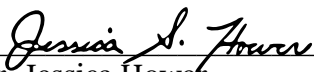


The Sisters of Terror: Gender and Generation in the Northern Irish Troubles  
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with Honors  
in History

Southwestern University  
2021

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Why are the English still with us? Why, after everything we've thrown at them, does the British presence in Ireland still endure? So many sacrifices have been made. So many of our brothers and sisters have given their lives in resistance to that occupation but we are still ignored. We are still denied our basic right to self-determination, and our sons and brothers, husbands and fathers are still held in British jails. Well if nothing has changed, then, my friends, it is time for a new approach. That is why our leadership has issued a new directive. This is from the very top. Today, the Irish Republican struggle for freedom enters a new phase. The time has come to escalate our efforts, redouble our militancy, spill more blood, so that the Crown retreats and leaves Ireland forever.<sup>1</sup>

So begins the voiceover for the cold open at the start of Season 4 of Netflix's *The Crown*.

The TV series, created by Peter Morgan, a British filmmaker, depicts the history of the British royal family from the accession of Elizabeth II onward. The show provides the viewer with an intimate, albeit dramatized, window into the joys and struggles of maintaining and promoting the longevity of the crown. In response to backlash about the plainly embellished, even invented, moments of the series, which elicited a formal call from British politicians to add a disclaimer to the title sequence, Morgan claimed that “sometimes a writer has to use their creative imagination... often fiction is more honest than ‘official history.’”<sup>2</sup> He fully embraces the untruths of the narrative, while recognizing the distinction between truth and accuracy, contending that the viewer will get a fuller understanding of the emotion, strife, and weight of the Crown's decisions via fiction than if he had focused solely on the actual truth. In fact, the epigraph above, although it sounds like a real speech, is simply part of the script – it is a tool to introduce the Irish Republican Army and the Troubles into the narrative of the show. This use of fiction, although it is not entirely warranted, does work to draw the viewer in, heighten the drama, and emphasize the tenuous relationship between the two entities.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Crown*, season 4, episode 1, “Gold Stick,” directed by Benjamin Caron, aired November 15, 2020, on Netflix. 00:01:00.

<sup>2</sup> Ishita Sengupta, “Fiction is Often More Honest than Official History: The Crown Creator Peter Morgan,” *The Indian Express*, May 2, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/art-and-culture/peter-morgan-the-crown-interview-olivia-colman-6390387/>.

The opening scene focuses upon Queen Elizabeth II at the Trooping of the Colours in 1979. As she prepares herself for the fanfare and the cheers of her adoring subjects, in full military regalia, a quiet, serious Northern Irishman provides the voiceover. He begins quite simply with a question, asking how, after so many years of British occupation and Irish resistance, have the British refused to leave the island and allow for a united Ireland. As the scene progresses, Queen Elizabeth joins her family in front of the crowd of thousands and the Northern Irish voice grows stronger, more insistent, and more frustrated. At the same time, flashes of Irish protests and flag burnings appear on screen – in stark juxtaposition to the uniformity of the military parade. The speaker struggles to puzzle out why the British have refused to grant Ireland its freedom, even after so many Irish men and women have given their lives to the Republican cause, at the same time as the British are celebrating their might.

This scene is particularly striking because of the symbolism at work and the juxtaposition between image and dialogue. Although the Trooping officially serves to celebrate the Queen's birthday, it is a day rife with militarism, imperial imagery, and shows of loyal devotion to monarch and monarchy. Ireland stands as one of Britain's last remaining holdings and also, arguably, its first colony. The two are also, paradoxically and significantly, near neighbors. As such, the scene highlights the tension inherent in the Anglo-Irish relationship, which was then reaching a fever pitch, and also suggests the continued relevance of that dynamic, by foregrounding it so forcefully at the start of a new season of one of the most popular series now on TV. Although the crown had lost most of its power abroad by the 1970s, its grip on Northern Ireland remained strong and demanding. However, the scene also demonstrates that if the British do not pull out of Ireland, Republican forces will only work harder and strategize more diligently and violently to make Britain recognize the futility of their rulership. It is evident in the series

that even though British leaders had pushed the Irish problem to the back burner, the Irish would work to ensure that Republican efforts were not in vain. At the same time, the scene addresses the fundamental issues that Irish Republicans were facing both before and during the Troubles. The Irish sought independence, freedom, and a fully united island, but were largely ignored by the British. For centuries, Republicans worked to create a system in which Ireland could be ruled for and by the Irish themselves – they sought the end of British colonial intervention and oppression – but many of the Conservative members of the British state dug in their heels.

Yet for all of its success in capturing the Irish cause and its history, *The Crown's* cold open manifests, even compounds, a gapping omission in how that cause and history are told—an omission that this thesis seeks to address: the pivotal role of women in the Northern Irish Troubles. The voiceover is offered by a man and mentions women only briefly for their actions; he does not include them among the imprisoned, nor in the rising militancy of the IRA. Men emerge as strong and violent enough to be imprisoned for their actions, but this does not leave adequate space in the movement for women. This project finds and posits that women were invaluable members of the Irish Republican movement, but that traditional historical narratives do not discuss their actions or their dedication to the cause because they actively work against stereotypes of women. This most recent, most widely disseminated pop culture view of the IRA augments this narrative, portraying the organization as male-dominated, ruthless, and violent. Women, and especially women in violent roles, are not mentioned in the series, largely to uphold society's understanding of gender roles.

Across traditional historical narratives, transcending fields and subfields, “women have been represented stereotypically as wives and mothers who are supportive towards, and supported by, their menfolk,” not as their own individuals with rights and agency, as June Purvis

and Amanda Weatherill have argued.<sup>3</sup> There is a strict dichotomy between men and women in all aspects of life: “nature/culture, work/family, public/private, equality/difference.”<sup>4</sup> Historians too define the past in terms of stereotypical gender roles. Although “incorporating the history of women would enrich the study of history” by adding more layers and deeper meanings, they are still often excluded, as Alice Kessler-Harris has shown.<sup>5</sup> This male-centered conception of the past is particularly prevalent in conversations about conflict, violence, and political strife. In these stories, men perform as military and governmental leaders while the women are left in charge of the family, the household, or, at best, peacekeeping. Men are the historical actors who possess agency, direction, and political prowess, and women are left to wait in the wings, with little to no voice. History rarely and only recently considers women as adequate soldiers, fighters, or activists, roles that are in direct opposition to the ideal view of womanhood and motherhood.

The historiography of the Troubles of Northern Ireland is no different – men are the violent, volatile actors, while women are the mothers, sisters, and daughters of the soldiers or victims, passive at best, forgotten entirely at worst. However, by ignoring their contributions to the Troubles, a full understanding of the conflict is impossible. This erasure of female efforts during the Troubles augments the historical narrative in favor of men’s actions and successes. It ignores the fact that women held active, violent roles in organizations like the Irish Republican Army, were involved in crucial peacekeeping operations, defied gender stereotypes, and were activists at all levels of society. This thesis restores women to the Irish historical narrative by examining their contribution to the Republican movement. Further, building on the centrality of

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<sup>3</sup>June Purvis and Amanda Weatherill, “History and the Challenge of Gender History” in *The Feminist History Reader*, ed. Sue Mogan (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Corfield, Piurvis, Weatherill, “History and the Challenge,” 122.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, “Do We Still Need Women’s History?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 54, no. 15 (7 December 2007): pp. 2.

motherhood to Irish society, wherein women were charged with molding their children's thoughts and actions by acting "as domestic aids... dominated by Irish militarism and patriarchy," I explore how previous generations of Irish Republican women influenced those active during the Troubles.<sup>6</sup> I evaluate these connections and show how strong and meaningful the matrilineal ties – both in terms of true genetic links, as well as inspirational ones – between these generations of women truly were in order to demonstrate that the Irish Republican movement could not have succeeded without the influence and aid of women across time and space. Indeed, I argue that this connection between generations of Republican women was one of the largest indicators of which women of the Troubles would become violent, and which would turn to peace.

