low for us to attempt, for we are not the auxiliaries or the handmaidens or the camp followers of the Volunteers—we are their allies. ...If some unhappy fate were now to destroy the Volunteers, Cumann na mBan is not only capable of still growing and flourishing, it is capable of bringing the whole Volunteer movement to life again...<sup>177</sup>

Though not all of her contemporaries shared Colum's enthusiasm or optimism for the group; Cumann na mBan had the right to claim by this point that they were a "force to be reckoned with"<sup>178</sup> After the split, Cumann redefined its role. Many women rallied to the group because of their bold stance in the Volunteer Split; their program began showing that they were not just camp-followers and auxiliaries. More changes would come over time; by 1918, all branches of the group would come to reorganize along military lines due to the more extremist elements and the inclusion of a younger generation of activists.

Cumann's choice to march in the funeral of the famous Fenian O'Donovan Rossa evinced a change in attitudes. This was a massive demonstration planned by the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Kathleen Clarke explained in her autobiography that the nationalist planned the funeral and made it a public affair to rejuvenate and encourage nationalist sentiment in Ireland, a mission that was, in the minds of nationalists, accomplished: "O'Donovan Rossa had served Ireland, living and dead."<sup>179</sup> The Irish Volunteers, Irish Citizen Army, and Cumann na mBan marched in the procession. These men and women marched in uniform; Cumann na mBan's presence at the funeral was so

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<sup>176</sup> Eithne Ni Chumhaill (Eithne Coyle), "The History of Cumann na mBan", *An Phoblacht*, 8 April and 15 April, 1933. Quoted in Maria Luddy, editor, *Women in Ireland 1800—1918: A Documentary History*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 304-309, 307.

<sup>177</sup> Mary Colum, *Irish Freedom*, September 1914 quoted in Margaret Ward, *In Their Own Voice*, 49-51, 50.

<sup>178</sup> Colum quoted in Ward, *In Their Own Voice*, 49.

<sup>179</sup> Kathleen Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, 57.

strong that many girls joined afterwards.<sup>180</sup> Though some Cumann branches had been drilling in uniform at this point, it still attracted the attention of the public to see 1,000 women marching in this fashion; the *Irish Citizen*'s comments on this procession were especially telling:

Large Contingents of women marched in O'Donovan Rossa funeral procession, taking an integral part of it and as far as discipline, bearing, and physical endurance went, proved themselves fully equal to the men. The comments of the crowd on the women (usually friendly) were instructive, for they were almost invariably hailed as "Suffragettes" the presumption naturally being that all women who take part in public life in any way must be connected with the movement of Votes for Women.<sup>181</sup>

The author of the article congratulated the women of Cumann on being the equal with the men in their discipline and physical endurance. The suffragists were still a little bitter, perhaps, that Cumann na mBan received so much public attention, as the jab stating that people believed them to be suffragists indicates. The observation that the crowd complimented the women, rather than denigrating them, ascertains that the public opinion of nationalist people towards the women was one of approval. Cumann's appearance in displays was important because it showed British Officials, as well as the rest of the world, that the nationalist movement was unified behind the goal of Ireland's freedom. Cumann's participation in parades and processions also raised public awareness of the Cumann na mBan and attracted new recruits to the cause.

In 1915, just a couple of months after the funeral, Cumann na mBan made an important decision, they adopted a uniform based on that of the Volunteers. Their uniform consisted of a coat, skirt, belt, and hat made out of Volunteer tweed; the coats had four pockets and the skirt was at least seven inches off the ground. The women also had haversacks with a first aid kits.<sup>182</sup> The uniforms were not mandatory at this point, because the women had to make these, but women who could not attain a uniform had to wear a haversack and a hat. The choice of a shorter skirt indicated that Cumann took Countess Markievicz's suggestion that women should "dress suitably in short skirts and strong boots...and buy a revolver,"<sup>183</sup> to heart. Countess Markievicz, like the rest of the IWFL, often criticized Cumann na mBan for not being revolutionary enough. Her criticism often weighed more heavily with Cumann, however, because many women in Cumann admired the Countess for her radical politics and her critiques helped them reform the group's identity.

Margaret Kennedy, a member of the Inghinidhe na hÉireann branch of Cumann na mBan noted that after O'Donovan Rossa's funeral in August of 1915 that their training was extended: "we were trained and exercised in drill, figure marching, stretcher-drill, signalling and rifle practice...We also went on route marches regularly on our own

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<sup>180</sup> Annie O'Brien and Lily Curran, WS 805, NAI, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913—21, Statement by Witness, 1.

<sup>181</sup> "Are Women People?," *The Irish Citizen*, August 7, 1915.

<sup>182</sup> Lil Conlon, 16.

<sup>183</sup> Countess Markievicz, "Buy a Revolver," *The Irish Citizen* (Dublin), October 23, 1915. The meeting at which the uniform was chosen took place the week after the Countess's piece appeared in the paper.

initiative in order to train the girls in marching and in taking control.”<sup>184</sup> The Inghinidhe Branch’s records indicate that they were slightly more advanced than some of the other branches. They were given military distinctions before the other branches, “Seamus Pouch [their drill and rifle instructor] insisted that we should be put on a military basis instead of being governed solely by a committee, and that officers should, therefore be elected. Ours was the first Dublin Branch to have officers.” They then elected a Commandant, Vice-Commandant, Secretary and Treasurer.<sup>185</sup> There are two important observations within this statement. Firstly, these women held rifle practice, despite the fact that some of the Volunteers felt that women should not be shooting. Padraic Pearse stated, “I would not like to think of women drilling and marching in the ordinary way, but there is no reason that they should not learn to shoot.”<sup>186</sup> While some Volunteers did not want them to shoot and other did not want them to run military drills; Cumann na mBan did both. Secondly, it was a man who suggested that they become more military-based. These two facts provide a strong counterpoint to the suffragists’ critique of Cumann women as “animated collection boxes” for the Volunteers. Some of the men were supportive of Cumann’s military role.

Historians ignore and downplay the importance of events in the earliest part of the revolutionary period, but the Howth Gun-running, Volunteer split, and O’Donnivan Rossa’s funeral each gave women a chance to show their nationalist spirit. These events also caused gradual changes within Cumann na mBan. The organization turned slowly towards more military activity—the women went from being collection agents for the men to a fully trained reserve militia within the course of two years. Men only excluded women at one point, they refused to let them unload and defend the guns; a stance that the leaders negated by sending the girls’ on their subsequent mission to the North. The women rose to meet every challenge doled out in their tumultuous early years and the men congratulated them on their accomplishments. This does not mean that one should assume that the men accepted the women as equals, even though evidence does show that many of the women viewed themselves as equal. Despite the ways in which the women and men interpreted their relationship with one another, the upheaval of Easter Week impacted both sexes tremendously and, in many ways, a certain sense of camaraderie between the Volunteers and Cumann rose from the women’s unflinching service in the line of duty. Once again, the women in uniform were to take to the streets, but this time they were acting under fire.

Brian O’Higgins, one of the Volunteers, memorialized the women of Cumann na mBan in a song which was sung at a concert on the Sunday prior to Easter Week:

All honour to Oglaiġ na hÉireann  
 All praise to the men of our race  
 Who, in days of betrayal and slavery  
 Saved Ireland from Ruin and disgrace  
 But do not forget in your praising

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<sup>184</sup> Margaret Kennedy, WS 185, NAI, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913—21, Statement by Witness, 1.

<sup>185</sup> Margaret Kennedy, WS 185, NAI, 1.

<sup>186</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women*, 29. Quote was taken from Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O’Grady, *Curious Journey: An Oral History of Ireland’s Unfinished Revolution*, Cork, Mercier Press, 1998, 23.

Of them and the deed they have done  
Their loyal and true-hearted comrades  
The Soldiers of Cumann na mBan

Chorus:

They stand for the honour of Ireland  
As their sisters in days that are gone  
And they'll march with their brothers to freedom  
The Soldiers of Cumann na mBan

No great-hearted daughter of Ireland  
Who died for her sake long ago  
Who stood in the gap of her danger  
Defying the Sassenach foe  
Was ever more gallant or worthy  
Of glory in high sounding rann  
Than the comrades of Oglaiġ na hEireann  
The soldiers of Cumann na mBan

O, high beats the heart of our Mother  
The day she had longed for is nigh  
When the Sunlight of joy and of freedom  
Shall glow in the eastern sky;  
And none shall be honoured more proudly  
That morning by chieftain and clan  
Than the daughters who served her in danger  
The soldiers of Cumann na mBan!<sup>187</sup>

Brian O'Higgins was a Volunteer and member of Sinn Fein. He wrote and performed this song before Easter Week began; however, it was a sign that some of the men considered Cumann an integral part of the army before the Rising took place. The women's activities, radical and traditional, had made an impact on the hearts and minds of the men. The Rising would strengthen the bond between the male and female nationalists.

The Easter Proclamation, printed before the Rising began, was the greatest indicator of ideological change. The proclamation, addressed to Irishmen and Irishwomen, began by explaining why they were rising, but went on to state:

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible...The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights, and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of

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<sup>187</sup> Brian O'Higgins, "The Soldiers of Cumann na mBan," quoted in Ruth Taillon, *When History Was Made: The Women of 1916*, (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publication, 1996), 39-40. Oglaiġ na hEireann is Gaelic for "the Irish Volunteers".

the whole nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.<sup>188</sup>

Historians should not credit only Socialists, men with liberal views on women, or a few outstanding female figures for this inclusion of women as equal citizens; Cumann na mBan should be given their share of the credit. The men claimed the women's allegiance in the document; they not only allowed the women to be involved, they wanted the women to take part in nationalist activities. Ruth Taillon also asserted "The proclamation reflected the very real influence and involvement of women in the national and labour movements of the time."<sup>189</sup> Had the women chosen not to organize and create a separate organization, their accomplishments might have gone unnoticed and uncovered, but their separate participation demanded attention and led the men to conclude that it was wrong to exclude women who had taken such an integral part in the activities of the past. This document also bound women to the idea of a republic; the promise of equality encompassed by the proclamation made the women more dedicated to the defense of its principles.

The Volunteer Executive planned the 1916 Rising after the IRB created the bogus "Castle Document" which stated that the Castle was about to clamp down on the Volunteers, and because of the discovery of its forgery, MacNeill [leader of the Volunteers] countermanded the order for the rising. This resulted in mass confusion for men and women both. The Volunteers Council said the Rising was on, even though the head of the organization had called it off.<sup>190</sup> In the end, the confusion prevented both men and women from participating in the Rising; though some individuals found out about it later and joined partway through the week. The ICA was considerably more organized than the Volunteers and Cumann; they had set out plans for the women's ambulance corps in advance. Some of the Volunteers had reservations about women serving at their stations, however, historians should not assume that the men intentionally misinformed the women<sup>191</sup>; to do so would have been depriving themselves of much-needed nurses and first aid workers. Women were turned away from several posts in the beginning; but upon hearing of their troubles, Pearse, Connolly, and Clarke sent out a directive to the men instructing them to allow the women to carry out the work for which they were trained. James Connolly and Padraic Pearse held a meeting before the Easter Rising where they announced that there was no longer a distinction between the Volunteers and the ICA, there was now only the Irish Republican Army.<sup>192</sup> By Tuesday, only De Valera and the Third Battalion, who held the Boland's Mill garrison banned women. Later, de Valera apologized for this [though he privately told Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington that he was only sorry because some of his best men had been forced to cook by the lack of women] and stated that women were "at once the boldest and most unmanageable revolutionaries."<sup>193</sup> As with past risings, women played a variety of roles

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<sup>188</sup> The Provisional Government, *Proclamation of the Republic*, 24 April 1916.

<sup>189</sup> Ruth Taillon, *When History Was Made*, xvii.

<sup>190</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women*, 35.

<sup>191</sup> Margaret Ward uses this as evidence that some of the men were very hesitant about allowing women into their stations. *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 107-108.

<sup>192</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 111.

<sup>193</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women*, 38; Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 110.

in Easter Week. The majority worked as Red Cross workers, were couriers, or procured rations for the men. And a few women fought, (though this was not general Cumann na mBan policy) Margaret Skinnider of the Glasgow branch was just one of the few.

The women planned their operations extensively before the Rising; both the ICA and Cumann women set up medical stations and made bandages and other supplies for the men. Many women also ran intelligence and acted as couriers before the Rising began. Nancy Wyse-Power, who had joined Cumann in 1915, took her first mission to Cork on Ash Wednesday of 1916.<sup>194</sup> Wyse-Power had a brush with the authorities as she was delivering the message. Upon her arrival, she discovered a priest had taken the bag, mistaking it for his own. This led to much trouble on her part as she and the MacSwiney family, to whom she was delivering the message, spent all the next day trying to retrieve this. Her only consolation was that a priest was less likely to go to the police, and in fact, he returned the bag without even mentioning its contents.<sup>195</sup> In a later mission during Easter Week, Wyse-Power sewed a message she was given into the hem of her skirt.<sup>196</sup> Difficulties like this made the women's work as couriers rather dangerous. An anonymous source stated that: "Cumann na mBan girls did practically all the despatch carrying...none of them returned unsuccessful. That was a point of honour with them—to succeed or be killed."<sup>197</sup> While this is probably exaggerated, the women went to great depths to keep their messages safe. The women felt that carrying out missions successfully was a way to prove themselves to the men and to their country. One girl, Chris Caffrey, told Margaret Skinnider that she had been dragged off the street and strip-searched by the British, but she ate the despatch just to keep it out of their hands.<sup>198</sup>

Men chose women for many of these missions because they could move about the country more easily than the men, providing that they dressed traditionally in long skirts or dresses. Even Margaret Skinnider, who often dressed as a boy, dressed as a woman when doing despatch work and when running weapons.<sup>199</sup> British soldiers generally refused to strip search women unless a lady searcher was available. Since women were less conspicuous and less likely to be searched, women also ran other important errands. Marie Perolz obtained extra revolvers from an arms dealer in Dublin.<sup>200</sup> In fact, the Volunteers sent a group of Cumann na mBan girls to save a batch of guns shortly before the rising; they asked Brighid Folley, Effie Taaffe, and Kitty O'Doherty to find and protect the guns that had come into the country in boxes marked as 'cutlery'. Informers at Dublin Castle warned the men that the British had discovered what was really in the boxes and that house was to be raided by Castle Officials; the women successfully transported these two boxes across town, past a couple of policemen, and hid them under the stairs in the O' Doherty's house.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 541, NAI, 13.

<sup>195</sup> Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 541, NAI 13-15.

<sup>196</sup> Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 541, NAI, 27.

<sup>197</sup> "Cumann na mBan: Tribute from a Hostile Source" quoted in Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women*, 41.

<sup>198</sup> Skinnider, 165.

<sup>199</sup> Skinnider, 50-51; 76-78. Skinnider would alternate between her uniform and female garb during the Rising; 138.

<sup>200</sup> Mary Perolz, WS 246, NAI, 6-7.

<sup>201</sup> Kitty O'Doherty, WS 355, NAI, 8-14.

First Aid work was not safe either; the British fired at the Irish Red Cross women because they were not officially affiliated with the Red Cross, therefore the British soldiers treated them as hostile elements. Skinnider witnessed the troops firing on the first aid workers and was angered at the British violation of the rules of engagement:

Once that day I saw them shooting at our first-aid girls, who made excellent targets in their white dresses, with large red crosses on them. It was a miracle that none of them was wounded. Bullets passed through one girl's skirt, and another girl had the heel of her shoe shot off. If I myself had not seen this happen, I could not have believed that the British soldiers would disobey the rules of war concerning the Red Cross."<sup>202</sup>

The men expected female dispatch carriers to be in danger, but surely they could not have anticipated that the British would treat their unarmed first aid workers as common revolutionaries. Many of the men admired of the women's bravery, however they still believed that women needed protection, as their reactions to the surrender showed.

The women of Northern Ireland, who had already practiced shooting, discovered that their newfound skill was not to be put to use in the Rising:

It was about a month before Easter Week that Nora Connolly announced that at the next meeting she would ask the members to decide whether or not they actually fight if it became necessary. After the meeting Nell and I told Nora that we did not need to wait—we were prepared to fight, and that was our reason for joining Cumann na mBan. However, at the next meeting Nora said that she had been advised not to press the matter.<sup>203</sup>

The women of Tyrone were clearly willing to fight, but were not allowed. This was likely the case with other women in other locales. Dublin, however, was a slightly different case since so much confusion accompanied the rising. The Volunteers did not want the women to actually fight, even though in most cases British Troops vastly outnumbered them and despite the fact that the women were already running the same risks of injury and death. Danger was inherent in any position on the battlefield—the Red Cross nurses, dispatch carriers, and women who procured rations for the men were all in the line of British fire. However, the air of confusion made it easier for a few women to fight despite the fact that neither the Volunteers nor Cumann condoned it. Countess Markievicz, who was involved in the ICA and Cumann na mBan, as well as na Fianna Eireann, stated that she could not give accounts of all those who surrounded her and the people she met, but "Some were members of Cumann na mBan, and others were just women who were ready to die for Ireland."<sup>204</sup> Ernie O' Malley also spoke of the Fianna and Cumann na nBan's part as fighters<sup>205</sup> Many of the women who did not fight

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<sup>202</sup> Skinnider, 124.

<sup>203</sup> Elizabeth Corr, WS 179, NAI, 2.

<sup>204</sup> Margaret Skinnider "Stephens Green" quoted in Margaret Ward, *In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism*, 73-76; 73.