The vast majority of historians of the Troubles view the conflict in the 1960s-1990s in a vacuum. These scholars do not fully investigate how previous violent events, such as the Easter Rebellion and the Irish Civil War, created the fuel for the religious and political fire. They consider the Troubles to be a unique, disconnected entity.<sup>7</sup> I, however, find that in order to fully understand the scope and significance of the conflict, as well as the role that women played within different organizations, it is important to acknowledge the influence of previous generations. Without this consideration, we miss the true grievances of Irish Republican women – exclusion, censorship, and erasure from history. The male-dominated Republican organizations refused women entry dating back to the early 1880s, but women still managed to play a significant part within the movement.<sup>8</sup> As such, this thesis seeks to unearth the ideological ties

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<sup>6</sup> Wei H. Kao, "Awakening from the Troubles in Anne Devlin's 'Ourselves Alone,'" *An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 103, No. 410, *Imagined Community: Irish Identities* (Summer 2014): 171, <https://jstor.org/stable/24327820>.

<sup>7</sup> Michael L. Storey, *Representing the Troubles in Irish Short Fiction* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 185.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 4.

between different generations of Irish women, as well as place women back into the historical narrative of the conflict.

This thesis shows that the women who became violent members in the Irish Republican Army were most closely connected to active, Republican women of previous generations. These women grew up learning about Republicanism, about nationalism, and about the importance of maintaining an Irish identity. Their ancestors influenced their violent actions, as well as how they behaved in prison. Conversely, women who joined peace organizations and politics either rejected their foremothers' Republican ideology or were less influenced by it. They did not have the same connection and indoctrination as the fighting women, so were far less likely to participate in violent activities. These were the women who chose peace and unity over Republicanism. This is important because it gives an indication of which women were more likely to turn to violence in the Troubles, and which would advocate for peace.

The Troubles are a highly contested era in Irish historiography. From the late 1960s to the late 1990s, life, politics, and society in both Ireland and Northern Ireland were defined by the conflict. In much of the literature, scholars describe it as a sectarian political battle for control of Northern Ireland, as well as a civil rights movement for Catholics living in Ulster.<sup>9</sup> Here was a conflict marked by its radical, guerrilla, tit-for-tat violence that resulted in over 3,600 civilian and paramilitary casualties. Historians of Ireland, including Ian McBride, Margaret Ward, and Michael Storey, generally agree, though are separated along religious fault lines, that the true cause of the Troubles was the Catholic fight for Irish Republicanism. McBride, a historian from a Catholic background, for example, understands them as “an ethnic conflict, a clash of cultures,

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<sup>9</sup> Patrick Radden Keefe, *Say Nothing* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019), 15. Ian McBride, “The Truth About the Troubles,” in *Remembering the Troubles*, ed. Jim Smyth (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 10.

and anticolonial struggle, or a terrorist campaign... about self-determination.”<sup>10</sup> He believes that “Republican insurgents saw themselves as fighting a war against the British state. But the IRA campaign was activated and fueled by street disturbances between Protestant and Catholic crowds,” as Loyalists “frequently provided the spark that lit the violent fuse.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Ward considers them primarily as an issue of Irish nationalism versus British rule.<sup>12</sup> Protestant historians, such as Eric P. Kaufmann, however, argue that even if their coreligionists were the initial aggressors, it was the violent retaliations of the Catholics that perpetuated the conflict.<sup>13</sup> Although a truce was reached between the two sides in 1998, most historians still agree that the animosity between the two sides lingers.<sup>14</sup>

The primary focus of most of the literature on the Troubles is upon the conflict itself – historians discuss the actions of violent men, politicians, and paramilitary organizations. The vast majority of scholarship excludes women and their achievements in their entirety. Catholic scholars, such as McBride, generally depict the Catholic leaders of the IRA as having “grown up surrounded by Protestants... who would spit every time [Catholic families] passed” their doors – the IRA men were those who were “born into a family tradition” of radical Republicanism.<sup>15</sup> Keefe states that the men were deeply steeped in religious animosity from birth and became “fearless and cunning” soldiers with the ability to “mastermind any operation” against their Protestant foes.<sup>16</sup> These male leaders “regarded [themselves] as soldier[s], not politician[s]” who

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<sup>10</sup> McBride, “The Truth About the Troubles,” 14.

<sup>11</sup> McBride, “The Truth About the Troubles,” 16.

<sup>12</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 248.

<sup>13</sup> Eric P. Kaufmann, *The Orange Order: A Contemporary Northern Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Marie Smyth and Marie-Therese Fay, ed., *Personal Accounts from Northern Ireland's Troubles*. (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 62. McBride, “The Truth About the Troubles,” 10.

<sup>16</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 63.



would stop at nothing to fulfill their orders.<sup>17</sup> They believed that their cause was justifiable, noble, and worthy because of the constant aggression of neighboring Protestants.

The few scholars who have dealt with the history of women during the Troubles, such as Carmel Roulston and Wei H. Kao, explain that their female subjects sought to embody the “spiritualised and etherealised” image of “Mother Ireland”; women were “domestic, docile, and/or devoted” to their families, to peace, and to maintaining the traditional social order.<sup>18</sup> Irish society – Protestant and Catholic alike – shared the belief that women, and especially mothers, had a unique insight into the needs and interests of the community. It expected women to raise their children in faith and in peace, as women desired peace and stability over all else.<sup>19</sup> Both communities rarely associated women with radical or violent organizations and movements. Because of this, when women mobilized for a cause, their successes were “often achieved by reference to their responsibilities in and for the family.”<sup>20</sup> For example, Roulston and Storey explain that Irish women often opted for non-violent, peaceful movements, instead of more violent avenues.<sup>21</sup> However, these historians have “perceived the women’s intervention merely as female acquiescence to [Catholic] religious authority,’ rather than as evidence of the women’s ability to bring a peaceful resolution to the Troubles.”<sup>22</sup> The historians claim that the women only joined peace movements because it was their duty as Catholic women, not because they had a genuine desire for activism. As a result, and feeding into traditional historical understandings, the scholarship has relegated the women of the Troubles to doomed roles marked by and geared towards passivity and peace.

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<sup>17</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 64. McBride, “The Truth About the Troubles,” 11.

<sup>18</sup> Kao, “Awakening from the Troubles,” 169.

<sup>19</sup> Carmel Roulston, “Women on the Margin: The Women’s Movement in Northern Ireland, 1973-1988,” *Science & Society*, Vol. 53, No. 2, Marxist Perspectives on Ireland (Summer 1989): 222, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40402997>.

<sup>20</sup> Roulston, “Women on the Margin,” 222.

<sup>21</sup> Roulston, “Women on the Margin,” 228.

<sup>22</sup> Storey, “Gender and Nationalism,” 193.

More recently, however, there has been a small influx of historians exploring the complexity of roles for women involved in the Troubles. For example, Margaret Ward's monograph, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, describes the roles that women played in early Irish Republican movements. Her work focuses specifically on the actions and political activities of Ladies' Land League, Inghinidhe na hEireann, and Cumann na mBan of the early 1880s to the late 1940s. She addresses the fact that "very little has been written about this unique period" of female agency and violence, stating that the male Republican leaders preferred to expunge the efforts of women in order to focus upon their male successes.<sup>23</sup> Ward, however, finds that the women were crucial members of these early Republican organizations – these women paved the way for later generations of female Republicans.

Storey is in close conversation with Ward. For both, no longer are women simply depicted as peacemakers; they are granted more agency, both violent and political, and are included in narratives of paramilitary organizations. Storey shows that "throughout history, and especially since the late nineteenth century, women have played significant, albeit unsung, roles in the revolutionary struggle for Ireland's independence."<sup>24</sup> These revolutionary women were particularly active in Irish struggles "from the land agitation of the 1880s" to the present day through their roles in "their own organizations and institutions."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the goal of his history is to "challenge the assumption that women [were] the passive bystanders of a war between male factions" and prove that women played active, often aggressive roles in various women's and men's organizations, and thus changed the fabric of the nationalist conflict.<sup>26</sup> His work

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<sup>23</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> Storey, "Gender and Nationalism," 179.

<sup>25</sup> Storey, "Gender and Nationalism," 180.

<sup>26</sup> Storey, "Gender and Nationalism," 191.

addresses the early generations of Republican women and expands upon Ward's by specifically addressing the paramilitary roles of women within the Troubles.

Complementing and extending this lively scholarly conversation, my project too approaches the Troubles from a gendered perspective that rejects the typically male-dominated conversation – I work against the stereotype that women could only be useful and successful in peace-keeping roles or in maintaining the family. Additionally, I show how influential and meaningful previous generations of Republican women were for those of the Troubles. Toward these ends, I analyze correspondence, newspapers, photographs, and video and print interviews stretching from the late 1880s to the 1990s. Each primary source highlights the extent to which women were involved in the Republican movement: most were either written by or centered on women. Although there are men present, even dominant, in many of my primary sources, I endeavor to read against the grain to see how women fit into the dialogue. Additionally, because many of the organizations I discuss were secretive, very few records are available in the public domain to maintain the anonymity of the members. As such, this thesis is founded on the available sources and was limited by these records. Despite the lack of records, this thesis fills some of the gaps in the existing literature, while also working to connect two distinct conversations about women in different generations within the Irish Republican movement. Although Storey and Ward study how women were involved within the movement, they focus only on one generation – either the women of the early movement, or the women of the Troubles. They do not consider how the women who were active in the Troubles were connected to and influenced by the previous generations of Republicans, as I seek to.

What follows is in four main sections. The first highlights the women of the early days of the movement, while the latter three focus more specifically on the women of the Troubles and

into the peace accords. This thematic organization allows me to simultaneously trace the influence and importance of the previous generation of women on the women in the Troubles and discuss how critical women were in the conflict. The first chapter examines “The Mothers” of the Republican movement, that is, the women of the Ladies’ Land League, Inghinidhe na hEireann, and Cumann na mBan. It ranges from the 1880s fight for Irish Home Rule to the late 1910s aftermath of the Easter Rebellion and relies chiefly on correspondence between members of the women’s organizations and photographs from meetings and events. The second section privileges “The Fighters” of the Troubles, the women who participated in violent roles within the Irish Republican army, as well as how these women were directly influenced by previous generations of Republican women and justified their aggressive actions because of the worthiness of their cause. Relying on interviews with women who fought for the IRA and were imprisoned for their actions, I reveal why they were willing to fight for the cause. The third section addresses “The Peacekeepers.” This section, which stems largely from newspaper articles and interviews, focuses on the leaders of the Irish Peace movement and the women who attempted to usher in unity and cohesion in Northern Ireland and end the incessant violence of the era. The fourth and final section examines “The Politicians,” a section that highlights the women that partially fit into two groups. These are the women who were active in the Republican movement, but also facilitated talks of peace.

I chose this approach of splitting the women into different categories of like-minded individuals in order to more clearly see the patterns that emerge. For example, it is easier to see that the women who became violent were more connected to the women of previous generations – the Fighters would not have become fighters without this maternal influence. Similarly, the women who turned to peace had little-to-no connection to previous Republican movements.

They did not feel the need to fight for the Republican cause, and instead worked to promote a lasting peace. My organization scheme helps to bring this argument to light – each section plays off of one another and influences the others.

## **The Mothers:**

This section follows the Mothers of the Irish Republican Movement. It relies heavily on newspaper articles and speeches from the era and highlights both the roles that these Republican women held, as well as how society viewed them. The chapter focuses on the women who created a space for themselves within a male dominated society and centers upon the women who educated the next generations of Republicans by indoctrinating them into the cause. Their influence and legacy lasted long after the disbanding of the early women's organizations through their stories and legends. These women were the educators of the next generation of Republican women and provided the spark that lit the violent fuse of the Troubles. The Republican movement lived through these women, these Mothers.

### ***Ladies Land League (1881-1882)***

In the late 1800s, Irish political discussions in Dublin were primarily centered on the call for Home Rule. Many, including Charles Parnell and Douglas Hyde, as well as Liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone, supported the Irish cause for British emancipation. These men claimed that citizens of Ireland needed to unify their beliefs and “act in opposition to every English government which refused to concede the just rights of Ireland” in order to uphold and maintain the “name of Ireland and to retain her nationhood.”<sup>27</sup> Initially, the primary method to combat British rule in Ireland was to focus on the unmet needs of the poor, tenant farmers – a demographic that was frequently ignored and abused by British politicians. The leaders of the Home Rule movement, namely Charles Parnell, demanded that the farming industry, and

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Parnell, “Parnell in Cork, January 1885,” in *Ireland, 1870-1914: Coercion and Conciliation*, ed. O’Corrain, Donnachadh, O’Riordan, and Tomas (Dublin: Four Courts, 2010), 5.

therefore tenant farmers, should “not be fettered by rent,” so that Irish land could be farmed, owned, and ruled by Irishmen.<sup>28</sup> They denounced the outrageous evictions of poor farmers as “cowardly and disgraceful practices” that merely brought about disunity and inequality.<sup>29</sup> By focusing on the poor majority of Ireland, the early leaders of the Home Rule and the Irish Republican movements began to gain a small, but vocal following. In the late 1880s, men were the primary leaders of both movements. These men only turned to the leadership of women when the men physically could no longer lead – when British officials forcibly removed the men from the situation by arresting the leaders. Therefore, it was the women who helped to carry the movement forward.

In the late 1870s and 1880s, the peasantry and tenant farmers made up the majority of the population of Ireland. It was a time defined by inequitable “land distribution and high rents... in which 800 landlords owned half the country.”<sup>30</sup> Throughout the country, “peasants still scraped out a living on their tiny plots” of borrowed land, but rising rent expectations, “cruelly frustrated by a new series of disastrous [potato] harvests,” left the poor in dire need of assistance.<sup>31</sup> It was at this time that Charles Parnell, leader of the Irish Home Rule campaign, became president of the Irish National Land League, an organization designed by men, and run by men, to promote the reduction of land rents, as well as the ownership of the soil by those who lived on and worked it.<sup>32</sup> The Land League was, at its core, battling against the unjust eviction of impoverished farmers who were unable to pay their land rent because the leaders believed that if a man could pay rent and keep his home, he could remain financially afloat. The leaders of the organization encouraged farmers to be “bold and stern” in their actions, to “set [their] faces as a

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<sup>28</sup> Parnell, “Cork.”

<sup>29</sup> Charles Parnell, “Parnell’s Speech on the Home Rule Bill, 1886,” in *Ireland, 1870-1914: Coercion and Conciliation*, ed. O’Corrain, Donnachadh, O’Riordan, and Tomas (Dublin: Four Courts, 2010), 15.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 8.