<sup>205</sup> Ernie O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound*, (Dublin: The Sign of Three Candles, 1936; reprinted London: Rich and Cowan Ltd, 1937), 62.

carried guns on them for self-defense, and in several cases, Cumann na mBan girls procured rations by holding up lorries filled with supplies (supposedly for the British).<sup>206</sup>

Most of the women wrote positively of their experiences during Easter week; however, the fact that the men turned away or ignored some women led to narratives like that of Julia Grennan:

It was Máire Peroltz who told me the Rising was definitely on. On Saturday night Roddy Connolly came and he mobilized the two of us for Liberty Hall, although we were Cumann na mBan. However Connolly sent for us and we went over and he said that he was going to attach us to the Citizen Army. We saw no objection to this because the Volunteers weren't taking any notice of us, didn't care whether we were there or not.<sup>207</sup>

Grennan wound up at the General Post Office (GPO) and was, in fact, one of the only three women to remain there during the surrender. Most of the other women experienced fewer difficulties in their participation; a few wound up cooking in the garrisons, but the majority of them spent at least some time out in the thick of the fighting. The women's witness statements from the Bureau of Military History showed women's exhilaration in being a part of this event. They broke out of the woman's typical world of wife and motherhood and acted as an integral part of military operations.

However, as the week drew to a close, and Elizabeth O'Farrell circulated the order to surrender, the men at many of the stations sent the women away. P. H. Pearse, who was stationed at the GPO gave a beautiful speech thanking the women for their help and told them that "when the history of that fight would be written the foremost page in the annals should be given to the women of Dublin who had taken their place in the fight for the establishment of republic." He also told them that their presence had inspired the men, recalled the story of Ann Devlin, considered the greatest female patriot in Irish history, and told them that "such heroism, wonderful though it was, paled before the devotion and duty of the women of Cumann na mBan." In the end he prayed that God would give Cumann na mBan the strength to "carry on the fight."<sup>208</sup> Other commanders thanked the women very sincerely as they were sending them away. The men genuinely praised the women's heroism and dedication; James Connolly wrote: "We are winning and in the hour of our victory let us not forget the Splendid Women who have everywhere stood by us and cheered us on. Never had a man or woman a grander Cause, never was a Cause more grandly served."<sup>209</sup>

Though the garrison leaders dismissed most of the women, others refused to leave and chose to surrender with the men. These women were arrested. The women who had left when asked generally escaped, but the British still arrested 74 women the day of the

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<sup>206</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 37.

<sup>207</sup> Interview with Julia Grennan, Donncha O' Dúlaing, *Voices of Ireland: Conversations with Donncha O' Dúlaing*, Biographies by Henry Boylan, (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1985), 70.

<sup>208</sup> Eithne Coyle, "The History of Cumann na mBan," 308. Julia Grennan and Leslie Bean de Barra's interviews in Donncha O'Dulaing, *Voices of Ireland*, 68-77; 90-106.

<sup>209</sup> Lil Conlon, 25.

surrender. Countess Markievicz was the only woman to receive a death sentence, although this was changed to a lifelong sentence of penal servitude because she was a woman.<sup>210</sup> The British did not know what to do with their female prisoners. J. G. Maxwell corresponded with the authorities and told them that he was releasing most of the women because they were just part of “the Sinn Fein ambulance society;” however, he held twelve women because they had records with Dublin Castle. He says of these female prisoners that

had they been male prisoners, I would have at least recommended [them] for internment. In view of their sex, however, I considered that it would be desirable that they should be granted their liberty, but, at the same time, I could not consent to allow them to be at large in this country while the present unsettled state of affairs continues.<sup>211</sup>

Maxwell planned to deport the women to England, but an answering letter stated that the British authorities desired the release of the women. Maxwell finally freed Madeleine Ffrench Mullen, Eibhlin Gifford, Mary sRyan, Kathleen Bryan and Annie Higgins, most of whom were Cumann na mBan. He deported Countess Plunkett (mother of Joseph Mary Plunkett) and Dr. Kathleen Lynn (Irish Citizen Army) to England. In the meantime, he interned Winifred Carney, Maura Perolz, Helena Moloney, Breida Foley, and Ellen Ryan (also Cumann na mBan members, with the exception of Helena Moloney who also belonged to the ICA) at Aylesbury under Defense Of the Realm Act, regulation 14B.<sup>212</sup> Margaret Skinnider, who was in prison with these women spoke of the outrage the female rebels felt at being held without a charge. She also mentioned the barbaric condition of Kilmainham gaol, which was highly unsanitary, and the fact that the women were all held in a room without toilets.<sup>213</sup> Women’s role in the Rising shocked the English authorities, most especially Countess Markievicz. Sensational Headlines followed in the British Press, such as “Woman Rebel Leader” and “Heard Countess Shot Six”; the sheer fact that so many of the articles in *The Times* mention the countess and her habit of dressing in what was considered to be men’s clothes (the Uniform of the ICA) indicated that the British, while not terribly opposed to women’s participation as nurses and first aid workers, considered fighting women an anomaly. General Maxwell released women who had been involved in highly seditious activities because the British in general did not seem to feel threatened by the women as long as they did not fight openly. The discomfort felt by General Maxwell at holding women prisoners was later to be displaced, as the Irish War of Independence would show that the women were just as dangerous as the men.

The fact that some women in the ICA and Cumann na mBan were active fighters during Easter Week does not prove that the men considered the women their equals; nor does the fact that Cumann na mBan members for the most part did not fight change the fact that these women operated smoothly and efficiently in dangerous environments

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<sup>210</sup> Skinnider, 160-1.

<sup>211</sup> Doc 90a: Letter from the Rt. Hon. Sir J. G. Maxwell, Commander in Chief, Ireland, to the Secretary, War Office, 10 May 1916. WO141/19 Public Record Office, Kew. In Maria Luddy, editor, *Women in Ireland*, 317-8.

<sup>212</sup> Doc 90b: Letter from General Sir J. G. Maxwell to the Secretary, the War Office, 15 June 1916. WO 141/20 Public Records Office, Kew, in Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland*, 318-9.

<sup>213</sup> Skinnider, 166-168.

while providing the men with invaluable services whether as cooks, couriers, nurses, or fighters. The men commented on their bravery and encouraged them to carry on the fight. The women of Easter Week performed their duties and afterwards, with the execution and internment of loved ones, had the option of becoming mourning mothers, widows, or sisters. But this was not to be the fate of Cumann na mBan or the women of the ICA. The Irish Citizen Army withdrew from the fight for Irish Independence after Connolly's death. They continued on in a weakened form, but without the strong leadership of Connolly, it was difficult for the ICA to regroup and determine its new principles. This meant that women who wanted a part in the national struggle would have to join forces with Cumann na mBan, and men would have to join the Volunteers. The women who rejected Cumann's principles now reconsidered their position and several strong figures from the ICA worked with them in the next phase of the struggle for independence.

As Deirdre McCarthy stated in her article on Cumann na mBan, "rather than submissively accepting their auxiliary role in revolutionary politics the women became acutely aware of their own lack of status and hence sought not only Ireland's freedom but women's equal citizenship within the new Ireland."<sup>214</sup> Rather than being foisted into their revolutionary roles, the women chose to participate. The men did not beg them to join the nationalist movement and had shown some resistance to their activities in the beginning, but the women became active agents of change by participating despite the opposition. The changing perception of femininity was not a new view that women should be allowed to participate in military actions in varying capacities, but the realization that women could handle the psychological impact of warfare. Notions of femininity's need of protection by the masculine were still in operation, to a degree, but at the same time, Cumann na mBan's work showed that women had virtues previously considered masculine: their bravery, strength and endurance were all items mentioned in the men's farewell speeches.

Women's participation in the Rising turned the hearts of men and women alike. Women presented themselves as Irish citizens ready to fight whether the Volunteers wanted them involved in the Rising or not. Conservative women, too, began to respect other women's desire to operate in a wider sphere of activities. The women of Cumann na mBan gained self-confidence and defined themselves as an independent body of Irishwomen early in their existence, but there was a constant evolution of identity during the first three years of their existence. The women were now able to claim an equal part in the fight with the men—they had aided the men in every aspect of the Rising.

The British authorities enforced strict laws and curfews after the Rising; they also raided homes of suspected Republicans. With many men being imprisoned or executed, women were often left alone to run their homes. Cumann na mBan's role in the immediate aftermath of the rising was very vital to their visibility; through their use of propaganda, they kept the "Republic" alive. Just like the Ladies' Land League, they were continuing the work while the men were in prison. They carried on the intellectual war waged by the leaders of the Easter Rising and they popularized the movement by keeping the people informed of the executions and atrocities following Easter Week. The Irish

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<sup>214</sup> Deirdre McCarthy, "Cumann na mBan: The Limerick Link, 1914-1921" in Bernadette Whelan, editor, *Clio's Daughters: Essays on Irish Women's History 1845 to 1939*, (Limerick: University of Limerick Press, 1997), 52—73, 52.

people, many of whom had not supported the rebels and were unaware of why the Rising had happened, converted to the cause after these events; the rebels' "sacrifice" had worked with a little help from the girls of Cumann. The women of Cumann changed over the course of a few short years, as did men's perceptions of them. Cumann na mBan had moved from being an eclectic group compromising to unite the more traditional women with the radical ones to being fully-fledged activists who, in the aftermath, spread Republican ideas to the masses. While some of the Volunteers ridiculed women in the beginning, the IRA did not consider Cumann na mBan women unfeminine, for they remembered well the lesson learned in Easter Week.

## CHAPTER 4

### CUMANN NA MBAN IN THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Ireland was devastated after the 1916 Easter Rising. The insurrection had failed, Dublin was in ruins, and British troops were present in greater numbers than before. British authorities imprisoned many male nationalists, while they freed most of the women, even those who had taken part in the Rising. Cumann na mBan, more than any other nationalist organization, continued operations by holding meetings, raising funds, and distributing propaganda. The equality promised by the 1916 Proclamation excited the women, who made extreme sacrifices to see the Irish Republic created. During the years 1916—1921, the women of Cumann na mBan played an integral role in nationalist events and the Irish War of Independence.<sup>215</sup>

From 1916—1921, it became very easy for women to operate outside of normal gender roles. Cumann na mBan now had the help of unincorporated female nationalists as well as a few suffragists with nationalist sympathies. Women without official ties to nationalist organizations set up most of the safehouses due to the nature of the guerilla warfare waged by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the years 1919-1921. The women of Cumann took a more military approach following 1918; their conference that year emphasized military struggle and reorganized branches with this in mind. Aideen Sheehan has said that even after 1918, “Cumann na mBan was an organisation almost entirely practical in nature. It did not explore new venues of political theory, being content to stay within the framework of the new nationalism by following the militaristic ethos of the Volunteers, and also by embracing the Irish-Ireland ideas espoused by Sinn Fein.”<sup>216</sup> However, a closer reading of Cumann women’s own words showed that they did not just regard themselves as soldiers or nationalists; their involvement in war activities was, for many women, a part of their civic duty as outlined by the Easter Proclamation. Even though this Proclamation had promised women equal citizenship, nationalist women realized that until the war against England was over, they had to keep legitimizing their role through their continued participation in the struggle.

In addition to this, the women of Cumann na mBan enjoyed their work; their job options outside of the nationalist realm were narrow: most women worked in factories, shops, or offices. Cumann na mBan women became notorious as troublemakers following the Rising, in fact, most of the proclamations and laws following the Rising were leveled at Cumann.<sup>217</sup> Many women liked the newfound strength and empowerment provided by nationalist activities; Maire Comerford stated, “I’m very proud of these women, as a woman myself, very proud that it was the women that provoked this first proclamation. [the first proclamation after the Rising was made by Maxwell against Cumann and the widows of the Rising for selling commemorative flags]”<sup>218</sup> At a meeting after the Rising, Cumann na mBan made the statement:

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<sup>215</sup> The term “Irish War of Independence” is becoming more popular in usage, the term “Anglo-Irish War” is becoming less common because the dichotomy inherent in the term did not actually exist, there were Irish siding with the British and vice-versa. Michael Hopkinson justifies the use of the term thusly in *The Irish War of Independence*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 2004), xx.

<sup>216</sup> Aideen Sheehan, “Cumann na mBan: Policies and Activities,” in David Fitzpatrick, editor, *Revolution?: Ireland 1917—1923*, Dublin: Trinity History Workshop, 1990, 88—97, 88.

<sup>217</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary years, 1900—1923*, (Dublin: O’Brien Press, 2004), 67.

<sup>218</sup> Maire Comerford in Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O’ Grady, *Curious Journey: An Oral History of Ireland’s Unfinished Revolution*, (Boulder: Robert Rhineheart Publishers, 1999), 97.

Cumann na mBan is proud that its members rallied under the Republican flag in Easter Week, 1916, and claim that by taking their places in the firing line, and in every other way helping in the establishment of the Irish Republic, they have regained for the women of Ireland the rights that belonged to them under the old Gaelic civilisation, where sex was no bar to citizenship, and where women were free to devote to the service of their country every talent and capacity with which they were endowed: which rights were stolen away from them under English rule, but were guaranteed to them in the Republican Proclamation of Easter Week.<sup>219</sup>

The women of Cumann clearly stated that their work with the military forces in Easter Week had regained their equality and citizenship rights. They did not just feel that their rights had been restored, but that they had earned their right to equality in the Republic. They wanted to defend this right by continuing to work in the national struggle.

Historian Margaret Ward referred to the years 1916—1921 as Cumann na mBan's "years of strength,"<sup>220</sup> and the evidence indicates that this was the time of strongest activism for the organization. Cumann's activities in the years 1916—1918 were extremely varied and political in nature. They focused on rebuilding Ireland and putting a female face on the nationalist movement in the process. The women used nationalist propaganda to gain sympathy for the Republican cause, through speeches and publications, women swayed public opinion and to ensured that people remembered the sacrifices of last Easter. Politically, they took up issues such as prisoner's rights and performed community services, such as election work. Between 1919—1921 Cumann na mBan aided in the fighting of the Irish War of Independence. This was not merely a war in the military sense; historians now acknowledge that it was also an intelligence and propaganda war. While the few histories of Cumann na mBan and revolutionary women treated it as guerilla war in the strictest sense, Meda Ryan emphasized women's part (particularly Cumann na mBan's) in securing intelligence and obtaining and transferring information from Dublin Castle.<sup>221</sup> With this reassessment, women become key actors in the IRA's successful campaign against the British forces in Ireland.

During the arrest of the participants in the Easter Rising, large crowds consisting primarily of "separation" women gathered. In Dublin these crowds jeered at and booed the prisoners while throwing things at them.<sup>222</sup> Brigid Lyons, a member of Cumann na mBan who was taken prisoner following the Rising, remembered at an interview in 1976:

Now we never had the British to protect us before, but luckily this time the soldiers guarded us very heavily because when the gates were opened and

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<sup>219</sup> Cumann na mBan Constitution and related documents, in Lil Conlon, *Cumann na mBan and the Women of Ireland, 1913—25*, (Kilkenny: Kilkenny People Ltd., 1969), 299—300.

<sup>220</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 119.

<sup>221</sup> Meda Ryan, *Michael Collins and the Women in His Life*, (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1996), 13, 61.

<sup>222</sup> C. L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880—1935*, (Athens: University of Georgian Press, 1993), 75. Also mentioned in Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 119.

we were marched out there were such shrieks of hatred. Never did I see such savage women. A lot of them were getting the separation allowance because their husbands were off fighting in France and they thought their livelihood would be taken away because of what we had done. A lot of it seemed to be directed against the Countess's breeches and puttees.<sup>223</sup>

The people of Dublin reacted in this manner for two reasons: first, with the mail halted and transportation stopped, women did not receive their separation allowances and second, these women had family members fighting for an Irish regiment in WWI.<sup>224</sup> As Lyons noted in the interview, those who had relatives in WWI, and who often relied on the separation allowances from the British Government to survive, feared that the insurrection would cause the government to take away their stipends. It was not until the two weeks after the Rising, when the execution of the sixteen leaders took place that the popular crowds would begin to sympathize with separatist-nationalists. It was Cumann na mBan, with their relief work and propaganda, that ultimately changed the hearts of the crowd.<sup>225</sup>

Cumann na mBan, most of whom had been released from prison after two to three weeks of incarceration, now had to decide the next course of action. Cumann na mBan performed many different types of work in the years 1916—1918. The women of Cumann started a fund to aid families of the dead and imprisoned, worked for the cause of amnesty, waged a propaganda war, aided the men in the anti-conscription movement, and in 1918, helped to get the first woman elected to British parliament by educating women voters and by canvassing for the elections. These five activities were to be the basis for Cumann's work in the post-rising years.

Large numbers of Dublin families were now facing starvation; many of the men who had been killed, executed, or arrested during or following Easter Week had not left provisions for their dependents. The first priority for women in the nationalist movement was to provide funds for these families who had lost their primary wage earner. Kathleen Clarke had been working secretly for the IRB since 1909 and prior to the Rising, had been given documents to protect, as well as some money for the relief of dependents of any Volunteers who might be killed in battle.<sup>226</sup> With the help of Sorcha McMahon and other Cumann na mBan members, Clarke, as president of the relief association, started the Volunteers' Dependents' Fund. Kathleen Clarke's brother, Edward Daly, and her husband, Tom Clarke, were executed in the week following the Rising. She subsequently suffered a miscarriage and nearly died;<sup>227</sup> however, she began working on the fund again as soon as she could sit up in her hospital bed. Many members of Cumann worked ceaselessly on the relief effort. Sorcha McMahon was reputed to have worked eighteen hours a day on the fund.<sup>228</sup> The women of Cumann

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<sup>223</sup> Brigid Lyons Thornton in Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O' Grady. *Ireland's Unfinished Revolution: An Oral History*, (Boulder: Robert Rhineheart Publishers, 1999), 77.