<sup>31</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, London and New York, Harper & Row, 1904, 164.

flint, and swear to hold [their] own” against the aggravation of their landlords.<sup>33</sup> However, the Irish government, which was largely made up of wealthy, male landowners, both Irish and British, as well as Catholic and Protestant, targeted the Land League and worked to outlaw the organization for aiding the poor majority. Under the Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act, a coercion act targeting conspiracies against landlords, British officials began to arrest the members of the Land League.<sup>34</sup> Following such official condemnation, the Land League was left with two primary options: either step back and force the peasant farmers into greater poverty or create an alternate form of leadership to take over for the arrested men. The men would be forced to rely on female leadership.

After the Land League was outlawed, there were desperate pleas among female Irish Republicans across Ireland, as well as America, for the formation of a sister organization to promote the same ideals as the original group. In August of 1880, Fanny Parnell, one of Charles Parnell’s sisters, and an Irish nationalist in her own right, and Jane Byrne, a woman from New York City, created the New York Ladies’ Land League.<sup>35</sup> They worked to raise money and awareness for rent relief, but recognized that the “real solution lay in the agitation being carried out in Ireland,” not in the fundraising in America.<sup>36</sup> The pair urged Irish women to establish a similar organization to the New York Ladies’ Land League that would take over the protection of the tenant farmers – primarily through fundraising and land agitation – when the men were arrested. However, many of the original male leaders initially refused to offer support for a sister

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<sup>33</sup> Parnell, Fanny. “Hold the Harvest.” *History Ireland*, 1881, <https://www.historyireland.com/home-rule/anna-fanny-parnell/>. Accessed 11 November, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act, [https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1881/mar/22/protection-of-person-and-property#S3V0259P0\\_18810322\\_HOC\\_25](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1881/mar/22/protection-of-person-and-property#S3V0259P0_18810322_HOC_25).

<sup>35</sup> Fanny Parnell, ODNB, accessed March 11, 2021. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1007411?rsk=1vsVzK&result=1>.

<sup>36</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 12.



organization because they were afraid that they would be subject to “public ridicule” if they were relegated to relying on women for public agitation.<sup>37</sup> These men agreed when they recognized that this “most dangerous experiment” was the only feasible solution to the issue of proscription.<sup>38</sup> The only way the Land League could continue in any form, let alone promote change, was to allow women to take power and serve in leadership positions.

In January of 1881, in the midst of the male leaders’ arrests, the Ladies’ Land League was officially founded and worked concurrently with the male-led Land League. Anna Parnell, the second sister of Charles Parnell, was the face of the new women’s movement. She worked to fight for the Irish poor because, as she stated, she “refused to be pleased and happy when [the tenant farmers were] turned out of their homes in the dead of winter;” she refused to remain passive as the male leaders of the Land League were arrested for aiding the poor.<sup>39</sup> Her initial goal, beyond promoting the welfare of tenant farmers, was to instill “self-confidence into the women who were beginning to offer their services;” they were told to “depend upon [them]selves and do things for [them]selves and to organize [them]selves.<sup>40</sup> The women at the helm of the organization quickly determined that charity and raising money alone were not sufficient to address the issues that the tenant farmers were facing. Instead, adopting “the program of a permanent resistance until the aim of the League [was] attained was the only logical” plan.<sup>41</sup> These women chose to continue the actions, violently, if necessary, that their male predecessors had begun. By the end of the year, there were 21 women in reserves that were prepared to step in as the leaders were arrested.<sup>42</sup> This new organization run by women, and justified by men, granted the female Irish population a unique opportunity to work on their own

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<sup>37</sup> Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, 310.

<sup>38</sup> Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, 299.

<sup>39</sup> Anna Parnell, “Claremorris Speech,” 19 February 1881.

<sup>40</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Anna Parnell, “Claremorris Speech,” 19 February 1881.

<sup>42</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 15.

projects, free from male influence and sway, and have a say in the political activities of the time. The organization was one of the first examples of female agency in Ireland – for the first time, Irish women were leading themselves. Although the organization existed because of the absence of men within the movement, women were able to promote and act without the guidance and leadership of male counterparts. The women’s organization flourished and was successful in its aims of helping Ireland’s poor.

As a result of the organization’s goals and successes, women across the country were spurred into action. They were encouraged, by both male and female leaders, to “form [them]selves into branches of the Ladies’ Land League” and were told to “be ready to give information of evictions in [their] districts [and] to give advice and encouragement to the unhappy victims.”<sup>43</sup> They were tasked with these roles, much as the men were, in order to provide the organization with figures and statistics about the poor population. Because of this influx of information, the Ladies’ Land League was able to provide aid, funds, and food to those in need. The ranks of the Ladies’ Land League quickly spread across Ireland and grew by a few thousand women who volunteered their services, time, and money to the organization. They worked throughout the country to support evicted tenant farmers. Additionally, as a way to prevent landlords from quickly redistributing evicted farmers’ lands, a practice known as “land-grabbing,” the League provided monetary aid to the farmers and erected small wooden huts on the land. Although the women’s practices were expensive and the government continued fighting against their interventions through male incarceration, the women of the Ladies’ Land League chapters across Ireland continued their pursuit of justice and were quite successful,

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<sup>43</sup> Jenny Wyse Power, “The Political Influence of Women in Modern Ireland,” in W. Fitzgerald (ed.), *The Voice of Ireland*, Dublin and London, Virtue, 1924, pp.158-61.

largely because they were not frequently arrested. Indeed, the women, particularly the Parnell sisters, went out of their way to confront the government in both their actions and their writings:

Tear up the parchment lie!  
Scatter its fragments to the hissing wind –  
And hear again the the People’s first and final cry:  
No more for you, O Lords, we’ll dig and grind;  
No more for you the Castle, and for us the Styel<sup>44</sup>

In this poem, Fanny Parnell urged the tenant farmers to ignore the demands of the landlords, ignore the arguments of the government. She claimed that if the people rise up together against their unjust bonds, they will create a society that works for everyone – a society that is not ruled by the wealthy few. She echoes the tenet of the Ladies’ Land League that the poverty-stricken Irish should no longer be forced to submit and obey the unjust orders of their landlords and the government – especially laws and Acts that targeted the poor. The Ladies’ Land League argued that the tenant farmers should have their own autonomy and land.

In the following months, more of the men from the Land League were arrested and the Ladies’ Land League was finally on its own – its male-led counterpart essentially became defunct. As a result of their independence, however, the League’s workload increased greatly. Now, “not only were they helping evicted families and supervising the building of Land League huts for those who had been left homeless, they also had to provide for the steadily increasing numbers of prisoners and their dependents.”<sup>45</sup> They were forced to dole out approximately 400 pounds a week to feed the prisoners and their families, as well as work to fundraise for the additional costs to support evicted tenant farmers. In response to the women’s struggling efforts, both British and Irish newspapers were scathing about the women’s ability to direct a campaign.<sup>46</sup> The women of the Ladies’ Land League were considered to be dangerous and

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<sup>44</sup> Parnell, Fanny, *Land League Songs* (Dublin: Ladies’ Land League, 1881).

<sup>45</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, October 24, 1881.

subversive by many Irishmen because they were breaking the typical, demure, passive Irish female stereotype – they were the actors being “consulted by the men” of the movement, instead of the other way around.<sup>47</sup> Notably, the Irish Catholic Church scorned the political activities of the women, with Archbishop McCabe claiming that they “forgot the modesty of their sex and the high dignity of their womanhood” because they displayed themselves before the public gaze in a character unworthy of a child of Mary.”<sup>48</sup> The men of Irish society did not view the women to be of good moral character.

Against all odds, however, the women were quickly becoming heroines across Ireland. Successful in “challenging the police without male support,” they formed at least 34 branches of the League in various cities and towns.<sup>49</sup> They defied the landlords and worked to promote resistance and independence through their anti-land-grabbing methods. However, in May of 1882, the government signed the Kilmainham Treaty with the men of the Land League that “agreed to release prisoners, deal with the question of rent arrears, and amend the Land Act,” thus creating the appearance of a male Land League victory, and taking all of the agency away from the women.<sup>50</sup> As the men were released from prison, they sought to retake their positions of power from the women. Three months after the signing of the Kilmainham Treaty, the Ladies’ Land League was disbanded. It was not until the formation of Inghinidhe na hEireann in 1900 that women were able to regain as much political authority and autonomy.

### ***Inghinidhe na hEireann (1900-1914)***

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<sup>47</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, October 24, 1881.

<sup>48</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, March 14, 1881.

<sup>49</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 31.

From 1882 to 1900, there were no formal political organizations for women in Ireland, nor was there a space for women in men's organizations. Although there were rare occurrences where singular women were able to break down the barrier and join men's groups, men expected the majority of women to return to their homes and their children – they were expected to be Irish mothers.<sup>51</sup> Maud Gonne, a wealthy, English-born Irish revolutionary, however, refused to sit idly by. Gonne's father, a captain in the British Army, left his daughter's education in the hands of a Republican governess who cultivated and encouraged Gonne's passionate Irish nationalism.<sup>52</sup> Because of her resources and passion, Gonne took it upon herself to create space for women within the strengthening Irish Republican movement – she believed that Irish women were integral players in Irish society and should have the ability to act as such. In 1900, the same year that Queen Victoria visited Ireland and hosted a celebration of children there, a new organization called the Patriotic Children's Treat Committee was formed, with Gonne the unanimous choice for president. The group was primarily made up of mothers who worked to organize a fete that would be lavish in scale and promote the Irish nationalist cause to over 25,000 children. Newspapers heralded the event claiming that “Dublin never witnessed anything so marvellous as the procession through its streets... of thirty thousand school children who refused to be bribed into parading before the Queen of England.”<sup>53</sup> Gonne and her unofficial women's organization worked tirelessly to influence the younger generation of Ireland into joining the Republican cause. They served as the mothers and teachers to Irish children, indoctrinating them into the movement.

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<sup>51</sup> Wei H. Kao, “Awakening from the Troubles in Anne Devlin's ‘Ourselves Alone,’” *An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 103, No. 410, Imagined Community: Irish Identities (Summer 2014): 169, <https://jstor.org/stable/24327820>.

<sup>52</sup> Maud Gonne, ODNB, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1004708?rskey=H9xEdV&result=1>.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Griffith, *The United Irishman*, May 25, 1900.

After the success of the Patriotic Children's Treat Committee had proven the women's talent and capabilities to the male-dominated Land League, the women agreed to form a permanent National Women's Committee. The primary goal of this organization was to educate young Irish girls "into an understanding of the national ideal" through extensive Irish history classes.<sup>54</sup> This group, however, quickly morphed into Inghinidhe na hEireann (Daughters of Erin). This new organization had many lofty goals including: "the re-establishment of the complete independence of Ireland," encouraging "the study of Gaelic, of Irish literature, History, Music, and art," particularly among the younger generations, supporting Irish manufacturing, and discouraging the promotion of British culture and imports.<sup>55</sup> Although the members were not necessarily mothers themselves, they embodied the stereotype of the Irish mother: a woman who worked to raise Irish children, as well as promote and revive Irish traditions in order to pass them on to the children. Because of this, they were not strictly at odds with the image of fundamental Irish motherhood – they were active Republicans, but maintained their typical role. These women worked to ensure that the next generation was fully equipped to revolt against the British should the opportunity arise.

Additionally, the rules for membership were quite strict. Women were required to "make a definite commitment" to the group, meaning that they had to be entirely loyal to the cause, had to adopt "Gaelic names to conceal their identity," and "all members had to be of Irish birth or descent."<sup>56</sup> Because the women's organization was so young, and had so many lofty goals, it was important that the women offered a united front against the British. They worked to bolster their loyalty and membership because, the fear was, if the women did not comply with all of these membership requirements, they would be less loyal to the cause and more likely to turn on the

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<sup>54</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 50.

<sup>55</sup> *Bean na hEireann*, March 1911.

<sup>56</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 52.

sisterhood. If they were unwilling to fully protect themselves and their fellow members, then the organization would fail before it had the chance to make a change.

Initially, Inghinidhe na hEireann focused primarily on the education of Irish children. The women of the organization taught the children this history of Ireland through heroic stories of Irish myth and legend. The women created a curriculum that highlighted the importance of Irish nationalism in every facet of their education. Through their emphasis on teaching, the organization had a “golden opportunity to inculcate nationalist sentiments into the future generation.”<sup>57</sup> The women of Inghinidhe na hEireann were literally guiding and shaping how their future soldiers would view Irish nationalism and Republicanism in relation to the British. This indoctrination, however, was “perceived by non-nationalists to be a great threat” to the stability of Britain in Ireland because the children were learning that England was the origin of all evil.<sup>58</sup> It was primarily the women’s organizations that pushed this nationalist agenda on Ireland’s children. Although the women had autonomy and control over their movement, women still acted solely as mothers and teachers, rather than as leaders, political beings, or fighters. They still fit into the typical role of Irish women, and had yet to break through female stereotypes.

Soon, though, Inghinidhe na hEireann began branching out from its educational focus. They began visiting West Dublin, where Irish girls would meet with British soldiers. There, the group handed out leaflets filled with anti-British propaganda to warn Irish women against the traitorous act of “consorting with the enemies of their country,”<sup>59</sup> reinforcing that they did “not sufficiently realize the power they [had] to help or hinder the cause of Ireland’s freedom” depending on which men they chose to marry. By marrying a British man, Irish women gave up

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<sup>57</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 53.

<sup>58</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 53.

<sup>59</sup> R.P. Davis, *Arthur Griffith and Non-Violent Sinn Fein*, Dundalk, Dundalgan Press, 1974, 14.

their power, as well as their ability to raise Irish children.<sup>60</sup> These leaflets were meant to show female readers their level of agency. They were able to pick who they wanted to marry, as well as who they wanted to associate with. In this way, *Inghinidhe na hEireann* appealed to the Irish woman's sense of maternal duty, purpose, and religious belief, claiming that any woman who cavorts with an English man is an impure traitor to Ireland.<sup>61</sup> They encouraged Irish women to recognize their important role in raising the future generation of Irish fighters.

By handing out these leaflets, the members begged other women to remember their own female predecessors and consider what “those noble women [would] think if they knew their daughters were associated with men belonging to that army, which [had] so often wrought ruin and havoc in Ireland, and murdered in cold blood thousands of Irishwomen and children.”<sup>62</sup> By calling upon this historical female precedence, the members honored the legacy and action of the women of the past – the mothers who raised Irish children in Republicanism, the mothers who taught their children Irish traditions and stories, the mothers who ensured that their children would not disgrace themselves with British sympathies. The *Inghinidhe* members, as mothers themselves, saw the importance of guiding their daughters back into the light of Irish nationalism and pride – they wanted to ensure that their daughters would be able to take over the leadership of Republican women's organizations when the mothers were gone. The women of *Inghinidhe na hEireann* employed this powerful rhetoric in their propaganda against the British in order to fully shame and convince Irish women to break their connections and ties with British soldiers. They referred to the British army as “the most degraded and immoral army in Europe” and claimed that the soldiers were “chiefly recruited in the slums of English cities, among men of the lowest

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<sup>60</sup> *Inghinidhe na hEireann: Irish Girls!* (Dublin: *Inghinidhe na hEireann*, 1910).