<sup>224</sup> Sinead McCoole, 47.

<sup>225</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 120.

<sup>226</sup> Kathleen Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman: My Fight for Ireland's Freedom*, edited by Helen Litton, (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1997), 60; 115.

<sup>227</sup> Kathleen Clarke, 127.

<sup>228</sup> Kitty O'Doherty, WS 355, NAI, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913—21, Statement by Witness, 28.

worked on these funds despite the losses and sufferings they had endured following the Rising. Rather than mourning, these women were rebuilding the community and devising plans for the future of their organization. Aine O’Rahilly, who had once shunned Cumann na mBan, worked on the fund with them, “A lot of people who were not in the movement at all came together to help the dependants of those who were executed or imprisoned.” She also asserted that Clarke, MacMahon, and the many other women within the movement worked very hard, “Cumann na mBan gave whatever they had.”<sup>229</sup>

The Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) formed a relief fund, as well. They started The National Aid Association while the British authorities prohibited Clarke and other Cumann na mBan from collecting funds. A few Cumann na mBan women, such as Min Ryan and Nancy Wyse-Power, worked with the NAA.<sup>230</sup> There was a great deal of conflict between the VDF and the NAA for a short while. To circumvent the early tensions arising between the two organizations, and to facilitate assistance to the 10,000 people in Dublin who were financially devastated, they amalgamated the two funds and thereafter called it the Irish National Aid and Volunteers’ Dependants Fund (NAVDF). Kathleen Clarke, who was a strong suffragist and resentful of the IPP, removed the Parliamentarians from leadership in the organization before the two merged.<sup>231</sup> The association for the combined fund hired Michael Collins as its secretary. The largest part of the fund-raising, however, still fell upon the shoulders of the Cumann na mBan. This was a double burden since many of the women had lost their jobs due to their involvement in the Rising.<sup>232</sup>

The fund-raising activities organized by Cumann na mBan were mostly ceilidhes and concerts, traditional means of fundraising for the nationalist cause. They also sold flags and other patriotic items. Nancy Wyse-Power stated, “During the summer of 1916 there was little Cumann na mBan activity outside the work of the National Aid Association which was established within a few weeks of the suppression of the Rising.”<sup>233</sup> Cumann na mBan women undertook not only the job of collecting and distributing the funds, but also of compiling lists of prisoners and their families. They had to research claims and find the relatives of the imprisoned.<sup>234</sup> This was the only task for Cumann immediately following the Rising because it was so time-consuming. Their determination to distribute the funds to the needy gained support for nationalist groups by some families who were skeptical about their work beforehand. Fund-raising for prisoners’ dependents would continue to be a staple job of Cumann na mBan throughout the Irish War of Independence and Civil War.

Cumann women also frequently attended court cases of Volunteers or ICA men, as well as trials against British soldiers for various atrocities during the months following the rising. Nancy Wyse-Power mentions that she was present at the trials of Austin Stacks and Con Collins, as well as the trial against Captain Bowen-Colthurst, who

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<sup>229</sup> Aine O’ Rahilly, WS 333, 9.

<sup>230</sup> Kitty O’Doherty, WS 355, NAI, 28-9.

<sup>231</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism*, (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 119. Also mentioned in Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 587, NAI, 3.

<sup>232</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 60-61.

<sup>233</sup> Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 587, NAI, 2.

<sup>234</sup> Lily Curran and Annie O’Brien, WS 805, NAI, 16.

murdered Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, a pacifist and feminist.<sup>235</sup> Cumann women destroyed incriminating papers following the Rising, in hopes that they could save their comrades.

During the latter months of 1916 nationalist men and women began working on the amnesty cause for the imprisoned republicans. Helena Moloney spent a great deal of time in prison following the rising. She was a member of both Cumann and the Irish Citizen Army and fought with an ICA battalion during the Rising. The British soldiers were surprised to find women fighting in the event and had not even guessed that they were soldiers, despite their uniforms. However, when they discovered that she and other women had fought as snipers, the angry British troops imprisoned them in Kilmainham.<sup>236</sup> “We were put in a disused wing at Kilmainham. It was a condemned wing. That part of the building had not been used for generations.”<sup>237</sup> Like many other prisoners, Moloney served time in various prisons—Kilmainham, Mountjoy, Lewes, and Aylesbury. The British confined her in dirty barracks for over a week prior her imprisonment in a cell where the girls caught lice from sleeping on the dirty mattresses.<sup>238</sup> British troops arrested Lily Curran and Annie O’Brien and kept them in Richmond barracks where they fed them tea from a bucket and hard biscuits; a mattress shortage meant that the girls slept on the floor there. Curran and O’Brien spent time in Kilmainham as well; the first thing they noticed was the inscription over the gate which read “Sin no more lest worse shall come to thee.” She reported that they found this humorous, though they did not find the rest of the prison to be so, “We were put three in a cell, the majority being on the ground floor. They were dreadful, filthy places, not having been used for years before that. We got two palliasses—which the soldiers called biscuits—between every three prisoners...we took turns at night on the palliasses, not sleeping very much, of course.” When the women asked for a towel and a basin in their cell, since they had no toiletries, the sergeant major in charge replied, “You must remember it is in a prison you are, not a hotel.”<sup>239</sup> The women at Kilmainham all reported hearing the volleys from the executions of the men.<sup>240</sup> The women’s personal experiences in prison inspired the amnesty movement; though the only woman to remain in prison until the General Amnesty in June 1917 was Countess Markievicz.<sup>241</sup>

Cumann na mBan, with other nationalists, argued that these were political prisoners who were being thrown in with common criminals and that the insufferable prison conditions in Mountjoy and Kilmainham marked them as inappropriate for the confinement of such prisoners. Prisoners in Kilmainham complained that their cells were dirty and crowded, and that there were not enough facilities for personal hygiene. Some Cumann, who had spent time in Kilmainham and Mountjoy had already experienced the disgusting conditions of prisons firsthand. Cumann na mBan’s work for the defense of prisoners was of great importance after the rising. Even when release was not possible, they asked for better prison conditions. At a meeting of the fund, one woman mentioned

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<sup>235</sup> Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 587, NAI, 4.

<sup>236</sup> Helena Moloney, WS 391, NAI, 39-40.

<sup>237</sup> Helena Moloney, WS 391, NAI, 41. She and the other women were kept in the B Wing of Kilmainham which was constructed in the eighteenth century.

<sup>238</sup> Helena Moloney, WS 391, NAI, 40-41.

<sup>239</sup> Lily Curran and Annie O’Brien, WS 805, NAI, 10-11.

<sup>240</sup> Lily Curran and Annie O’Brien, WS 805, NAI, 14-15. Also Rose McNamara, WS 482, NAI, 11.

<sup>241</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 123.

an idea for an Amnesty Association and asked the fund to help them in their campaign; however the association declined.<sup>242</sup> Amnesty meetings were public, although they were often held under the auspices of Cumann na mBan.<sup>243</sup> Their demand was for better prison conditions and also to see that prisoners got treated as political prisoners or prisoners of war rather than as criminals. They asked for the help of American women's societies, the U.S. President, the Pope, and the government of Russia. The effort of Amnesty organizations led to the "Irish Convention" which resulted in the release of 117 internees. British forced declared a General Amnesty in 1917 for all prisoners from the Rising. The NAVDF, though it had not aided the amnesty workers, gave those who had served prison terms allowances upon their release in 1917: married men were given £40, while single men received £20. Later prisoners were given £250 and £150 respectively, which was equivalent to a year's salary.<sup>244</sup> Amnesty would continue to be a concern, not just after the Rising, but also during the War of Independence and Civil War.

The women did not wish for the republican spark to die; they kept it alive through their propaganda work. They distributed leaflets and published articles in papers that would print them. They published pamphlets outlining prison conditions and British atrocities to gain public sympathy for nationalists. The early propaganda movement by Cumann na mBan involved the production of Easter Week memorabilia—they created postcards, posters, and flags. Some of these overlapped and were sold as part of the fund-raiser for the NAVDF. Cumann created a series of postcards commemorating leaders in the 1916 Rising. These portrayed important figures from the rising with a brief description of their activities and sentences. Countess Markievicz's card, for instance, told of how she was sentenced to death for her part in the rising, but then explained that her sentence was commuted to Penal Servitude for life.<sup>245</sup> One propaganda postcard from 1917 was an illustrated scene in which the widows of the executed men were haunting General Maxwell as he had nightmares about the killings. Below the scene is written the words, "No Rest for 'That Brute Maxwell!'"<sup>246</sup> The widows and mothers of the Rising leaders became emblems to the nation; they represented the sacrifice of these men and many became public figures in their own right. Margaret Pearse, the mother of Padraic (P. H.) and Willie Pearse, took a public role following her sons' executions and later became a Teachta Dála (TD) on the second Dail Eireann. The widows with their young children, however, became the most prevalent symbol of the Rising and the 1916 Christmas issue of the *Catholic Bulletin* featured pictures of these widows and their children.<sup>247</sup> Grace Gifford had planned to marry Joseph Plunkett on Easter Sunday, but they postponed it due to the Rising; their wedding took place in Kilmainham the night before Plunkett's execution. Her story was widely publicized following the Rising and articles about her marriage abounded in Irish, English, and American newspapers.<sup>248</sup> Cumann's propaganda work was so successful that, as Margaret Ward put it, "By the

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<sup>242</sup> Clarke, 139.

<sup>243</sup> Lil Conlon, 48.

<sup>244</sup> Kitty O'Doherty, WS 355, NAI, 34.

<sup>245</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 50.

<sup>246</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 48.

<sup>247</sup> Sinead McCoolle, op. cit, 62.

<sup>248</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *Guns and Chiffon: Women Revolutionaries and Kilmainham Gaol, 1916—1923*, (Dublin: Stationery Office, Government of Ireland, 1997), 32-33. Also Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 62-4.

time the first batch of prisoners were allowed home in December 1916 they had, to their great amazement, become heroes, their release being marked by the burning of bonfires on the hillsides and general celebration.”<sup>249</sup>

Though Cumann’s activities immediately resumed, it was really after the Summer of 1916 that nationalist organizations began reorganizing. Nancy Wyse-Power helped to reorganize Cumann branches throughout the country and Countess Markievicz became president of the national Executive of Cumann na mBan.<sup>250</sup> As soon as the country had recovered from the Rising, Cumann na mBan, like other nationalist organizations began growing exponentially. Before the end of the year, Kathleen Clarke and a few other women from the fund held a meeting to reestablish the Central Branch of Cumann na mBan in Dublin. Disorganization and disorder reigned at the meeting; the women argued amongst themselves about who had been involved in the Rising and who had not. Some of the Cumann even made the motion that any woman who had not participated in the Rising should be expelled from the organization. Clarke stopped the squabbling by pointing out that there was a lot of work to be done, “Our men are nearly all in prison, some are dead, and it is up to us to carry on their work...Let us show our enemy what we women can do.”<sup>251</sup> The women reestablished Cumann na mBan, although some tensions would remain between the older members who had been involved in the Rising and those who had not, including newer recruits.

Women in Cumann na mBan and remnants of the ICA celebrated the first anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1917. Several churches held commemorative masses, though the Catholic Church generally did not sanction these. Cumann na mBan women reprinted and distributed copies of the Easter Proclamation. They also re-flagged the outposts from the Rising; British soldiers followed them around removing the flags. Helena Moloney got so angry at this that she got a steeplejack to the GPO, it took the soldiers all day to remove the flag that she had hung. Moloney also helped a couple of ICA women hang a banner outside Liberty Hall, which read, “James Connolly, murdered May 12 1916.”<sup>252</sup> The women barricaded themselves in the hall to prevent it from being taken down. Through these various activities, the women of Cumann na mBan made sure that the people remembered the Rising.<sup>253</sup>

Several republican women and men, in an attempt to gather support for the Irish cause, went to America on lecture tours. They even smuggled documents to President Wilson asking for America’s aid in procuring their freedom.<sup>254</sup> Several women toured America immediately after Easter Week, however, the most successful of the early republican lecture tours was that of Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington in 1917-18.<sup>255</sup> Sheehy-Skeffington experienced many difficulties on her tour: she was arrested in San Francisco, physically prevented from speaking on some occasions, and the British attempted to

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<sup>249</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 121.

<sup>250</sup> Nancy Wyse-Power, WS 587, NAI, 5.

<sup>251</sup> Kathleen Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, 133.

<sup>252</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 122.

<sup>253</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women*, 64.

<sup>254</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*,

<sup>255</sup> Joanne Mooney Eichacker, *Irish Republican Women in America: Lecture Tours*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 1916—1925, 58.

kidnap her and transport her to Canada.<sup>256</sup> However, Sheehy-Skeffington also had sympathetic crowds and massive support from some American communities. She drew enormous crowds, strengthened and unified the republican sentiments of the Irish-American communities, and asked for support of Ireland's independence.<sup>257</sup> Greater numbers of nationalists would go to America as the War of Irish Independence became more turbulent in 1920—1921.

Political changes occurred rapidly in 1917 and 1918. The British and Irish presses blamed Sinn Fein, a pacifist organization dedicated to the recovery of Ireland through cultural nationalism and self-determination, for the Rising. Papers across Britain and Ireland referred constantly to “The Sinn Fein Rising,” which was especially inappropriate because Arthur Griffith, and most of its leaders, objected to the Rising. However, the authorities imprisoned Griffith, like many other pacifists, despite his non-involvement in the rising. In 1917, after the release of the prisoners, Sinn Fein regrouped and became known as the Second Sinn Fein. The Second Sinn Fein was very political and supported the coming war. They also decided to ally themselves with the Irish Republican Army; the IRA became the military wing and Sinn Fein became the political wing. Cumann na mBan had begun working with Sinn Fein prior to the regrouping of the Volunteers/IRA, the nationalist movement reached a time of unity. The only way for nationalist organizations to survive British rule and to free themselves from it was to work together.<sup>258</sup>

Politicized women from the Irish Women's Workers' Union, Cumann na mBan, and Irish Citizen Army came together and formed the League of Women Delegates (later Cumann na dTeachtaire) in April of 1917. A small group of women from this conglomerate organization agitated at the Sinn Fein Convention, their efforts got four women elected to the twenty-four member executive: Countess Markievicz, Kathleen Clarke, Kathleen Lynn, and Grace Plunkett.<sup>259</sup> This was accomplished despite the fact that only twelve women showed up for the Sinn Fein Convention of over one thousand men. This was at least partly because the men supported them; one man, Sean T. O'Kelly agreed that the women should be involved in the executive and stated that “any Irish man who could oppose women's claim for equality would be acting in an un-Irish spirit.” Men not only agreed to elect women to the executive, but included articles in their constitutional documents protecting women's equal membership terms in the organization. In fact, the final clause of Sinn Fein's new constitution insisted, “That the equality of men and women in this organisation be emphasized in all speeches and pamphlets.”<sup>260</sup> Nationalist women won a victory in Sinn Fein, it was now up to the women to decide what their role would be in the next phase of nationalist activity.

Cumann na mBan expanded rapidly and in 1917 and 1918 several women traveled across Ireland as organizers in charge of starting new branches in rural areas. The executive appointed Alice Cashel for organizational work in January 1918; she managed to set up several new branches in the 1918—1919 period, however, the RIC

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<sup>256</sup> Joanne Mooney Eichacker, *Irish Republican Women in America: Lecture Tours*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 1916—1925, 58.

<sup>257</sup> Eichacker, 90.

<sup>258</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 123-126; Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 59, 65.

<sup>259</sup> Ward, *op cit.*, 125; McCoolle, *op. cit.*, 65.

<sup>260</sup> *The Irish Citizen*, November 1917; Margaret Ward, 125.

followed her. The RIC warned her that if she held another meeting, she would be arrested. She held the meeting anyway but had to go “on the run” afterwards; the IRA arranged her stay at various safe houses in the area.<sup>261</sup> Cumann also acted as female recruitment officers, traveling across Ireland recruiting women and men to their cause. Recruiters often had difficulties convincing parents that their daughters should join.<sup>262</sup> Brighid O’Mullane, another organizer, told of her work; she lectured women on the aims and objectives of Cumann and about the group’s work. While the girls were often eager to join, their parents were harder to persuade:

I had a good deal of prejudice to overcome on the part of parents, who did not mind their boys taking part in a military movement, but who had never heard of, and were reluctant to accept, the idea of a body of gun-women. It was, of course, a rather startling innovation and, in that way, Cumann na mBan can claim to have been pioneers in establishing what was undoubtedly a women’s auxiliary of an army. I fully understood this attitude and eventually, in most cases, succeeded in overcoming this prejudice.<sup>263</sup>

Parents in some rural areas had not heard of Cumann na mBan and were anxious about sending their daughters into battle. However, the work of women like O’Mullane and Cashel helped to overcome objections from family members who felt that war was strictly male work. In fact, these Cumann organizers caused the ranks of Cumann to grow from 100 branches in 1917 to 600 in 1918.<sup>264</sup> Women in Cumann na mBan frequently had to go into hiding for their activities from 1918 forward. This was compounded by the fact that Cumann was declared “dangerous” and “unlawful” organization in July 1918, along with Sinn Fein, The Gaelic League, and the Irish Volunteers.<sup>265</sup>

Local meetings of Cumann na mBan councils in early 1918 decided to help organize women voters and to assist them to ensure that every eligible woman voted.<sup>266</sup> The women of Cumann na mBan worked to secure elections for Sinn Fein candidates, canvassing and distributing pamphlets. One pamphlet “The Present Duty of Irishwomen” was addressed specifically to the new women voters:

Irishwomen, your country calls to you to do your share in restoring her to her rightful place among the nations. No great sacrifice is asked of you. You have merely to secure the votes, to which you are entitled, and use them on behalf of SF [Sinn Fein] candidates at the next general election. How can that benefit Ireland? You ask. It will benefit her because of these things:

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<sup>261</sup> Alice M. Cashel, WS 366, 3-4.