<sup>61</sup> *Irish Girls!*, 1910.

<sup>62</sup> *Irish Girls!*, 1910.



and most depraved characters.”<sup>63</sup> The women argued that because soldiers in Ireland had wreaked havoc in the past, “they would slaughter [Irish] kith and kin and murder women and children again... unhesitatingly.”<sup>64</sup> Although the Inghinidhe members were often driven away by the angry soldiers, who often were linked to Irish women, as they handed out their pamphlets to Irish women, the members persisted in their promotion of Irish ideals. The British soldiers actively worked against the women in order to continue courting Irish girls.

In addition, when King Edward VII was scheduled to visit Dublin in 1903, the women of the organization were the first to protest his arrival. They encouraged women electors in Dublin (where women were allowed to vote in local elections) to vote against the candidates who openly supported Queen Victoria and her visits to Ireland, as they did not work towards the Republican cause.<sup>65</sup> The women stormed political rallies and questioned political leaders about their views on Irish nationalism. They went as far as to force the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Tim Harrington, out of office by helping voters to recognize that he was too sympathetic to the British cause.<sup>66</sup> The women, headed by Gonne, worked to ensure that the nationalist city of Dublin would deny the King of England entrance. Although they failed to prevent his visit, by voting loyalists out of office the women helped usher in an era in which Dublin refused to recognize the British monarch for the first time since the Norman invasion.<sup>67</sup> They helped to create a space in which Irish nationalism could develop and flourish as the Irish came to fully reject their subordination to the British crown. They left a legacy of Republicanism that lasted generations.

Although Inghinidhe na hEireann was quite successful in many of its early campaigns, after the organization joined forces with Sinn Fein, its leadership and political prowess began to

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<sup>63</sup> *Irish Girls!*, 1910.

<sup>64</sup> *Irish Girls!*, 1910.

<sup>65</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 59.

<sup>66</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 62.

<sup>67</sup> Chantal Deutsch-Brady, “The King’s Visit and the People’s Protection Committee 1903,” *Eire-Ireland*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1975, 3-10.

fade. The women of Inghinidhe na hEireann sought to participate in actions that would garner the most attention and publicity as possible – they refused to let the men in positions of power ignore them. The organization was unique among Irish nationalist movements: “they brought a new dimension to nationalist life, imbuing the movement with a theatrical element which stirred the imagination and aroused more emotion than a thousand meetings or earnest resolutions ever did.”<sup>68</sup> The women had the opportunity to reach a larger crowd by influencing men and other women, as well as children. They were responsible for lighting the flame that became the Republican movement. But, arguably most importantly, they offered women a “means of escaping from the confines of their usual roles” as mothers, wives, and housekeepers.<sup>69</sup> They provided the space for women to be political. However, at its worst, the organization was not always united under one front and suffered poor leadership. There “were many contradictions in the Inghinidhe position” about issues of nationalism, women’s suffrage, and feminism, which ultimately doomed the organization.<sup>70</sup> The women could not agree on the caliber of their missions, nor could they reconcile their differing views of an Irish woman’s place in society – a disagreement that ultimately led to the group’s demise. The conflicts between the traditional Irish woman and the radicalized woman grew too strong and forced the organization to splinter and weaken. The women, as well as Ireland, could not reconcile these two, distinct types of women, and, thus, the organization could not persist. It soon became evident that the organization was no longer capable of mobilizing large numbers of women because, despite their tireless efforts, their responses to British rule became more and more tame as leadership shifted to more passive

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<sup>68</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 58.

<sup>69</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 59.

<sup>70</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 73.

women.<sup>71</sup> The legacy of the political women of Inghinidhe na hEireann, however, lived on through the newest women's group – Cumann na mBan.

### ***Cumann na mBan (1914-1940)***

At the same time Inghinidhe na hEireann was fading, there was an upsurge in militancy, particularly in the North of Ireland, centered around Belfast. Both Unionists, led by the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), and Republicans, led by the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Volunteers, began to prepare for an armed, violent conflict. Initially, although women were allowed to attend meetings of the Irish Volunteers, they were limited to a gallery room “specially set apart for them,” thus negating and dismissing the roles that women had played in previous Republican organizations.<sup>72</sup> The male leaders relegated women to the role of passive observers, who were “excluded from any meaningful participation in political events,” even though they had been active players in the movement in the previous women's organizations.<sup>73</sup> The Irish Volunteers worked to ensure that there was a place for women at the table, as the women were great fundraisers, but in his presidential speech, Eoin MacNeill simply claimed that along with the violent, active positions for men, “there [would] also be work for women to do,” thus implying that women would not be able to fill any militant roles.<sup>74</sup> He, along with many of his male comrades, shunted women to the sidelines, rather than allowing them agency and active roles. Instead of working to provide women with active jobs, the leaders of the Irish Volunteers were working to strike a balance between the men who refused to have women participating in the movement and those who welcomed the efforts of the Republican women. Even when male

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<sup>71</sup> *Sinn Fein*, March 19, 1910.

<sup>72</sup> *The Irish Citizen*, July 5, 1913.

<sup>73</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 90.

<sup>74</sup> Eoin MacNeill, “Presidential Speech” (Speech, Dublin, 1914).

leaders provided the women with tasks to promote the cause, they were traditionally feminine roles, such as raising funds for uniforms and weapons, sewing Irish flags, and cooking for the Irish Volunteers meetings.<sup>75</sup>

In April of 1914, Irish women were able to carve out a private, female space for themselves in the larger Republican movement. They created their own organization led by and for women that was designed to aid men, while still maintaining the female domestic sphere. Cumann na mBan was founded, initially, for “women who did not need to work; women whose husbands or fathers were already involved with the Irish Volunteers.”<sup>76</sup> It was designed not to discuss or debate political issues, but to help arm and provide for the men. The organization did not provide women with roles that would challenge male prejudices against them, but rather reinforced traditional gender norms. Agnes O’Farrelly, the first president of Cumann na mBan, maintained that nationalist women should simply extend their domestic concerns to the public sphere, meaning that any violence that the men participated in, and that the women helped to promote, would protect their children and homes.<sup>77</sup> As such, women continued fundraising to provide arms to male fighters and began teaching young children about the importance of defending oneself from British rule. They stayed out of the violent, militant clashes between the men of the Irish Volunteers and the UVF.

Although the women of Cumann na mBan were pleased to have some level of autonomy in their own organization because they wanted to be a part of the mass movement, there was a great deal of pushback from more radical Republican women, such as Mary Colum and Countess Markievicz, because of the lack of violent action within the group. They wanted the opportunity to be a part of the mass movement, but wanted to be members of an independent organization,

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<sup>75</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 103.

<sup>76</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 92-93.

<sup>77</sup> *The Irish Volunteer*, April 18, 1914.

instead of being merely an offshoot of the Irish Volunteers.<sup>78</sup> These radical women wanted to be more than a subordinate augmentation of the men's organization, especially because the Irish Volunteers were fighting for the rights of Irishmen, not Irishmen and -women. They believed that in order for all citizens of a united Ireland to have full citizenship and voting rights, the women would have to fight for themselves.<sup>79</sup> As a result, when the Irish Volunteers suggested Cumann na mBan's subordinate role in the movement, the women reacted quickly and passionately, claiming that they were "not the auxiliaries or the handmaidens or the camp-followers of the Volunteers – [they were] their allies. [They were] an independent body with [their] own executive and [their] own constitution."<sup>80</sup>

After Cumann na mBan moved away from the leadership of the Irish Volunteers, the first women who joined "this new, mass-based organization, came... from strongly nationalist families who supported this commitment" to the Republican cause.<sup>81</sup> These women had been steeped in the ideas of violent Republicanism from birth, and offered their full support in any way they could. They were raised hearing stories of British injustices, particularly with regards to the Potato Famine and the Home Rule debate. Initially, the women organized classes in first aid, stretcher bearing, as well as drill and signaling in order to properly educate their members on what to do if battles were to occur. By the end of 1915, however, "a militaristic fervour was sweeping through the organization," leading the women to delve deeper into arms dealing.<sup>82</sup> Although only the men's auxiliaries were able to use the guns, the women, because they were less suspicious than their male counterparts, smuggled the guns to and from Belfast and Dublin.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *The Irish Citizen*, May 30, 1914.

<sup>79</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 96.

<sup>80</sup> *Irish Freedom*, September 1914.

<sup>81</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 102.

<sup>82</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 103.

<sup>83</sup> Ina Connolly Heron, "James Connolly – A Biography," *Liberty*, August 1966. Journal of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.

Their roles were not strictly violent, but the women supported the violent actions that the men of the Irish Volunteers took against the British.

During the lead up to the Easter Rising of 1916, the Cumann na mBan women were particularly important. Although they were not involved in the actual fighting, nor were they arrested and executed like their male counterparts, the women were invaluable in spreading information, plans, and the Proclamation of the Republic itself. The male leaders sent these women from Dublin to Cork, Enniscorthy, Tralee, Waterford, and Belfast – all cities that were Republican strongholds in order to alert other branches of the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan of the events of the Rising.<sup>84</sup> The women, because British men considered them inconspicuous and unassuming, were able to slip past British blockades, bringing food, first aid, and information with them. The women worked valiantly to ensure that the male leaders of the movement were able to know the true events of the Rebellion, as the cities were rife with disinformation and anti-Republican propaganda. After the Irish Volunteers' surrendered to the British after the Easter Rebellion failed, a surrender that the women were not required to take part in as they were nurses and couriers, not fighters, the male leaders praised the women for their "bravery, heroism and devotion in the face of danger."<sup>85</sup> Although the women were not serving in violent roles, their efforts were invaluable. They willingly put themselves at risk for the Republican cause, and chose to continue the fight for the movement after the Rebellion. Even though the "armed rebellion had been crushed and Ireland [had been] left in a state of shock which gradually turned into bitter resentment of the British... only the women remained free to consolidate this new mood and generate a new movement" against British occupation in

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<sup>84</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 108.

<sup>85</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 115.

Ireland.<sup>86</sup> Republican women took it upon themselves, with their commitment and zest for the cause, to move forward with the Irish Republican movement.

Throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, women were prominent, albeit unsung, members of the Irish Republican Movement. They created women's organizations to promote the cause, while maintaining their roles as mothers and wives. Women carried the cause forward when the men were imprisoned. They educated the younger generations of children and indoctrinated the Republican ideals in them, though simultaneously worked to reject the stereotype that women could only take care of children and the house as well as the society that confined them to these domestic roles by adopting more active measures. Their legacy of action, political prowess, and the promotion of women's rights carried forth into the subsequent generations of Irish women, lighting the spark that grew into a bonfire of female Irish Republicanism. These were the women who shaped the next generation – the women who educated and influenced the active, violent members of the Troubles.

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<sup>86</sup> Ward, *Unmanageable*, 118.

## The Fighters:

After the formation of the Republic of Ireland in 1921, the aggression and urgency of the Irish Republican cause lessened, and with it, the emphasis on women as the mothers of the movement began to fade. Although remnants of early Republican organizations, such as Cumann na mBan and the original Irish Republican Army, lingered and many citizens supported the unification of the island, there was a relative measure of peace. However, even under the rule of law and order, the stark divisions between Catholics and Protestants, Republicans and Unionists, grew deeper, spurred by the rising inequality in Northern Irish society. These entrenched communities founded on traditionalism and nationalism “profoundly shaped the emergence of the Northern Ireland conflict,” according to historian Ian McBride.<sup>87</sup> By the mid-1960s, historian Ronnie Munck explains, the Protestant-led government of Northern Ireland had created systems in which the Catholic minority could not buy homes, work equal jobs, and, in some cases, vote.<sup>88</sup> Londonderry, or Derry to Catholics, was known as “the focal point of discrimination” in Northern Ireland as two-thirds of the population voted anti-Unionist, but, because of the gerrymandering of electoral districts, the council was two-thirds Unionist.<sup>89</sup> Throughout the region, Protestant-led organizations actively worked to suppress the voices and desires of Catholic citizens. In response to these vast inequalities, the Catholics of Derry developed a civil rights campaign to highlight and target injustices, as well as promote Catholic inclusion in all aspects of life. From this campaign, the IRA of the Troubles was born.

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<sup>87</sup> Ian McBride, “The Truth About the Troubles,” in *Remembering the Troubles*, ed. Jim Smyth (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 12.

<sup>88</sup> Ronnie Munck, “The Making of the Troubles In Northern Ireland,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 27, No. 2 (Apr. 1992), 213.

<sup>89</sup> Munck, “Making of the Troubles,” 214.



Although Loyalists and the British Army believed the IRA to be fighting simply for civil rights and nationalism, the IRA campaign portrayed their armed struggle as a “form of anticolonial struggle... a continuation of the IRA campaign of 1919-21.”<sup>90</sup> They claimed that they were fighting against the same British rule, against the same British army, and, ultimately, against the same British crown as their ancestors. They were creating a society in which non-violent Catholics “felt they could identify with the hurt and anger” caused by the British Loyalists.<sup>91</sup> The leaders of the IRA worked to appeal to Irish men and women who felt oppressed and mistreated by the Protestant government in order to garner support for their cause. This rhetoric and the development of a paramilitary system appealed to a wider demographic of Northern Irish citizens – namely, women. As Storey explains, during the early days of the Troubles, due to the “combination of female insistence and male recognition of the necessity of having some militarily trained women” to successfully push the Republican movement forward, women were welcomed into violent roles within the IRA.<sup>92</sup> The male leaders allowed women to fill the positions that their female ancestors held as teachers, nurses, and menders, as well as to take on new, more demanding positions. They were bombers, ammunition transporters, and prisoners. The women of the IRA were fighters.

The fighting women of the IRA were deeply influenced by the previous generations of Republican women. They were the daughters and granddaughters of Cumann na mBan and Inghinidhe na hEireann. They were heavily steeped in stories of Republicanism, nationalism, and Catholicism. Without this connection to the past, these women likely would not have taken on such violent, dangerous roles within the Republican movement. This section relies heavily on

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<sup>90</sup> McBride, “The Truth about the Troubles,” 16.

<sup>91</sup> McBride, “The Truth about the Troubles,” 21.

<sup>92</sup> Michael L. Storey, *Representing the Troubles in Irish Short Fiction* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 192.

documentaries made in the 2010s that highlight each of the named women. Although the documentaries were filmed after the end of the Troubles, the women's understanding about their violent actions and the roles that they played within the movement had not changed. None of the women stated any regret about the decisions they made. Each woman remained dedicated to Republicanism and to the violent means of the movement for their entire lives.