<sup>262</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women*, 71.

<sup>263</sup> Brighidh O’Mullane, WS 450, NAI, 2-3.

<sup>264</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women*, 65. Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 131.

<sup>265</sup> Document # 26: Dublin Castle declares Sinn Fein, Irish Volunteers and other Organisations as Dangerous, *Supplement to the Dublin Gazette* of Tuesday, 2 July 1918: published 3 July 1918, in Arthur Mitchell and Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, eds., *Irish Political Documents, 1916–1949*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1985), 46-47.

<sup>266</sup> Lil Conlon, 57; Maria Luddy, editor, *Women in Ireland: A Documentary History, 1800–1918*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 319.

The Sinn Fein Party stands for an Ireland developing all her resources industrial and agricultural, and able to provide well paid employment for all Irishmen and Irishwomen.

An Ireland collecting her own taxes, and spending them in the country which produced them, for the development of that country.

An Ireland free from the bad of England's war debt.

A prosperous Ireland—prosperous as Denmark, Holland, Norway, and Sweden are prosperous.

An educated and enlightened Ireland

An independent Ireland...<sup>267</sup>

Cumann encouraged women to vote; they wanted to make sure that every new voter took part in the election, but they also wanted women to use their votes to help the nationalist cause. Cumann na mBan also took over canvassing efforts for female candidates. Countess Markievicz and Winnifred Carney both received the aid and support of Cumann and other women's organizations. While Carney lost the election, Markievicz won a seat in Westminster. However, the candidates of Sinn Fein, who won by a landslide in the election (taking 73 out of 105 seats), did not take their seats in parliament, but chose to form the Irish Parliament, Dail Eireann. Only twenty-six members of the first Dail were able to take their seats, most of them, the Countess included, were in prison for the "German Plot" at this time.<sup>268</sup>

Women resumed their Anti-Conscription campaign with new fervor as the war situation looked disparate and Britain threatened Ireland again with a conscription bill. Men considered protests to industrial conscription to be just as important as their protest to military conscription, an Alderman in Cork stated that he hoped when the time came "that the WOMEN would also take their place and refuse to accept industrial conscription." Other men echoed this sentiment.<sup>269</sup> Cumann na mBan led the anti-conscription protests; they even had a "women's day" on which many women across Ireland signed a pledge which stated that even if England conscripted the men, they would not take their places in the workforce.<sup>270</sup> Despite the fact that women and men both protested, a conscription bill passed in 1918; however, World War I ended before British forces implemented it.

Cumann na mBan's 1918 Convention was held in September of 1918, despite the fact that they had been banned by the government. Their president, Countess Markievicz, was still in prison, but the executive kept the meeting in order. Cumann na mBan made several important changes at this meeting. The policy of Cumann na mBan 1918—1919 stated that their goals were:

1. To follow the policy of the Republican proclamation by seeing that women take their proper position in the life of the nation.

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<sup>267</sup> The Present Duty of Irishwomen, issued by the Executive of Cumann na mBan, Dublin, 1918, quoted in Maria Luddy, ed., *Women in Ireland*, 319.

<sup>268</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 134-137.

<sup>269</sup> Lil Conlon, 60.

<sup>270</sup> Sinead McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 66-67; Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 127-8.

2. To develop the suggested military activities in conjunction with the Irish Volunteers.
3. To continue collecting for the “Defence of Ireland” fund, or for any other fund to be devoted to the army and equipping of the men and women of Ireland. [note the addition of women into this goal had happened in 1917]
4. To organise opposition to conscription along the lines laid down in the two anti-conscription pledges...
5. To assist in the movement to secure representation for Ireland at the Peace Conference, by the election of Republican candidates, etc;<sup>271</sup>

By women’s “proper place in the nation,” Cumann referred to their activities as revolutionaries, rather than the usual domestic duties of women. They acknowledged women’s change of roles during the years 1914—1918. The 1917 Convention had a slightly longer version of resolution number one: “To Follow the Republican proclamation by seeing that women take up their proper place in the life of the nation. Members of Cumann na mBan should participate in the public life of their locality and assert their right as citizens to take part in the nomination of candidates for parliamentary and local elections.”<sup>272</sup> Whereas this had fallen third on the list of priorities in 1917, it was the number one priority in 1918. The women were not afraid of taking their place as independent revolutionaries, as the previous period showed. The women had become seasoned activists, self-confident and assertive.

After they had effectively run the propaganda war on their own and worked so hard to feed and clothe the families of imprisoned men, they were determined to work with the men, but they wanted to make sure that their own officers made the final decisions for Cumann battalions. They changed the preamble of the Constitution in 1918, the new preamble stated, “Cumann na mBan is an organization of women founded to advance the cause of Irish liberty. Although working in co-operation with other associations having the same objectives, it is independent of them.”<sup>273</sup> It had also been decided that “each branch of Cumann should become attached to a Volunteer Company or Battalion and that all military orders should be given by the Volunteer Captain to the Captain of the Cumann na mBan branch.”<sup>274</sup> Since the women operated autonomously in 1916 and 1917, they did not relish the idea of being under the leadership of the men. The women prioritized their own agenda over their work for the men. The leadership of Cumann na mBan even suggested that women should focus on Cumann na mBan activities such as drilling, fund-raising, and electioneering rather than making supplies for the men.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Cumann na mBan Convention Report, 1918, MS 22,655, NLI, Sheehy-Skeffington Papers.

<sup>272</sup> Cumann na mBan Convention Report, 1917, MS 22, 655, NLI, Sheehy-Skeffington Papers.

<sup>273</sup> Cumann na mBan Convention Report, 1918, MS 22,655, NLI, Sheehy-Skeffington Papers.

<sup>274</sup> Lil Conlon, 60.

<sup>275</sup> Lil Conlon, 68.

Eileen MacCarvill was present at this meeting, “We had a Cumann na mBan Annual Conference I think in October 1919 (it was actually 1918), in 25 Parnell Square. At that Convention I put forward the proposal that we should reorganise Cumann na mBan on military lines in view of the fact that we were co-operating with the Volunteers...The proposal was well-received by the younger delegates, who showed a desire for reorganisation, and although some of the older members were reluctant to change the existing organisation, the vote being taken, it was carried by a large majority.”<sup>276</sup> Women now held the offices of Captain, Lieutenant, Quartermaster, and Adjutant. Eileen MacCarvill became the Captain of the University Branch of Cumann na mBan following the conference. Her branch became attached to the Third Battalion of the IRA, which was under the command of Joseph O’Connor. Women in Cumann na mBan were at odds over the new policies; the women who voted against the reorganization of the society often had problems with directly military actions. While women in the organization who did not want to take up arms still had the option of nursing and dispatch carrying, many of these could not come to terms with violent policies. During 1919, a few Cumann na mBan women resigned because they disapproved of the shooting of policemen by members of the organization.<sup>277</sup>

Cumann na mBan’s changing self-perception aids in the understanding of their part in the Irish War of Independence. It is true that women in the guerilla war fulfilled their now-traditional roles of courier, gun-runner, and agitator; however, at the same time, women at this time took their work a step further. Women in Cumann undertook more military roles; women threw bombs and again acted as snipers, though in larger numbers by this point. Mary Cremen recalled in her Witness statement, “During the Black and Tan Wars with other members of Cumann na mBan and IRA, I took part in raids on the houses of relatives of the Black and Tans threatening them that if they did not get their Black and Tan relations to leave Ireland, their homes would be burnt down or other damage done to them.”<sup>278</sup> Whereas the women of Cumann had always run drills within their own branches and divisions, by 1921, Cumann na mBan had its own training camps where women spent time practicing drilling, first aid, signalling, marksmanship, and map reading.<sup>279</sup>

Nationalist men’s perceptions of nationalist women would remain positive throughout the War of Independence; in fact, they complemented Cumann girls, one letter sent to Constance Markievicz stated:

I assure you that if it were not for Cumann na mBan things would have been very unpleasant for us here on various occasions. You came to the rescue individually and collectively and it is only those of us that have been through it that can fully appreciate the value of such splendid work, my only hope now, and I am expressing the sentiments of every one who has served under me, is that you continue on in the future as you did in the past and that our officers and yours who knew each other so well and who

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<sup>276</sup> Eileen MacCarvill, WS 1752, NAI, 5-6. (There was no national conference of Cumann na mBan in 1919 because the police closed down the convention area and threatened to arrest the women if they went through with the conference.)

<sup>277</sup> Eileen MacCarvill, WS 1752, NAI, 7.

<sup>278</sup> Mary A. Cremen (Cremin), WS 924, NAI, 6.

<sup>279</sup> Louise Ryan, “ ‘Furies’ and ‘Die-hards’ ”, 263.

have always worked harmoniously together in the past, will always assist each other in the same spirit. Let us be prepared to face the future with full determination and bright hopes of that final victory for which so many Noble Ones have fallen.<sup>280</sup>

It is possible that the men felt that women's expansion of roles did not threaten the overall status-quo and that they believed things would return to "normal" after the war ended. However, it is possible and many quotes from this time indicate that at least some of the men realized that they could not have done their work without the women of Cumann na mBan.<sup>281</sup>

Cumann na mBan and the IRA asked certain women outside of nationalist politics not to join Sinn Fein or Cumann. Molly O'Brien, one of the non-Cumann women, wrote of her experiences: "I was not a member of Cumann na mBan although I wished to join it. I was advised not to as I might be found more useful if I was not openly identified with the organization. I was always at their disposal and gladly did anything they asked me to do, such as carrying despatches, etc."<sup>282</sup> Women outside of the organization could perform courier duties and run safe houses because the British authorities were not yet familiar with them. British authorities often recognized Cumann na mBan, most of whom had criminal records by this point. However, some Cumann women, such as Aine O'Rahilly helped hide prisoners on the run anyway. Because troops raided Cumann women's homes frequently, their homes were not as safe for this purpose.<sup>283</sup>

The Irish War of Independence is still a highly controversial topic. Many historians have argued successfully that intelligence and propaganda played a more important part in its success than military maneuvers (which were mainly carried out to aid the other two causes).<sup>284</sup> Michael Collins depended on intelligence agents more than anyone else during the War of Independence. He used a system of informers to uncover British intelligence agents in Ireland; these were promptly executed by the "Flying Columns" of the IRA. This method was also useful in thinning the British forces in Ireland; Collins knew that the British would overreact to his tactics and he hoped that their atrocities would gain support from other countries for the Irish cause. In the end, the British came under heavy criticism from America and other countries, even the citizens of England rallied against the campaign of terror in Ireland. However, this was not until 1921 after the atrocities had reached a new height. Women acted as intelligence agents during the war by meeting and making contacts with informers in Dublin Castle, by carousing with British soldiers, and by courier work.<sup>285</sup> While Cumann na mBan performed work alongside the men as per usual; their contributions to the propaganda

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<sup>280</sup> The Commanding Officer of the Longford Area, letter to the Longford Cumann na mBan, in Lil Conlon, 241.

<sup>281</sup> Lil Conlon quotes three separate letters from male commanders in the IRA similar to the quote above; Michael Collins's speech to the women of Cork that is quoted in Lil Conlon and in Meda Ryan's text also makes note of this fact.

<sup>282</sup> Maire Ni Bhriain (Molly O'Brien), WS 363, NAI, 4.

<sup>283</sup> Aine O' Rahilly, WS 333, 9-10.

<sup>284</sup> See James Gleeson, *Bloody Sunday: How Michael Collin's Agents Assassinated Britain's Secret Service in Dublin on November 21, 1920*, reprint 1962, (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2004); Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 2004).

<sup>285</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *Guns and Chiffon*, 37-8.

work, as well as their work as couriers and intelligence agents played a pivotal role in the War.

The first event in the Irish War of Independence was the shooting of two RIC men by Irish Volunteers in County Tipperary on January 21, 1919. In April 1919, Sinn Fein, the IRA (formerly Volunteers), and Cumann na mBan called for a boycott of British police and officials. Nationalists asked people to ostracize these men, they asked those who owned shops to refuse service to policemen, they also asked people not to attend events where special forces would be present and to avoid sharing benches with them at Mass and other church ceremonies.<sup>286</sup> The war gained intensity as small raids on police headquarters led to more raids on personal homes. Policemen raided suspected Republican women's homes; when they found arms or incriminating documents, they immediately arrested the homeowners. They also arrested women for collecting funds without a permit.<sup>287</sup>

The IRA's guerilla warfare style, horrified the British forces, who saw them as a complete breach of the "rules of engagement."<sup>288</sup> The reinforcements known as the "Black and Tans" arrived in March of 1920; ex-army men that comprised a dangerous and frequently brutal, para-military force known as the RIC Auxiliary or the "Auxiliaries" arrived shortly afterwards.<sup>289</sup> It was during 1920 that Ireland assumed a state of perpetual crisis heightened by multiple atrocities from both sides. The RIC, "Black and Tans," and "Auxiliaries" would use unnecessary force in dealing with Irish men and women, some of whom were innocent of charges against them.<sup>290</sup> The burning and bombing of homes, frequent raids, threats, and murders would mark the arrival of the new recruits. The actions of British forces throughout 1920 and 1921 came under criticism, not only from Ireland, but also from America and many people in England.

During the war, the public once again remarked on the visibility of Cumann na mBan, and nationalist women in general. Whereas women's presence in the Rising confused the press originally, papers by this point publicized women's activities without as much hesitation, "as the armed conflict intensified, especially in the early 1920s, the press devoted increasing coverage to women's involvement in the Republican movement."<sup>291</sup> The number of women in public life was growing, in January 1920, "forty-three women were elected to borough and urban Councils." However, at the same time, people elected women into public offices because it was difficult for men to perform public duties by this point in time.<sup>292</sup> Women also entered public offices in greater numbers, partially because they were less able to go "on the run" and hide due to their domestic duties; many women involved in the war had small children. In fact, the

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<sup>286</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 70.

<sup>287</sup> Sinead McCoolle, 67. For accounts of early raids, see Lil Conlon, 76-108; these chapters detail the raids and arrests in 1919.

<sup>288</sup> Michael Hopkinson, 73-4.

<sup>289</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 71.

<sup>290</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 82; Lil Conlon, 127—129; Louise Ryan, "'Drunken Tans' Representations of Sex and Violence in the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21)," *Feminist Review*, no. 66, (Autumn 2000), 73—94, 77-8; Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 142—152.

<sup>291</sup> Louise Ryan, "'Furies' and 'Die-hards': Women and Irish Republicanism in the Early Twentieth Century," *Gender and History*, Vol. 11, no. 2, (July 1999), 256-275, 261.

<sup>292</sup> Lil Conlon, ;Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 69-70. Also quotes Maire Comerford. Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 138.

women of Cumann often met under the auspices of a “baby club,” due to the fact that so many mothers performed various nationalist and war activities.<sup>293</sup>

The raids, which originally consisted of police entering and searching the home, had become horrific in nature after Britain’s new recruits arrived in 1920. The “Black and Tans” often raided homes and shot suspicious persons rather than arresting them. These new troops also frequently burned houses and businesses, destroyed personal property, and arrested or killed those who were innocent of their crimes.<sup>294</sup> The British government prosecuted some of these troops for their crimes. In 1921, some divisions of the IRA attacked loyalist homes in response to the brutalities of British forces, however, their main campaign remained focused on the destruction of British military and intelligence officers.<sup>295</sup>

British special forces rarely punished women formally, they normally attacked the women for their work in Cumann na mBan or for running safe houses and harboring IRA and Cumann members. Auxiliaries or Black and Tans often carried out reprisals on women for these activities. Women commonly reported having their hair cut off by men in masks. These were later often found to be local Black and Tans. There are few documented accounts of rape during the War of Independence, however, most nationalist women were Catholic and, therefore, unlikely to admit to such incidents.<sup>296</sup> Louise Ryan suggested that rape might well have become a weapon of war that these Auxiliaries used to terrify the women and to weaken the morale of the IRA.<sup>297</sup> Lil Conlon mentioned the compilation of a report on women whose homes were raided, the report stated that the British officials raiding the homes often acted in a way that was “terrifying to women...it is, however, extremely difficult to obtain direct evidence of incidents affecting females, for the women of Ireland are reticent on such subjects.”<sup>298</sup> British forces conducted over 48, 747 raids on private homes in 1920.<sup>299</sup>

Troops frequently raided the home of Madge, Agnes (Una), and Carrie Daly, sisters of Kathleen Clarke, but in October of 1920, raiders pulled guns on the sisters and dragged Agnes out of the house. They threw her down, cut her hair off and then slashed her hand with a razor, striking the artery. The raiders then left her to bleed to death, though her sister Carrie saved her life with first aid knowledge gained from Cumann.<sup>300</sup> On November 1, 1920, Eileen Quinn, a woman with three small children sat in her yard with one child on her lap and the others beside her; three lorries full of policemen (she never specified whether it was “Black and Tans” or regulars) drove by and opened fire on her. A neighbor woman came out of her house and took her children, but the shots proved fatal to Quinn, who died shortly after a local priest administered the last rites. Members of the British parliament criticized this outrage most heavily.<sup>301</sup> However, the

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<sup>293</sup> Sinead McCooole, 73-76

<sup>294</sup> James Gleeson, Bloody Sunday, 101. Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, 92-93.

<sup>295</sup> Michael Hopkinson, 93-4.

<sup>296</sup> Louise Ryan, “Drunken Tans: Representations of Sex and Violence in the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21),” *Feminist Review*, no. 66, (Autumn 2000), 73—94, 77-79.

<sup>297</sup> Louise Ryan, “ ‘Drunken Tans,’ ” 80.

<sup>298</sup> Lil Conlon, 163; Louise Ryan, “ ‘Drunken Tans,’ ” 78.

<sup>299</sup> Margaret Ward, 143; Louise Ryan, “Drunken Tans,” 78.

<sup>300</sup> Lil Conlon, 129; Sinead McCooole, 77.

<sup>301</sup> Lil Conlon, 127—129.

atrocities continued. Troops continued to wrongfully arrest people, murder civilians, and bomb or burn homes.<sup>302</sup>

Alice Cashel worked in mostly political circles, aiding Sinn Fein, but also running illicit documents and carrying out IRA orders. A British Military Patrol attempted to invade Cashel House, but Alice refused them access to her home and when they were forced to leave, “They evidently objected to the control I kept over them, for when they went away I was told that they said that I treated them like dogs and I was warned that they would send the Black and Tans to avenge themselves on me.” The Auxiliaries came for her, but she had already planned an escape since they warned her in advance.<sup>303</sup>

Though the British considered the women’s activities to be highly seditious and noted great numbers of them involved in the war, they only imprisoned or interned about fifty women during the war years. There were still forty women in prison in 1921 when the Truce brought about their release.<sup>304</sup> When compared with the fact that seventy-four women had been arrested following the Rising, which had lasted less than a week, this is a surprisingly low number. Some female prisoners’ testimony showed that the British troops and police forces had no qualms about executing women. They also showed that the forces that came into contact with the women knew that they were just as dangerous and unlawful as the men. However, it seems that British authorities outside of Ireland were not terribly worried about what a few women could do. When J. G. Maxwell had tried to deport women after the 1916 Rising, the British government regarded female participation with ambivalence and not only released the women from prison, but allowed them to remain in Ireland.<sup>305</sup> In this same vein, authorities in England did not believe that women could be dangerous revolutionaries, and they did not support the women’s arrests. This coupled with the Auxiliaries tendency to punish women probably accounts for the low number of females arrested.

Lil Conlon’s history/memoir of Cumann na mBan explained another reason for the lack of women’s imprisonment; she stated that in April—September of 1921:

Attention had been focussed [sic] on the Women very much at this time by the Authorities, they were in receipt of information from their Intelligence Division, owing to raids and captures of documents, and they realised fully that Women were playing a major part in the Campaign. The going was tough on the female sex, they were unable to “go on the run”, so were constantly subjected to having their homes raided and precious possessions destroyed. To intensify the reign of terror, swoops were made at night, entries forced into their homes, and the women’s hair cut off in a brutal fashion as well as suffering other indignities and insults. General Sir Nevil Macready recognised that the women co-operated in no small

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<sup>302</sup> See Lil Conlon and Sinead McCool. Louise Ryan also notes the large numbers of women killed in the War years in “ ‘Drunken Tans’,” 77-78.

<sup>303</sup> Alice Cashel, WS 365, NAI, 9-10.

<sup>304</sup> Eithne Coyle in UinSeann MacEoin, ed., *Survivors: The story of Ireland’s Struggle as told through some of her outstanding living people recalling events from the days of Davitt, through James Connolly, Brugha, Collins, Liam Mellows, and Rory O’Connor, to the present Time*, Dublin: Argenta Publications, 1985, 159.

<sup>305</sup> Doc 90b: Letter from General Sir J. G. Maxwell to the Secretary, the War Office, 15 June 1916. WO 141/20 Public Records Office, Kew, in Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland*, 318-9.

degree with the Volunteers, even though his tributes were not too complimentary.<sup>306</sup>

If British authorities only realized that women's involvement was more serious than previously thought in the middle of 1921, then the cease-fire occurred before they had time to begin arresting women. Conlon's book described in great detail the many reprisals against women; only during 1921 was there a marked increase in British violence against women. There had been many raids and threats against women throughout the 1919-1920 period, but the numbers increased significantly during 1921, prior to the Truce.

During 1921, the authorities arrested more women and gave them lengthier sentences. Madge and Lily Cotter, aged 17 and 20, received life sentences when they were discovered in a turnip field near a police lorry that exploded.<sup>307</sup> Linda Kearns was driving a lorry containing weapons, ammunition, and explosives, three IRA men were with her. The police or Black and Tans who pulled them over were drunk and rowdy, and according to Kearns, they shot at them and when one of the IRA men begged them, "Don't shoot the girl!," the police replied "Oh, we can't leave her to tell the tale!" The officers continued to terrify her by taking aim at her head, calling her names, threatening her, and pretending to shoot her male comrades.<sup>308</sup> Kearns received a sentence of ten years in prison and spent the rest of the war being passed from one institution to another.<sup>309</sup>

The authorities never improved prison conditions, during the war they were still dirty, uncomfortable, lacking in proper food and provisions, and overcrowded.<sup>310</sup> There were thousands of Republican men in prison throughout the war, they eventually took up hungerstrikes in protest. The first death resulting from republican hunger strikes was that of Thomas Ashe. The RIC arrested Ashe for a seditious speech in 1917.<sup>311</sup> Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, also went on hungerstrike. He died after 74 days of fasting in 1920.<sup>312</sup> A hungerstrike took place in Cork Jail in 1919; 11 men took part, and 6 of these died. At this point, the IRA headquarters asked the men to discontinue the strikes.<sup>313</sup> Women, such as Countess Markievicz, also went on hunger strikes during the War of Independence, although they did not start striking in large numbers until the Civil War.<sup>314</sup> Both male and female prisoners planned and executed escapes, de Valera's escape was the most famous of these. Many papers and other documents also publicized

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<sup>306</sup> Lil Conlon, *Cumann na mBan*, 224.

<sup>307</sup> Lil Conlon, 245.

<sup>308</sup> Linda Kearns, *In Times of Peril: Leaves from the Diary of Nurse Linda Kearns from Easter Week, 1916, to Mountjoy, 1921*, edited by Annie P. Smithson, (Dublin: The Talbot Press, LTd., 1922), 15—18.

<sup>309</sup> Linda Kearns, 36.

<sup>310</sup> See Sinead McCoole, Margaret Ward, and any primary account of prison at the time.

<sup>311</sup> Charlotte Fallon, "Civil War Hungerstrikes: Women and Men," *Eire-Ireland*, (Fall 1987), 22, no. 3, 75—91, 75.

<sup>312</sup> Charlotte Fallon, "Civil War Hungerstrikes," 76.

<sup>313</sup> "The Treatment of Political Prisoners in Cork Jail" *Cumann na mBan* pamphlet in 1919, in Lil Conlon, 89—90.

<sup>314</sup> Sinead McCoole, *Guns and Chiffon*, 51-54.

the escape of four women prisoners: Linda Kearns, a Miss Keogh, Mary Bourke, and Eithne Coyle.<sup>315</sup>

Throughout the war, Cumann na mBan continued to collect illegally for a fund which was now known as the Prisoners' Dependents' Fund and continued to distribute leaflets and propaganda materials. Cumann's propaganda focused on British atrocities throughout the war. One pamphlet "The Treatment of Political Prisoners in Cork Jail," outlined hungerstrikes and prison conditions. "Irish Mothers—Do You Want Your Children Kidnapped?" focused on Britain's "War on Children." They printed it after the illegal arrest of an 11-year-old boy without his parents' knowledge, it ended with the ominous warning "Beware of the Police".<sup>316</sup>

Louise Ryan argued that men within the republican movement held reservations about women's activities, but they justified these to themselves by feminizing women who were acting in military capacities.<sup>317</sup> Also, the men's treatment of safe-house women as mother-figures relegated them to a feminized role, even though they were clearly in a war zone, since guerilla warfare, "ruptures the boundaries of homefront/battlefront and so challenges the duality of masculinity and femininity."<sup>318</sup> However, the crisis in the country also allowed the women to continue their transgression of roles. While men's later memoirs might have painted women in particular ways, men, for the most part, held positive views of Cumann women throughout the actual war period. Men again recognized the importance of women's work and praised their dedication and sense of duty. In 1921, several Commandants in the IRA sent letters to the women of Cumann, one of these read, "there was no question of the girls *only* helping. In despatch carrying, scouting, and intelligence work, all of which are highly dangerous, they did far more than the soldiers. In addition to this the Flying Columns would have collapsed early this year were it not for the assistance of the women, organised and unorganised."<sup>319</sup> IRA men knew the import of the women's work and sacrifice. For this reason, women were able to perform whatever work was necessary.

The 1921 Cumann na mBan Conference was held on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. Countess Markievicz, out of prison once again, announced that the men and women of Ireland had praised Cumann na mBan's continued dedication and work, "The men in the country tell me they never could have carried on without the help of Cumann na mBan who did all sorts of work for them..."<sup>320</sup> The Countess also praised the women and told them to keep up the good work, to support Irish industries, and to refuse to work for the English.<sup>321</sup> The Secretary's Report showed that although in 1918 Cumann had 600 branches, this had dropped to 300 active branches in 1920. However, 1921 was another

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<sup>315</sup> Newspapers from the time in Ireland and England announce the escape of "four women convicts", the account of the escape is covered in both Linda Kearns, 53—61 and Margaret Buckley, *The Jangle of the Keys*, (Dublin: James Duffy and Co. Ltd., 1938), 7—25.

<sup>316</sup> Lil Conlon, 89—91.

<sup>317</sup> Ryan, " 'In the Line of Fire,'" 51.

<sup>318</sup> Louise Ryan, " 'In the Line Of Fire': Representations of Women and War (1919—1923) through the Writings of Republican Men," in Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward, eds, *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women, and Wicked Hags*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 45—61, 60.

<sup>319</sup> Letter from the Commandant of the 1<sup>st</sup> W. Div. IRA, quoted in Lil Conlon, 240.

<sup>320</sup> Lil Conlon, 239.

<sup>321</sup> Conlon, 239.

big year for Cumann, as it grew to nearly 800 branches.<sup>322</sup> The Convention showed that despite the suffering of female nationalists, their organization continued to flourish. The Cumann women were ready to continue the war; however, both armies agreed to a cease-fire as they began negotiations for a treaty. Michael Collins represented the IRA and Arthur Griffith agreed to the conditions in December 1921.

The Truce granted general amnesty for the prisoners of the War of Independence. However, the Treaty which followed, would prove to be unsatisfactory to many men and women in nationalist organizations. Michael Collins got the best terms he could negotiate with the British, however, the partitioning of Ireland and the promised oath of allegiance to the crown was more than most nationalists could bear. When Michael Collins brought the Treaty before the Second Dail, a lengthy debate ensued. Collins delivered an eloquent speech about the Treaty being their “stepping stone” to the Republic. Both pro-treaty and anti-treaty TDs argued passionately on their sides of the debate. Eamon De Valera led the anti-treaty component of the Dail; they argued that the articles of agreement which required the oath of allegiance to Britain and allowed six counties in the North to opt out of the “Free State” made it unacceptable. Though the debate lasted for weeks, De Valera eventually walked out of the Dail, taking several deputies with him, including Countess Markievicz.

Jason Knirck argued that these debates caused both the republican movement, as well as the women within in it to be cast in the feminine tropes of “irrationality and emotionalism.”<sup>323</sup> To take this a step further, evidence suggested that the debates combined with the Civil War actually damaged women’s political rights. Men had praised women for their achievement prior to the debates and Civil War, however sources from 1922 onward more frequently show nationalist men’s disapproval of Cumann na mBan.

The six female TDs of the Dail voted unanimously against the Treaty. Their rejection was rife with references to the martyred dead and their duty to uphold the Republic. Anti-treaty men used very similar rhetoric, but while pro-treaty men were sympathetic for their male comrades feelings, they referred to women who used this rhetoric as irrational and hysterical. Republican women’s showed their refusal of the Treaty at the Cumann na mBan conference that year. Cumann held a vote over whether or not to accept the treaty and the answer was overwhelmingly a “no”. 419 members voted against the treaty, while only 63 voted for it.<sup>324</sup> Women in favor of the Treaty formed a separate organization and anti-treaty women of Cumann regrouped with the IRA for the coming Civil War.<sup>325</sup>

Throughout the period 1916—1921, the women of Cumann had undergone further change. Following the Rising they functioned without the aid of their male counterparts and gained a greater sense of autonomy. Cumann na mBan worked hard to keep the Republican Dream alive and earned many nationalist men’s respect. Cumann women would not allow themselves to be treated as anything other than equals. During the War of Independence, they strictly adhered to their own goals; they worked with the

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<sup>322</sup> Conlon, 240.

<sup>323</sup> Jason Knirck, “ ‘Ghosts and Realities’: Female TDs and the Treaty Debate,” *Eire-Ireland*, XXXII, 4, 170—194, 194.

<sup>324</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 172.

<sup>325</sup> Jason Knirck, “ ‘Ghosts and Realities,’” 170-194.

men, not under them. Like the men, women made great sacrifices—they lost husbands and sons, postponed marriages and other life plans, spent time in prison or experienced reprisals, and gave up their previously peaceful existences for the Cause. The Treaty was, to many women, a betrayal that compromised everything for which they had worked. Women also feared that their equality would be undermined by the Free State's subjection to the British Crown. The Civil War was to create a heretofore unknown bitterness between families, friends, and comrades-in-arms. The years 1922—23 would be more brutal than the Rising and the War of Independence combined; the Free State would imprison and execute many more people than the British had. The Civil War damaged Irish society by opening rifts between the men and women who had worked so closely together in the previous years.

## CONCLUSION

CUMANN NA MBAN IN THE CIVIL WAR AND FREE STATE

Many women in Ireland, particularly the Cumann na mBan, made great contributions to the 1916 Rising, Post-Rising period, and War of Independence. The Anglo-Irish Treaty ended the war, but factioned various political and military alliances. Dail Eireann ratified the Treaty, however, it passed by a very slim majority and all six of the female TDs on the Dail voted against it. Since the Cumann na mBan executive voted 24-3 in opposition to the treaty and the larger delegation voted 419-63 against it, the appearance was, to some of the group's contemporaries, as well as current historians, that Cumann na mBan was almost unanimously opposed to the Treaty.<sup>326</sup> However, the reality is that Cumann na mBan split over the Treaty; the organization's choice to support the anti-treaty side resulted in the loss of more than 60% of their membership.<sup>327</sup>

The Executive of Cumann na mBan had signed a pledge stating "This executive of Cumann na mBan reaffirms their allegiance to the Irish Republic and therefore cannot support the Articles of Treaty signed in London."<sup>328</sup> Jenny Wyse Power, who had decided only after much internal debate to accept the Treaty, stated in 1924, "It is to be regretted that this splendid force of women should have been the first body to repudiate the National Parliament, and thus initiate a policy, which has had such disastrous results. The decision had the further effect of limiting Cumann na mBan to purely military work."<sup>329</sup> Wyse Power feared that women would eventually become scapegoats for the Civil War, and in fact, a few individuals actually blamed women almost exclusively. Louise Ryan explained, "as the fighting intensified and more women joined the movement there was growing concern about the transgression of gender roles. During the Civil War, in particular, the national press frequently highlighted the extent of women's involvement in the fighting."<sup>330</sup> While fears about women's emotionality and instability became an issue during the Treaty debates, the Civil War brought women's involvement in war activities into the fore and made both government officials and church officials very nervous. The appearance that women universally rejected the Treaty coupled with conservatives beliefs that women neglected the home by engaging in politics lead to restrictions on Civil Rights following the Civil War. However, nationalist women (many who were with or had been with Cumann na mBan) along with other feminists protested these restrictions with limited success.<sup>331</sup>

Although few Cumann na mBan voted pro-treaty at the Executive and special meetings in Dublin, sources prove that the Convention intentionally underrepresented pro-treaty women. In a letter to May Conlon of the Cork District Cumann na mBan (the majority of whom were pro-treaty), J. J. Walsh, TD, wrote: "This Cumann na mBan

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<sup>326</sup> Lil Conlon, *Cumann na mBan and the Women of Ireland, 1913-25*, (Kilkenny: Kilkenny People Ltd., 1969), 255-257.

<sup>327</sup> Also for information on the Cumann split see: Ann Matthews, "Women and the Civil War," in *The Irish Sword*, XX, no. 82, (Winter 1997), 379—386.

<sup>328</sup> Lil Conlon, 255-256; Ann Matthews, 380.

<sup>329</sup> Jenny Wyse Power, "The Political Influence of Women in Modern Ireland," in William George Fitzgerald, ed., *The Voice of Ireland: a survey of the race and nation from all angles*, (Dublin : Virtue and Co., 1924), 161.

<sup>330</sup> Louise Ryan, "'In the Line of Fire': Representations of Women and War (1919—1923) Through the Writings of Republican Men," in Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward, eds., *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women, and Wicked Hags*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 45—61, 48.

<sup>331</sup> Mary E. Daly, "Oh, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, Your Way's a Thorny Way!: The condition of Women in Twentieth Century Ireland," in Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, eds., *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 102—125.

affair was rigged from stem to stern. Our people took no notice whatever of it, whether that was wise or not I cannot say, but certainly the country won't take it very seriously. We will take immediate steps to organise a Women's Political Association...I suggest that meantime you refuse to disband your District Council."<sup>332</sup> Even outsiders realized Cumann endeavored to keep out the pro-treaty women. In this case, it was a member of the Dail who noted that Cumann was not completely anti-treaty. Margaret Ward, and a couple of other historians, ignored the rigging of the Cumann na mBan vote in their works. In fact, only Sinead McCooole's and Ann Matthews's works actually discuss the existence of the pro-treaty Cumann na mBan and describe their work during the Civil War period.

The first problem with pro-treaty representation was that the meeting date changed at the last minute. Countess Markievicz could not attend on the original date of January 28, 1922 and so the meeting changed to February 5 at the last minute. Many women could not change their travel arrangements and therefore could not attend. At the same time a railway strike prevented many women in the South of Ireland from attending.<sup>333</sup> At a time when there were around 1000 branches of Cumann na mBan with each branch being guaranteed at least one representative, two if it was a large branch, there were only about 500 women present.<sup>334</sup> The executive also hosted a meeting for the women and encouraged them to vote anti-treaty. A few women, who had made it clear that they would vote pro-treaty, were not allowed to register.<sup>335</sup>

When the Cumann na mBan split, it dropped from a membership of 20,000+ to about 8,000.<sup>336</sup> Pro-Treaty women even started their own organization Cumann na Saoirse (Council of Freedom or Freedom Party). Moderates did not side with either pro-treaty or anti-treaty factions, but chose to leave the organization all together.<sup>337</sup> Margaret Ward's work dismissed Cumann na Saoirse in a couple of sentences, she stated that it was

*not* another version of Cumann na mBan; it was not a militarily active organisation, prone to considering itself the guardian of Republican conscience and prepared to use any means to further the cause. The organisation represented the aspirations of the emerging elite, and it looked with horror and distaste on the wild women of Cumann na mBan.<sup>338</sup>

While the organization was not military, there is no evidence that it found Cumann na mBan distasteful, they simply disagreed on the Treaty matters. The fact is that many of the Cumann na mBan of Cork performed military tasks during the War of Independence

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<sup>332</sup> Lil Conlon, *Cumann na mBan*, 257-258.

<sup>333</sup> Ann Matthews, 380-381. Many women in the South were pro-treaty.

<sup>334</sup> While 482 women voted, it has been noted in some sources that a few women chose not to vote either way and thus I estimate that there were at least 500 women at the meeting. For number of branches see Ann Matthews, 380 (who estimates 800) and Margaret Ward who estimates 1000 branches.

<sup>335</sup> Ann Matthews, 381.

<sup>336</sup> While there are no concrete figures for the number of women in Cumann na mBan at this point in time, Ann Matthews estimate is that there were 20,000—30,000 involved in the organization at the end of the Irish War of Independence.

<sup>337</sup> Sinead McCooole, *No Ordinary Women*, 86-87.

<sup>338</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 173.

and special forces imprisoned them and victimized them in the “reprisals” just as they had with women of Dublin.<sup>339</sup> Also there is no evidence in any source that the pro-treaty faction consisted only of upper classes, women whose husbands were pro-treaty often were pro-treaty themselves, but at the same time, many single women were pro-treaty as well. The main difference between the pro- and anti-treaty sides was that most of the colorful personalities such as Mary MacSwiney and Countess Markievicz sided with the anti-treaty Cumann.<sup>340</sup> Lil Conlon noted that many Irish men and women were pro-treaty; she also stated that the Cork pro-treaty faction had the cooperation of Cumann branches “as far west as Goleen, where 99% of the people were in favor of the Treaty.”<sup>341</sup> While many pro-treatyites in Ireland hated the partitioning of Ireland and the oath of allegiance to the British Crown, many accepted the Treaty simply because it forced the British troops out of Ireland. At the same time, many women and men in Ireland were tired of war and believed as Collins had said that the Treaty was a “stepping stone” which would eventually lead to the establishment of the Republic.<sup>342</sup>

In the Cork District meeting on the Treaty, the anti-Treaty resolution passed by the Executive was read, 18 representatives voted against the resolution, while only 6 had voted for it. Another anti-treaty resolution proposed by a member of Cork District Cumann only gained 7 votes for it and 16 against it. The women in the Cork District Council, supported the treaty and decided that their first action would be to arrange a committee to welcome Michael Collins to Cork. They planned an “address of welcome” and tribute to Collins, distributed leaflets, and inserted a notice in the newspaper asking all pro-treaty Cumann na mBan and women who wished to join a pro-treaty Cumann to communicate directly with the pro-treaty Head Quarters, which were now located in Cork.<sup>343</sup> While many other pro-treaty branches took up the name Cumann na Saoirse, the Cork District refused to give up the name Cumann na mBan. The Dublin Head Quarters threatened them numerous times and told them in response to their newspaper notices “you are no longer a member of Cumann na mBan, therefore your recent action is illegal and any further attempt to use the name of our Organisation will be dealt with by the Courts of the Republic. You are ordered to hand in without delay all books and correspondence in your possession dealing with Cumann na mBan.”<sup>344</sup> The women of Cork did not comply with their orders and continued to use the name Cumann na mBan right up until they disbanded after the Civil War.

Upon his arrival in Cork, Collins delivered a lengthy speech of thanks to Cumann na mBan. He addressed his thanks to the women and then discussed the recent issue of equal voting rights for women, which had met with some debate within the Dail from several deputies, pro- and anti-treaty:

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<sup>339</sup> Lil Conlon’s book focuses on the Cork District Cumann na mBan and describes very well the extremity of the violence in Cork. For breakdowns of the war in different counties and an account of the intensity of the war in Cork see: Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 2004), Chapter 12: War in Cork, 104—114.

<sup>340</sup> Ann Matthews, 384-385; Lil Conlon 260.

<sup>341</sup> Lil Conlon, 260-1.

<sup>342</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 86.

<sup>343</sup> Lil Conlon, 260.

<sup>344</sup> Letter from Cumann na mBan Headquarters Dublin to Cork Cumann na mBan quoted in Lil Conlon, 261-2.

...We had recently in the Dail mock heroics about votes for women, and we were forced into a position where we were supposed to oppose the rights of women. We didn't oppose it, and we don't oppose it, and we know better than our opponents what the women during the past few years have endured...

I don't go in for displaying my feelings in a cheap way, but any of us who went through the conflict knows that the women had to face things we had not to face. We were armed and had that advantage when the enemy came. But the women were subjected to all sorts of indignities, and they had not the protection that we had. Few appreciate to Ireland owes to the women to the women who stood their ground during the past few years, and no thanks that anyone can bestow upon them, will be too great....I want just to pay my tribute to them on behalf of the Nation, for I know what they did for us during the fight.<sup>345</sup>

Collins wanted to make sure that the women of Ireland knew that the pro-treaty side was not going to forget about the rights promised to them. His reminder that the Dail had recently voted to include all women over 21 in the franchise was a reminder that the pro-treaty side intended to be progressive in its legislation concerning women. His choice to thank Cumann na mBan for their work in the struggle could be viewed simply as a politically intelligent move, but Meda Ryan's study, *Michael Collins and the Women in his life*, indicates that his feelings of thanks for the women were indeed heartfelt. Collins was, in fact, one of the few pro-treaty leaders that most women refused to criticize. The Cork Cumann na mBan supported Collins not only because he was a local, but also because he was in favor of women's rights. The fact that Collins tied the issue of the vote to Cumann na mBan and nationalist women's work indicated that the organization was not apolitical, as some historians have claimed. Quite obviously Collins felt that the issue of suffrage was of great interest to Cumann na mBan, pro-treaty or not.

The pro-treaty Cumann also held extremely large rallies, continued to hold ceilidhes and perform traditional Cumann na mBan tableau; they also criticized the IRA's actions in the local papers. The anti-treaty women however, would always counter any remarks in the paper by stating that these articles and letters were not coming from "any official of Cumann na mBan" and warned that "Certain persons are using the name of the Organisation illegally."<sup>346</sup> While the pro-treaty and anti-treaty Cumann continued debating in the papers, Jennie Wyse Power held a meeting of the pro-treaty group and announced that:

In the present critical crisis it is right and proper that Irish women should publicly declare their allegiance to the Free State. It is also important that they should have an organisation to represent their interests at the coming elections. An idea had gone abroad that all women were against the Treaty. Their presence there showed that in the City of Dublin there were women who saw that the course they proposed to adopt was the right one,

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<sup>345</sup> Lil Conlon, 263-4.

<sup>346</sup> Lil Conlon, 266-7.

from the national point of view. When the constitution of the new organisation was proposed they would see that women of Irish nationality need not be ashamed or afraid to go to them in that organisation. They believed that through the Treaty and through the Parliament of the nation that would be set up, they would get to freedom quicker than through any other means. The Women of Ireland, not a noisy faction of them, stood where they always stood on the bedrock of Irish Nationality.<sup>347</sup>

The pro-treaty Cumann na mBan wished to show Ireland that they were not all against the Free State. Jenny Wyse Power knew that women could easily be made into scapegoats for the Civil War; she knew that if they showed their strength in numbers and made public their pro-treaty sentiments that they could change the public opinion, which now turned slowly against Cumann na mBan and female nationalists in general. Alice Stopford Green proposed that their constitution should read, “Cumann na Saoirse is an independent body of Irish women, pledged to work for the securing and maintaining of Ireland’s right as an autonomous and sovereign State to determine freely her form of Government.”<sup>348</sup> Their description as “an independent body of Irishwomen” was directly taken from Cumann na mBan’s constitution, perhaps to remind the public and the anti-treaty body that they had once been members too. The statement supported the Treaty, while showing that pro-treaty women wanted an independent Ireland as well, they accepted the “stepping-stone” speech by Michael Collins. The pro-treaty Cumann na mBan/Cumann na Saoirse continued to publish supportive manifestos and to work with the Free State government. These women were also present in large numbers at the funerals of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins in August of 1922. However, these women, while providing the army with support, were primarily interested in politics and did not engage in military endeavors during the Civil War.

While the Cumann na mBan who sided with the “Irregulars” (the IRA anti-treaty side) prepared for the war; the pro-treaty Cumann worked for peace. As events between pro-treaty and anti-treaty forces became more heated, the Pro-Treaty Cumann begged both sides to cease hostilities and to settle their difference in the Dail. However, both sides denied their proposal.<sup>349</sup> A few anti-treaty women, such as Maud Gonne, also worked for peace with Cumann na Saoirse/Cumann na mBan and other female activists from various backgrounds. The Civil War period for anti-treaty Cumann was to be characterized by many of the same elements as their previous activities. They were once again dispatch carriers, first aid workers, safe-house owners, intelligence agents, and guerillas. The Civil War fractured relationships all across the country and instilled many citizens with bitterness. Men and women who fought together against a common British enemy now fought each other. While nationalist expected brutality from the British during risings and wars, the brutality of the Free State towards prisoners of war was unexpected and shocking to their ex-comrades. The Free State had a reputation for being even harsher than the British. While the British had been hesitant to arrest women, the Free State Government had no qualms about it. The Free State Army and government

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<sup>347</sup> Lil Conlon, 267-8.

<sup>348</sup> Lil Conlon, 268.

<sup>349</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 91.

agents recognized the threat posed by the women of Cumann na mBan, especially after having been their comrades for the past few years.<sup>350</sup>

The Civil War began after the ugliness of the Treaty debates and many different attempts to reconcile differences between pro-treaty and anti-treaty sides. Prior to the beginning of the War, the anti-treaty side perpetrated minor raids and skirmishes. They seized as many arms as they could; on April 14, 1922, they took the Four Courts (judiciary centre of Ireland) and other important judicial buildings and published a declaration refusing to recognize the Provisional Government. The Free State tried to work with anti-treaty forces up until June, at which point, both sides abandoned a pact intended to prevent civil war. The Free State Government finally ended the occupation of the Four Courts on June 28, 1922 when they shelled it and pumped petrol into other occupied buildings. After the order for the evacuation of the Four Courts, some women refused to leave. Mrs. Stacks and Kathy Barry (both widows of IRA men) stayed behind.<sup>351</sup> The women in the garrison had fought, performed first aid duties, and acted as couriers between the buildings involved. MacCarvill and other women leaving the garrison saved the men's machine guns by wrapping them in paper and carrying them along as they left.<sup>352</sup> Several women fought; Countess Markievicz acted as a sniper at Moran's Hotel.<sup>353</sup> Anti-treaty Cumann's participation in the Civil War was, from the beginning, highly visible.

The Civil War might have been shorter and less tragic if some of the most sensible leaders of the time had not died early on in the War. After Harry Boland was shot, Cumann na mBan members attended the funeral, at which point "Cumann na mBan took charge as the men did not appear...As Harry had been very active trying to bring about a reconciliation between the two sides and had been meeting Mick Collins for that end, we felt that his death which seemed to be purposefully brought about to prevent reconciliation, put an end to our hopes."<sup>354</sup> While the attack on the Four Courts was stopped with petrol and fire, the greatest brutality of the Civil War did not take place until after anti-treaty IRA agents shot Michael Collins on August 22, 1922. Arthur Griffith, another voice of reason within the Free State died on August 12<sup>th</sup>, leaving the Free State in the charge of W. T. Cosgrave, who was to show fewer leniencies to his former compatriots.<sup>355</sup>

Many Anti-Treaty Cumann na mBan members spent a considerable portion of the Civil War in prison. Free State soldiers arrested Maire Comerford, the Director of Propaganda for Cumann na mBan, after she was part of a failed attempt to kidnap Cosgrave. She wound up in North Dublin Union, from which she escaped, as did many other republicans.<sup>356</sup> Cosgrave explicitly blamed women for the Civil War, arguing that "the mainstay of the trouble we have had was the activity of the women." Because many women were being held on seemingly trivial charges, the press accused Cosgrave of a "war on women," however he responded that it was "not possible to consider these

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<sup>350</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 93.

<sup>351</sup> Eileen MacCarvill, WS 1752, NAI, 9.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>353</sup> Sinead McCoolle, *No Ordinary Women*, 91.

<sup>354</sup> Eileen MacCarvill, WS 1752, NAI, 10-11.

<sup>355</sup> Sinead McCoolle, 93.

<sup>356</sup> Maire Comerford in Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O'Grady, *Ireland's Unfinished Revolution: An Oral History*, (Boulder: Robert Rhineheart Publishers, 1999), 304.

women as ordinary females.”<sup>357</sup> As the war progressed, many women were arrested for trivial charges such as having seditious materials on one’s person, speaking about the Free State in a negative way, or simply being suspicious by virtue of being a known republican. However, these charges could also include possessing guns (which by later in the war was worth a death sentence to the IRA men), carrying arms, and shooting Free State agents.<sup>358</sup>

Though not all women in prison for nationalist activities were Cumann na mBan, many female prisoners were members. It has been noted by Oonagh Walsh that nationalist women in the prisons created a sense of community through various activities such as making prison souvenirs, which they referred to as “relics” (often depicting national heroes and heroines), and by holding classes. Many women focused on education in the prisons by holding language classes, learning knitting, and receiving art instruction. Cumann women were in charge of organizing protests inside the prison. These could range from acts of violence to peaceful protests. Cumann na mBan members in the prison kept a “quasi-military organisation” among themselves, and in fact, the organization’s “hierarchy outside the prison duplicated itself inside, with the most militant and outspoken members advocating violent resistance to the authorities, while the rank and file preferred a more moderate approach.”<sup>359</sup>

Women’s protests within prison took many different forms from antagonizing wardresses to destroying prison property and barricading guards out of cells.<sup>360</sup> The women also protested the church, even though many of them were devout Catholics. The church excommunicated Cumann na mBan and all other militant republicans in October of 1922. Many imprisoned women and men had trouble gaining the rights of Holy Communion during their prison terms since the Catholic Church was openly condemning anti-treaty forces. The only way republican prisoners were allowed to partake of Communion was by accepting the pastoral condemning the “Irregulars” activities. The women stood up to church figures at this time, Mary MacSwiney wrote to Archbishop Edward Byrne of Dublin, that the church’s attempt to coerce women to surrender by withholding their sacred rites was “...unjust, irreligious, I can no more deny the justice of my cause than Joan of Arc. The Bishops got her burned as a heretic to please England but the Church has now declared her one of God’s saints.”<sup>361</sup> Margaret Buckley likewise challenged a priest who refused to hear her confession “I told him I would likely be going on hunger strike, that I hoped I would die on it rather than give in, and that now I placed all my sins on him...”<sup>362</sup> These challenges to church officials show that although the women were very religious; they despised the church’s attempts to control their behavior by refusing them communion and confession. They also clearly considered their religion to be separated from their political beliefs. In general, the women felt that the Church abused its power by refusing them their most basic religious rights.

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<sup>357</sup> Cosgrave quoted in Charlotte Fallon “Civil War Hungerstrikes,” 83; and in Sinead McCooole, *Guns and Chiffon*, 40.

<sup>358</sup> Sinead McCooole, *Guns and Chiffon*, 40-1.

<sup>359</sup> Oonagh Walsh, “Testimony from Imprisoned Women,” in David Fitzpatrick, editor, *Revolution?: Ireland 1917-1923*, (Dublin: Trinity History Workshop, 1990), 69—85, 74-77.

<sup>360</sup> Oonagh Walsh, 77.

<sup>361</sup> Oonagh Walsh, 80—83.

<sup>362</sup> Margaret Buckley, *The Jangle of the Keys*, 30.

Hunger strikes were common in Free State prisons. Margaret Buckley and Mary MacSwiney both struck against prison conditions, especially the Catholic Church's policy of not administering Communion to prisoners and for the lack of Mass and Confessions in prisons. Hunger strikes were often used to gain publicity for the republican cause. Mary MacSwiney's first hunger strike and the propaganda related to it was the device which attracted the greatest amount of attention to the anti-treaty cause and Cumann na mBan. MacSwiney claimed that she was striking against foreign dominion in Ireland. Cumann na mBan outside the prison made sure that the event gained national exposure by staging monster rallies, marches, and protests. They even got the press involved. People all over Ireland bombarded the government with letters. Government officials and clergy members advised the president to release her because allowing her to die would have supplied the republican cause another martyr.<sup>363</sup> This would have been especially unwise since her brother, Terence, had achieved martyr status when he died on hunger strike during the War of Independence. MacSwiney was so gravely ill by her 20<sup>th</sup> day that she was given the last rites; on her 24<sup>th</sup> day of hunger strike she was released.<sup>364</sup>

Other hunger strikes would be less successful, as the public was weary of war and could no longer support a war which damaged the land and worsened the quality of life for the common people. A six-woman hunger strike a few months later gained some publicity, but the public agitated less for the women's release despite the fact that important and influential women such as Maud Gonne MacBride and Mary MacSwiney were involved. The government only agreed to release them because they knew once more that letting women die on hunger strike would outrage the public. Kevin O'Higgins, who also placed blame on women for civil unrest in the country, only agreed to let them go if the Dail would sign an agreement that any other hunger strikers from that point on "would be allowed to die."<sup>365</sup> Men and women in Mountjoy staged one last massive hunger strike in October of 1923, after the Ceasefire; however, the Free State allowed two men to die on this strike and the prisoners discontinued it.<sup>366</sup> Sighle Humphries was one of the last women released, she described the despair felt by female prisoners after the ceasefire, "We were flattened. We felt the Irish public had forgotten us. The tinted trappings of our fight were hanging like rags about us."<sup>367</sup>

The women of anti-treaty Cumann na mBan believed throughout the entirety of the war that they represented the people of Ireland, and in particular the women. Leaflets and pamphlets authored by these women evince this mentality. One press statement handed to the New York Press insisted at many points that the Irish had unanimity on the issue of establishing a Republic with no ties to England (though this was obviously untrue); they even made the comparison of pro-treatyites to the "Tories" and "Loyalists" during the American Revolution.<sup>368</sup> However, the reality of the situation was, many

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<sup>363</sup> Charlotte Fallon, "Civil War Hunger Strikes: Women and Men," in *Eire-Ireland*, 22, No. 3, (Fall 1987), 75—91, 77—80. Details of Mary MacSwiney's hunger strike are also mentioned in Sinead McCoole, *Guns and Chiffon*, 51-2; also Sinead McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 95—97.

<sup>364</sup> Sinead McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 97.

<sup>365</sup> Charlotte Fallon, 82—85.

<sup>366</sup> Charlotte Fallon, 88—9; Margaret Ward, 197.

<sup>367</sup> Margaret Ward, 198.

<sup>368</sup> Kitty O'Doherty, WS 355, NAI, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History, 1913-21, Statement by Witness, Appendix A "First Statment Handed to Pressmen in NYC".

people in Ireland accepted the Treaty, flawed though it was. And in fact, as many secondary sources and primaries such as Lil Conlon's memoir make evident, the people of Ireland were tired of war. As the Civil War continued, the people of Ireland grew increasingly disenchanted by the bank robberies, constant fighting, and the accidental killing of civilians. The common people discontinued their support of the nationalist cause. Even massive protests and hungerstrikes did not gain the support of the popular crowd by the end of the war.<sup>369</sup>

The Ceasefire on the Civil War came after the death of Liam Lynch, one of the strongest proponents of the anti-treaty movement. He died on April 10, 1923 and shortly thereafter the Free State captured other senior officers of the IRA such as Austin Stack and Dan Breen. De Valera attempted to negotiate with the Free State government, but they refused his terms and demanded unconditional surrender. While the IRA and Cumann had worked closely together, De Valera was dismissive of the women's part in the revolutionary struggle (as he had been the only Commandant in the 1916 Rising who refused to allow women at his garrison). Liam Lynch's death and the De Valera's disinterest in Cumann na mBan meant the peace negotiations excluded them. The women submitted a resolution to both Liam Mellows and Ernie O'Malley in September of 1922 stating that Cumann na mBan wanted representation at any peace negotiations that might occur. However, De Valera artfully ignored the women's request in his speech which accompanied the ceasefire command.<sup>370</sup>

Even with the Civil War over, Civil unrest continued. The Free State continued to hold many anti-treaty women and men in prisons and internment camps after the war. In fact, the Free State continued to arrest prisoners after the ceasefire was issued. Enraged republicans such as Maire Comerford and Maud Gonne MacBride went on hungerstrike criticizing the government for "continuing the war after the Republicans had laid down their arms."<sup>371</sup> Rose McNamara was one of the women who went looking for prisoners after the war, she added that "This went on during 1923 and even after the cease-fire."<sup>372</sup> The Free State government was overly zealous in its treatment of its enemies throughout the Civil War for fears that the anti-treatyites would compromise their agreement with England.<sup>373</sup> However, the last of the prisoners from the Civil War were finally freed in June 1924.<sup>374</sup> Though the state released the Civil War prisoners, they raided homes and arrested male and female republicans into the 1940s. Troops arrested Mrs. Patsy O'Hagan following a raid in 1941, even though Free State Officers found nothing and she had two children at home; she was not released until 1943.<sup>375</sup> Known anti-treaty republicans lived a precarious life up until the Irish Republic came into being following

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<sup>369</sup> Sinead McCoolle, 86-7.

<sup>370</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 195.

<sup>371</sup> Margaret Ward, 196-7.

<sup>372</sup> Rose McNamara, WS 482, NAI, 15.

<sup>373</sup> Sinead McCoolle, 90-1.

<sup>374</sup> Margaret Ward, 199.

<sup>375</sup> Mrs. Patsy O'Hagan, Uinseann MacEoin, ed., *Survivors: the story of Ireland's struggle as told through some of her outstanding living people recalling events from the days of Davitt, through James Connolly, Brugha, Collins, Liam Mellows, and Rory O'Connor, to the present time*, (Dublin: Argenta Publications, 1980), 170-171. Pro-Treaty Cumann na Saoirse/Cumann na mBan disbanded in 1924.

World War II. Many anti-treaty Republicans would remain in opposition to the Free State up until their deaths.<sup>376</sup>

After the Civil War, people no longer discussed any revolution besides the 1916 Rising, the wanted to forget later events. More than anything else, most of Ireland's people wanted peace.<sup>377</sup> Pro-treaty Cumann na mBan/Cumann na Saoirse disbanded shortly after the Civil War. Lil Conlon recalled in her memoir: "At a special meeting of the Executive of Cumann na mBan it was unanimously agreed to discontinue the Organisation as it was the considered option we had conscientiously performed our duty to the Government and to the Nation."<sup>378</sup> The Anti-treaty Cumann na mBan did not dissolve following the Civil War though Annie O'Brien mentioned that "After the cease fire in April 1923, a gloom spread over our movement. Long before that we realised that we were fighting a losing battle..."<sup>379</sup>

The reticence on the subject of the Civil War is certainly notable in primary sources. In the interviews, the women and men mostly mentioned the events of the War of Independence, and some stopped at the 1916 Rising or shortly thereafter. This same trend is present in the Witness Statements. In the thirty witness statements used in this thesis, only three mentioned Civil War activities. Roughly half of these same statements stopped before the Anglo-Irish War. In fact, Annie O'Brien felt the need to justify her discussion of the Civil War in her witness statement, "I know there is great reluctance to speak about the painful differences of the post-Treaty period and I know that there were many good men on both sides who lost their lives. I feel, too, however, that I ought to set down everything I know about that time; else there is danger that justice will not be done to those on the Republican side who carried on the fight after the Treaty."<sup>380</sup> As Sinead McCool noted, the topic of the Civil War and events leading up to it were taboo topics even in the 1950s.<sup>381</sup>

Cumann women from both sides continued to associate with other organizations for women's rights during the Free State period. However, many strong female figures within the anti-treaty Cumann na mBan refused to interact with the Free State Government. Jenny Wyse Power noted in 1924 that women's rights were hurt by the fact that although four women had been elected to the Dail Eireann, only one woman, Margaret Collins O'Driscoll (sister of Michael Collins), chose to take her seat.<sup>382</sup> While feminist historians have blamed Collins O'Driscoll for being too conservative and criticize the state for only having one woman on the Dail, the fact is that many powerfully feminists refused positions in the government because of their devotion to the Republic and this, perhaps more than anything else, hurt the women's rights cause in the post-Civil War period.

The first unified campaign of Cumann na mBan post-Civil War was their jury campaign in which the women tried to influence jurors in Republican cases to find defendants not guilty. This began around 1926, at which point Republicans were still

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<sup>376</sup> MacEoin, *Survivors*, 171.

<sup>377</sup> Ann Matthews, 81. Public apathy to hungerstrikes and other protests is indicative of an economic and emotional drain on the people.

<sup>378</sup> Lil Conlon, 298.

<sup>379</sup> Lily Curran and Annie O'Brien, WS 805, NAI, 44.

<sup>380</sup> Lily Curran and Annie O'Brien, WS 805, NAI, 33.

<sup>381</sup> Sinead McCool, *No Ordinary Women*, Foreword.

<sup>382</sup> Jenny Wyse Power, "The Political Influence of Women in Modern Ireland," 161

being arrested for seditious activities against the Free State. This campaign continued on throughout the 1930s since de Valera, who had been such an ardent supporter of the Republic, was no more lenient on his former anti-treaty comrades than his predecessor had been. Cumann issued one circular to jurors in 1933 entitled “How the New Militia Will Be Used” and argued that the new Free State militia were the “jailors of Republican Prisoners” and that the prisoners fulfilled the role of patriot, “The crime they are guilty of is that for which Tone, Emmet, Pearse, and Liam Mellows gave their lives.”<sup>383</sup> They distributed this pamphlet to jurors in one of several cases against anti-treaty nationalists. The Garda report stated that the jurors acquitted the prisoners in the particular case, but that nobody realized until after the trial that the jurors received these circulars from Cumann na mBan’s publicity department. While an act had been passed to make juror’s names secret in response to Cumann’s attempts to influence jurors in the past, they noted that a known Cumann member had been present at the trial and had taken down the names of the jury members.<sup>384</sup> The Jury campaign began as an individual affair by Cumann na mBan, but within a couple of years, it was the unifying campaign that the organization needed to carry it through the 1920s.<sup>385</sup>

Many anti-treaty women in the Cumann na mBan continued to criticize the Free State and continued to pose the question of an Irish Republic. In 1925, Cumann’s Easter Lily Committee and Publicity Department adopted the emblem of the Easter Lily to remind the people of Easter Week. The lily naturally came in the tri-color of orange, white, and green to remind them of the hoisting of the tri-color flag over the GPO during Easter Week.<sup>386</sup> During the 1930s, one of the rival political groups proposed the wearing of a rival emblem that was not so politically tied to the republican movement. Cumann na mBan urged “People of Ireland, proudly proclaim your faith in the Cause of uncompromising Republicanism. Raise again the banner of Easter Week. Proclaim your hope, your confidence, your determination to see the Flag of Easter Week floating over a free, sovereign Republic for all Ireland. WEAR AN EASTER LILY.”<sup>387</sup> The Free State government opposed the women’s actions after the Civil War and the Garda Siochana (Civic Guard) spent a great deal of time following the women around taking down flyers and keeping them under surveillance. The Garda Siochana and Department of Justice files contain pamphlets, rules and regulations, as well as other Cumann na mBan materials attesting to this persecution.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s alternative political groups such as Saor Eireann (Free Ireland) and the Fianna Fail drew membership away from Cumann na mBan and the IRA. Saor Eireann intended to avoid signing the Oath. However, the Saor Eireann movement was not very strong and it collapsed shortly after it was formed. The Republican Congress was another alternative political group, however, it banned the IRA

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<sup>383</sup> Cumann na mBan pamphlet, “How the New Militia Will Be Used,” NAI, Department of Justice Files, JUS 8/325.

<sup>384</sup> Garda Siochana, Metropolitan Division, Detective Branch, Secret Report, “Intimidation of Jurors—Circular Issued by Cumann na mBan,” NAI, Department of Justice Files, JUS 8/325.

<sup>385</sup> Margaret Ward, 206-7.

<sup>386</sup> Undated 1930s pamphlet “Honour Ireland’s Dead” from the NAI, Department of Justice Files, JUS 8/326.

<sup>387</sup> Undated 1930s pamphlet “Honour Ireland’s Dead” from the NAI, Department of Justice Files, JUS 8/326.

from its meetings and the Cumann na mBan members who went over to the congress wound up resigning out of guilt. Eamon De Valera started the Fianna Fail party as an alternative to the Cumann na Ghaeheil government of Cosgrave (Fianna Fail would finally gain control of the government in 1932). However, De Valera's decision to sign the Oath of Allegiance to engage in politics angered some of his former comrades. Maire Comerford sarcastically asked De Valera at the Easter Week memorial in 1966 if he had "come home to find the Republic Betrayed" in 1920, to which he responded, "People believed their own propaganda; some people believe it still."<sup>388</sup> Comerford was not the only woman who was angered by De Valera or the Fianna Fail, May Dalaigh responded to a question about Fianna Fail with, "You ask about Fianna Fail? They were as bitter as hell that we did not go with them. And 'tis we who should be bitter and we are not. I hate to say it, but we showed them up. Tom eventually emigrated to the USA, and Mexico. In 1931 he returned to Ireland, settling down near Dun Laoire. He died in 1939, still a faithful soldier."<sup>389</sup>

While many scholars argued that women elected to office were relatives of dead republicans, this critique is only partly true.<sup>390</sup> Several women, such as Jennie Wyse-Power and Mary MacSwiney, were themselves important republican figures. A few women from Cumann also became political figures. However, even following the war, many anti-treaty Cumann members refused to participate in the Free State Government. Jenny Wyse-Power, former Commandant of the Central Branch Cumann na mBan and founding member of Cumann na Saoirse, became the most influential female politician in the Free State between 1922—1937. The people also elected Kathleen Clarke, another extremely influential Cumann na mBan woman, to the Seanad Eireann. Senators Clarke and Wyse-Power were the most outspoken women in the Seanad and were stronger advocates of women's rights than the female TDs of the Dail.<sup>391</sup>

While in many ways this history of Cumann na mBan diverged from previous histories, and particularly the earliest history of the organization by Margaret Ward, I agree with her on one of her major points, Many women from Cumann failed to become involved in the women's rights struggles in the 1920s and 1930s. While a number of individuals became involved in women's rights crusades, the organization as a whole abandoned the feminist cause.<sup>392</sup> Several reasons remain for Cumann's lack of solidarity around women's issues. Firstly, many of them refused to enter the Sinead or Dail Eireann, primarily because they refused to take the oath of allegiance to the crown, but also because they were reticent to acknowledge any government that was not part of an independent Ireland. The women's refusal to participate in the government due to

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<sup>388</sup> Maire Comerford in Eoin MacNeill, *Survivors*, 44.

<sup>389</sup> May Dalaigh in *Donncha Dulaing*, 368.

<sup>390</sup> Jason Knirck, "'Ghosts' and 'Realities'"; Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, "'Free Women in a Free Nation': Nationalist Feminist Expectations for Independence," in Brian Farrell and Michael Littleton, eds., *The Creation of the Dail: A Volume of Essays from the Thomas Davis Lectures*, (Dublin: Blackwater Press in association with Radio Telefis Éireann, 1994), 75—90.

<sup>391</sup> Mary Clancy, "Aspects of Women's Contributions to the Oireachtas Debate in the Irish Free State, 1922—1937," in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy, eds., *Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women's History in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, (Swords: Poolbeg, 1989), 206—232.

<sup>392</sup> Note, Margaret Ward states that Cumann na mBan did not ever take up the Feminist cause in the first place, but it is my opinion that up until the end of the Civil War, their efforts were clearly tied to their interest in women's advancement within Ireland.

nationalist principles damaged the civil rights cause.<sup>393</sup> Many of the women who chose to use legislative means to join in protests against certain Free State policies, nationalist and feminist, had to break with Cumann na mBan to do so. The women of Cumann, while having stood up to their male counterparts all throughout the revolutionary period, did not stand up to the Free State government on any issue other than that of complete Irish sovereignty. The equality guaranteed in the 1922 Constitution to citizens “regardless of sex” was enough for many of the women, and for many others, their refusal to acknowledge the Free State government was a refusal to acknowledge its constitutional documents and legislation. Simply put, many women in Cumann preferred to ignore the Free State rather than interact with it, some even refused political involvement even when legislation threatened sexual equality. By this same virtue however, the few women who gained access to the government were often members of Cumann na mBan or women who had been members.<sup>394</sup>

Before one condemns Cumann na mBan for letting women’s rights down, one needs to remember that feminists prioritized different issues in the early twentieth century, some of which current feminist historians often overlook.<sup>395</sup> For instance, fewer women protested the Juries Acts in 1924 and 1927, while great numbers protested the Conditions of Employment Bill in 1935. The reasons are simple, in 1924, the Jury Act did not seek to keep women from serving on juries, but allowed them to opt out. The 1927 Act encountered more protest because it threatened, in the beginning, to eliminate women from jury service; however feminist protests moderated this clause so that women opted in to jury service, as long as they registered to do so. The Conditions of Employment Act, however, met with criticism from wide sources, not just feminists. Section 16 of the Act gave the Minister for Industry and Commerce the ability to limit work in industry based on sex; the bill also fixed the proportions of female to male workers and forbade the employment of more women than men in any industry. While economic depression was a factor in the creation of the bill, it completely ignored the fact that many single women were still living in Ireland in the 1930s; 29% of all Irish women were still unmarried by age 45.<sup>396</sup> Women opposed this bill in greater numbers because it threatened women’s economic independence. The female senators within the Seanad were outraged by the bill. Kathleen Clarke and Jenny Wyse Power presented the most strenuous arguments against it; Clarke was most upset because the bill’s aim was to put women out of work, she stated that she would be in agreement with a bill that prevented women from scrubbing floors, “because scrubbing floors is an ugly, hard and badly paid job, and men do not want it.”<sup>397</sup> Jenny Wyse Power also retorted that if the men passed the bill that they should also set up a bureau to provide women with husbands and homes.<sup>398</sup> Women reacted to this bill much as they had to the 1925 Civil Services Act,

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<sup>393</sup> Margaret Ward, 234—245.

<sup>394</sup> Mary Clancy, 207-209.

<sup>395</sup> Mary E. Daly, , “Women in the Irish Free State, 1922—39: The Interaction between Economics and Ideology,” in Joan Hoff and Maureen Coulter, eds., *Irish Women’s Voices, Past and Present*, (Special Double Issue of the *Journal of Women’s History*, 6, no. 4/7, no. 1, (Winter/Spring 1995), 99—116, 100-101.

<sup>396</sup> Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, “Free Women in a Free Nation,” 88.

<sup>397</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 236. Seanad Official Report 11 december 1935.

<sup>398</sup> Margartet Ward, 237.

which barred women from the higher echelons of Civil Service. During the struggle over the Civil Service Act, Jenny Wyse Power used her position as a veteran of the Rising and war to argue for women's inclusion:

No men in a fight for freedom ever had such loyal cooperation from their women as the men who compose the present Executive Council. When they wanted messengers to go into dangerous places, they did not call on members of their own sex. When they wanted auditors to go out when the old Local Government Board broke down it was women they sent. It was women inspectors that went round...and did all the work for them in that terrible time...and these are the people who tell us that we are physically unfit.<sup>399</sup>

In 1925, Wyse Power succeeded in stopping the the bill in the Seanad (though neither she nor any of the other women were able to stop the 1935 bill from passing).<sup>400</sup>

Another Bill that gained widespread support from feminists was the Illegitimate Children (Affiliation Orders) Bill of 1929. Women could only bring actions against seducers in regards to her father's injury and employer's loss until the government drafted this bill, which gave women more autonomy for themselves and their illegitimate children. The bill permitted women to bring charges against seducers in their own names, which was a very progressive move on the part of the state, despite their restrictions on women. However, much of the Oireachtas debate focused more on the reluctance to allow a woman to name the father of her child, who, some argued, obviously a victim in the matter, and being blackmailed by a "hardened sinner."<sup>401</sup> Once again, Jenny Wyse Power made a powerful argument and managed to get the in camera clause incorporated into the bill. Mothers of illegitimate children were no longer alone in their sufferings; the fathers' names were now to be published as well.<sup>402</sup>

Activism by women in general intensified when the issue was of central importance to women's everyday lives (such as employment). Many women in the 1920s and 30s did not see issues such as divorce rights and the availability of contraceptives as important.<sup>403</sup> In the meantime, for a group like the Irish Countrywomen's Society, the women's rights crusade prioritized a protest for access to running water.<sup>404</sup> They wanted to improve women's lives, but in the case of rural women (in other words, most of

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<sup>399</sup> Jenny Wyse Power, Senate Debates, 17 December 1925, quoted in Maryann Valiulis, "Free women in a Free nation", 87-8.

<sup>400</sup> Mary Clancy, 219.

<sup>401</sup> Mary Clancy, "Aspects of Women's Contributions to the Oireachtas Debate in the Irish Free State, 1922—1937," in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy, eds., *Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women's History in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, 206—232, 216-17.

<sup>402</sup> Mary Clancy, "Aspects of Women's Contributions to the Oireachtas Debate in the Irish Free State, 1922—1937," 216-17.

<sup>403</sup> Mary E. Daly, "Women in the Irish Free State, 1922—39: The Interaction between Economics and Ideology," in Joan Hoff and Maureen Coulter, eds., *Irish Women's Voices, Past and Present*, (Special Double Issue of the *Journal of Women's History*, 6, no. 4/7, no. 1, (Winter/Spring 1995), 99—116, 100-101.

<sup>404</sup> Mary E. Daly, "Oh, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, Your Way's a Thorny Way!: The Condition of Women in Twentieth-Century Ireland," in Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, eds., *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 102—125, 102.

Ireland) their ideals of improvement were centered on survival. While rural women did not forsake politics, they often had other issues that were of greater immediate importance.

Some Irish women's historians viewed the Free State as unique in its repressive legislation against women.<sup>405</sup> While the government passed repressive and anti-feminist legislation in the 1920s and 30s, this was not a purely Irish phenomenon. Mary E. Daly proved in her many works that although limitations did occur, other European countries and the U.S. also limited women in similar ways. Her articles placed the Irish Free State in an international context and proved that Ireland was not alone in anti-feminist legislation. For instance, although the 1935 Conditions of Employment Act and the 1937 Constitution limited women's employment, especially that of married women, European countries and America both passed laws which limited women's employment during the 1920s and 30s.<sup>406</sup> Maryann Gialanella Valiulis added to this that laws which restricted women's work were not the only ones that had an international precedence. The U. S. passed acts similar to those in Ireland concerning nationality in marriage and women's place in the juries. In fact, she drew direct parallels between the jury act in the US and in Ireland. Men in both governments made almost identical arguments that "good women" never desired to serve on juries and that allowing women in the jury box was "monstrous" and "repugnant."<sup>407</sup> She noted that the arguments around both the jury debates and the question of nationalism in mixed-nationality marriages were based on the questioning of women's relationship to the state. Valiulis noted that both the U.S. and Ireland viewed women as indirectly related to the State, their husbands dictated their relationship to the state.<sup>408</sup>

While the state limited certain rights, Irish women's educational rights expanded. Ireland boasted a high number of female university students compared to many other countries; only Finland had a higher percentage of women university students.<sup>409</sup> Irish women's education allowed them access to many jobs despite the bans that were being imposed during the 1920s and 30s.<sup>410</sup> The restriction placed on women in the Civil Service Act in 1925 was similar to an Act that had been passed in Britain to preserve certain civil service jobs (the higher ranking ones) for men. The biggest difference was that Ireland's needed to supply jobs (for women as well as men, despite the restriction acts) to slow down immigration, which was still extremely common in post-Independence Ireland. Although the Conditions of Employment Act in 1935 allowed sex discrimination, it was otherwise a very progressive bill which provided workers with better rights regarding sick leave and vacation time.<sup>411</sup> Despite the Acts on women's employment, Daly also pointed out that more women were employed in the 1920s and

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<sup>405</sup> Margaret Ward and Maryann Valiulis fall into this school, as do many other authors looking at the Free State period.

<sup>406</sup> Mary E. Daly, "Oh, Kathleen Ni Houlihan," 103.

<sup>407</sup> Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, "Engendering Citizenship: Women's Relationship to the State in Ireland and the United States in the Post-Suffrage Period," in Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd, eds., *Women and Irish History: Essays in Honour of Margaret MacCurtain*, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, ), 159—172, .

<sup>408</sup> Maryann Gailanella Valiulis, "Engendering Citizenship," 162.

<sup>409</sup> Mary E. Daly, "Women in the Irish Free State, 1922—39," 107.

<sup>410</sup> Mary E. Daly, "Women in the Irish Free State, 1922—39," 108.

<sup>411</sup> Mary E. Daly, 109—110.

30s than previously and that the few supervisors completely enforced the sections regarding women's employment.<sup>412</sup>

The 1937 Constitution was the grand finale in restrictive legislation from the Irish Free State. While the 1922 Constitution had been explicitly egalitarian in nature, specifically noting that sex would not hamper citizen's rights, the 1937 Constitution treated women very differently. The Constitution identified women as "wives and mothers." De Valera also viewed the nationalist education and training of children as the mother's domain. Women criticized the fact that De Valera had altered Article 16 from the 1922 Constitution, which protected citizenship rights, by taking out the phrase "without distinction of sex." De Valera claimed that he removed the phrase because he felt that it insulted women by reminding them of how recently they had been included as citizens.<sup>413</sup> Many women's groups, (many Cumann members had joined these by this point), protested this and other articles so vehemently that they finally forced De Valera to reinsert the words "without distinction of sex" into the clause. Criticism also fell on Articles 40, 41, and 45:

**Article 40:** All citizens shall, as human persons, be held equal before the law. This shall not be held to mean that the State shall not in its enactments have due regard to differences of capacity, physical and moral, and of social function.

**Article 41:**

2-1: In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2-2: The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

**Article 45:**

4-2: The State shall endeavour to ensure that the inadequate strength of women and the tender age of children shall not be abused, and that women and children shall not be forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their sex, age, or strength.<sup>414</sup>

De Valera offended women with the wording of these articles. While some women condemned the Free State and refused to be involved in politics, many of them returned to the political realm just to protest the Constitution. Maud Gonne wrote: "If, when Ireland is free, a more detailed Constitution [than the 1916 Proclamation] were needed the Article concerning women and the Articles providing for Special Courts in Mr. de Valera's Constitution would damn it in my eyes."<sup>415</sup> Women's groups that banded together included the Women Graduates Association and the Joint Committee of Women's Societies and Social Workers, among others. The only women's political group that refused to protest the Constitution was the Irish Women's Worker's Union,

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<sup>412</sup> Mary E. Daly, 110-111.

<sup>413</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 238-9.

<sup>414</sup> Dail Eireann, Official Report, quoted in Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 238.

<sup>415</sup> Maud Gonne in *Prison Bars*, July 1937, reprinted in Karen Steele, ed., *Maud Gonne's Irish Nationalist Writings, 1895—1946*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 234.

they protested the Civil Services Act and other employment acts, but they felt that they had no business protesting for women's rights, per se.<sup>416</sup> This seemingly unanimous activism by women's groups earned the contempt of de Valera and some of his colleagues, but their protests caused only a few minor modifications of the Constitution. Article 16, which had been reamended to its original text also gained a sub-section which specifically protected women's seats on the Dail Eireann by stating that no disability acts or other citizenship limitations would be allowed to disqualify members from the Dail based on sex alone.

The state amended sub-section 4-2 of Article 45 so that it now read:

The State shall endeavour to ensure that the strength and health of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children shall not be abused and that citizens shall not be forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their sex, age, or strength.

The gain was that De Valera no longer referenced the "inadequate strength of women" and that the state recognized that men's health and strength might be factors in their employment as well.<sup>417</sup>

These small advances, however, should not be discounted altogether. While De Valera was clearly no feminist and while he tried to justify his reasoning for the changes in a pseudo-feministic way, the fact is that the Constitution did, as he claimed, recognize women's work within the home. The Constitution also gave mothers more rights over their children, however, only married women and families benefited from these protections and rights enhancements. Single women did not garner any benefits from the new Constitution. The fact that women still affected legislation should be seen as a good sign, Irish women (even nationalists) were not completely divorced from public life in the Free State.<sup>418</sup> Historians have discounted and ignored feminist victories in the 1920s and 30s. Historians rarely mention the facts that women forced the government to amend the Juries bill in 1927 and that women's intervention changed the Illegitimate Children (Affiliation Orders) Bill.<sup>419</sup>

Though the government increasingly limited women's rights throughout the course of the post-war years; there was no single person or persons primarily responsible for it. A combination of conservative women in the Dail, conservative men in the government, Catholic influence, and the refusal by some anti-treaty women to participate in the Free State Government accounted for the restrictions on women's rights. For a few years, the women of Ireland had experienced a freedom that was uncommon for its time. Women's contributions to the revolutionary effort brought them the vote on equal terms in 1922, six years earlier than women in Britain.

However, Cumann na mBan became a scapegoat for the Civil War, at least to men like Kevin O' Higgins and W. T. Cosgrave. This, combined with Catholic ideologies,

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<sup>416</sup> Margaret Ward, 239-242.

<sup>417</sup> Dail Eireann Official Report, 9 June 1937, Margaret Ward, 241.

<sup>418</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*;

<sup>419</sup> Mary E. Daly's articles all focus on positive aspects of women's protests, also see Mary Clancy's "Aspects of women's contribution to the Oireachtas Debate in the Irish Free State, 1922—1937," which is a very balanced account that documents both gains and losses experienced by women in the Free State.

attempted to counteract women's activism in the earlier years. Restrictive legislation on women's rights was passed all over Europe and the US, however, and was not a uniquely Irish phenomenon. Countries in flux often passed widespread legislation concerning women.<sup>420</sup> The desire for many countries was a return to normalcy following the wars. With economic stress as a major factor in many countries, placing women back in the home supposedly allowed men to have better chances at jobs.<sup>421</sup> As happened with women in America and England after World War II, Irish women performed war work that far exceeded the bounds of feminine normalcy and once the war was over, the church and many male leaders desired their reintegration into the homes that they abandoned to some extent throughout the 1900—1923 time frame.

Cumann na mBan were instrumental in changing perceptions of femininity during the revolutionary period, but an ironic consequence of this was a tendency to demonize women as warmongers after the Civil War. However, women's expanded roles, coupled with their part in the fight, achieved, for some time, a measure of equality. Cumann na mBan embraced the idea of civic duty and only through their continued participation in national efforts did they legitimize their claims to equality. While many historians assert that Cumann na mBan were not feminists, I disagree. These women protested their subjugation from the beginning and were active agents in changing gender dynamics between male and female nationalists over the last two decades. That they were not suffragists in the traditional sense does not mean that they had no concern for women's rights. Like the women who used their positions as wives and mothers to argue for their inclusion in the public sphere, the women of Cumann na mBan and other nationalist organizations used their position as comrades and soldiers to argue for their inclusion in politics.

Cumann na mBan did not cease to exist during the Free State years; in fact, Cumann still existed in 1969/70 when the IRA split again. Cumann split down the middle with many women joining the Official IRA and many others siding with the Provisional IRA. Many Cumann na mBan women from the early twentieth century held an interest in politics even in their old age. In fact, the problems in the Six Counties attracted the attention of several of the more political Cumann women. Maire Comerford stated in an interview in the 1970s:

People refer to the emancipation of Ireland as though freedom has already been won. But if a man is handcuffed or tied by the foot to another man or to something else, is he a free man? Can Ireland be held to be free while a portion of her territory is held? The partitioned area includes Armagh, the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland. It includes the crowning place of the O'Neills, the kings of Ireland, and it includes areas inhabited by the people with the most ancient Gaelic traditions. And they're all abused, treated as inferiors. They have been deprived of houses and of votes. They've been gerrymandered and every crime in the calendar of civil rights has been committed against them...

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<sup>420</sup> Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category for Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5, (December 1986), 1053—1075, 1073.

<sup>421</sup> Mary E. Daly, "Women in the Irish Free State, 1922—39: The Interaction between Economics and Ideology," 115-6.

Partition has made it impossible for the nation to develop, impossible to have democracy and impossible to have anything in the country but civil war. This evil has been persistent for many years. It came to the surface in 1968 and 1969 with the demand for civil rights, and the consequent attack on the nationalist population has meant that men have again had to take up arms to defend their people. It is a defensive war and—I love to hear this repeated as often as possible—it is generally admitted that the guerilla cannot be defeated. So quite obviously I would like to see Britain withdraw her troops and partition end.<sup>422</sup>

Comerford responded, not just as an elderly nationalist, but as a woman with an interest in contemporary politics. When she was originally asked about an interview, she responded,

I would not be at all happy if the burden of the message you seek to put across was limited to what are called “old historical wrongs” or exclusively to the past in a sentimental way. To explain what you call England’s guilt in the terrible story cannot be done without explaining her present guilt in failing to bring it to a proper conclusion. Much of England’s hypocrisy consists of acknowledging ‘past wrongs’ while keeping the present ones going.<sup>423</sup>

Comerford showed her interest not only in Civil Rights, but also in discussing Ireland’s past in an unsentimentalized way. She wanted a critique not only of “past wrongs,” but also of contemporary problems.

Activities within the nationalist sphere politicized the women of Cumann na mBan and Inghinidhe na hEireann. While patriotism brought them into the struggle, their involvement in these societies broadened their mental horizons and allowed them access to important political debates occurring around nationalist activities. Once politicized these women were not deterred. The setbacks of the Free State did not keep Cumann na mBan women (and ex-Cumann women) from having politically active lives; in fact, the government’s controversial legislation motivated women to remain in the political sphere throughout their old age.

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<sup>422</sup> Maire Comerford in Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O’Grady, 357-8.

<sup>423</sup> Maire Comerford in Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O’Grady, 357.

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