### ***The Price Sisters***

Dolours and Marian Price were born in the heart of a Catholic, Republican neighborhood in Belfast, Northern Ireland in the 1950s. Their parents, Albert and Chrissie Price both “shared a fierce commitment to the cause of Irish republicanism” and believed that “the Irish had a duty to expel [the British] by any means necessary.”<sup>93</sup> Albert was a member of the IRA in the 1930s and raised his two daughters with violent stories of Republican heroes and patriots who lost their lives in the Easter Rebellion. When they were small children, the girls would not hear bedtime stories of “Little Red Riding Hood, [they] would hear ‘they hanged my mate, Jimmy.’”<sup>94</sup> Chrissie and her own mother, Granny Dolan, had been members of Cumann na mBan and served time at Armagh jail for wearing orange, white, and green Easter lilies, a banned emblem of Republicanism. The rest of the Price family was just as committed, if not more so, to the Irish cause – nearly every older member of the family had been to prison for violence, theft, or insurrection.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, the sisters’ aunt, Bridie Price, who “lost both hands and her eyesight when a bomb she was assembling accidentally blew up,” never expressed “any regret for having made

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<sup>93</sup>Patrick Radden Keefe, *Say Nothing* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019), 15. Ian McBride, “The Truth About the Troubles,” in *Remembering the Troubles*, ed. Jim Smyth (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 11.

<sup>94</sup>*I, Dolours*, directed by Maurice Sweeney (2018; Ireland: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland), 4:55.

<sup>95</sup>Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 12

such a sacrifice in the name of a united Ireland.”<sup>96</sup> Dolours frequently stated that their Aunt Bridie’s condition “obliged [them] in some way to continue the struggle because it validated her sacrifice, and to have ignored the struggle would have made her sacrifice futile, useless.”<sup>97</sup> The sisters’ generational connection to Bridie’s experience with the cause heavily influenced their upbringing, as well as fueled their strong dedication to the movement. By fully committing themselves to the Republican cause, the Price sisters were able to live out their family’s legacy – they were to become the next generation of fighters for the unification of Ireland.

This strong, staunchly Republican upbringing greatly affected the way in which Dolours and Marian viewed the conflict in Northern Ireland. The sisters learned that when the leaders of Ireland signed away the six Northern Irish counties to Britain, they actually signed away the Northern Irish Catholics – this Catholic community was then left vulnerable to Loyalist rule.<sup>98</sup> As a result, the sisters, along with other young Republicans, developed a sense of arrogance because they “believed that [Republicans] were the possessors of the truth, the absolute truth, about how the island should be run and [they] believed [themselves] to be the custodians of the men of 1916.”<sup>99</sup> The young Republicans believed that theirs was the generation that could bring about change for Northern Ireland’s Catholics.

As the civil rights movement grew in Northern Ireland, the sisters joined “The People’s Democracy,” an organization for young men and women that was designed to promote lasting, peaceful change. Soon after its founding, however, the organization was put to the test. One of the group’s first missions was to help organize a march from Belfast to Derry. The goal was to highlight the plight of Northern Irish Catholics, but as the protesters approached Derry, they were

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<sup>96</sup> Paul Vitello, “Dolours Price, Defiant I.R.A. Bomber, Dies at 61.” *New York Times*, January 26, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/26/world/europe/dolours-price-defiant-ira-bomber-dies-at-61.html>; Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 13.

<sup>97</sup> *I, Dolours*, 12:05

<sup>98</sup> *I, Dolours*, 8:35

<sup>99</sup> *I, Dolours*, 8:20

set upon by violent Ulster Protestants.<sup>100</sup> Although the Catholic students felt prepared for any violence that might ensue, their numbers were quickly decimated by the stones, cudgels, lead pipes, crowbars, and laths of their Protestant attackers.<sup>101</sup> It was quickly evident to the movement's leaders that, try as they might, a peaceful protest could not be fully successful in Northern Ireland. These leaders learned that they needed to physically fight back against the injustices they faced if they wanted to make a difference. Dolours explained in an interview "change wouldn't be brought about by us marching up and down the road or being hammered into the ground."<sup>102</sup> As a result, many of the young Republicans, including Dolours and Marian Price, turned to a new sort of leadership and organization – the Irish Republican Army. Because they were radicalized nearly from birth, these young people sought to join an organization of action, of violence.

Although they were young and very idealistic about the Republican world they dreamed to create, the two sisters were fully dedicated to the Republican cause – they knew that they were in the right and soon recognized that violence was the only way to be successful.<sup>103</sup> Because of this, both Dolours and Marian Price joined the IRA, but with the expectation that they would not be rolling bandages, tending to wounded men, or teaching children, the typical female roles of Republican organizations of the past. They wanted to do more than their Aunt Bridie had managed. The sisters wanted to have active, fighting positions within the movement – and they argued with the male leaders to insure their roles.<sup>104</sup> As such, initially, both sisters were employed to transport explosives and weapons from Dundalk, a town just across the border in the Republic of Ireland, to the IRA battalion areas of Belfast.<sup>105</sup> Because the sisters were young,

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<sup>100</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 21.

<sup>101</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 22.

<sup>102</sup> *I, Dolours*, 19:00

<sup>103</sup> *I, Dolours*, 29:45

<sup>104</sup> *I, Dolours*, 26:45

<sup>105</sup> *I, Dolours*, 27:45

pretty, and had no previous criminal record, they were the ideal candidates for these dangerous arms transports, as the British army rarely questioned single female travelers. Soon, however, both were promoted to the secretive Intelligence Unit of the Belfast IRA, called “The Unknowns.” Here, the sisters, the only two women in this elite unit, helped plan IRA bombings throughout Northern Ireland, as well as actively participated in “disappearings,” whereby IRA informants would be captured, transported to the Republic of Ireland, and killed.<sup>106</sup> The sisters quickly rose in the ranks of the IRA to become two of the most prominent, influential members of either gender of the organization.

Soon, however, in order to avoid stagnation within the Republican movement, the IRA Unknowns discussed how they could bring the war against British rule to a higher, more aggressive level. They decided that their most beneficial course of action would be to bring the war, itself, to London, because while the IRA “could set off 10 car bombs in Belfast and they would have little effect on the English public opinion, but... one car bomb in London would change English opinion to such an extent that” British government officials would perhaps work to remove British troops from Northern Ireland.<sup>107</sup> Dolours Price acted as the officer commanding for these dangerous IRA missions because of her extreme dedication to the cause – the Price familial loyalty stretched back generations, and their hatred towards the British was nearly unmatched. She worked with the other members of The Unknowns to develop bombing locations that were true “emblems of the British Empire,” such as Trafalgar Square, the Old Bailey, Oxford Street, and Whitehall.<sup>108</sup> She recognized that by detonating Irish car bombs on English soil, the IRA might be able to fully draw attention to the deep issues and festering relations that were commonplace within Northern Ireland. The leaders of the Unknowns,

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<sup>106</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 287.

<sup>107</sup> *I, Dolours*, 45:09

<sup>108</sup> *I, Dolours*, 43:25

including Dolours and Marian, hoped that by displaying the violence and conflict directly under the noses of British officials, their demands might be met.

In March of 1973, Dolours' bombing mission began. The operation had been meticulously planned by the Unknowns in order to bring about the most physical damage to British structures, as well as to protect the IRA members as well as possible. Dolours, along with Marian and nine other IRA men and women, travelled across the Irish Sea with four cars full of explosives. The members of the group arrived in London at different times and locations, checked into different hotels, and parked their vehicles in different public garages – although they were separated, they were poised and ready to strike at a moment's notice.<sup>109</sup> On the morning of March 8th, the team members drove their respective cars to their designated bombing locations: a British Army recruiting center, the British Forces Broadcasting Service, New Scotland Yard, and the Old Bailey courthouse.<sup>110</sup> The four vehicles were in place by 7:30am and were set to detonate just before 3:00pm, hours after the team members were scheduled to be back in Ireland.

However, as meticulous as their plans were, the group was thwarted after an IRA informant in Dublin alerted British police force to the attack.<sup>111</sup> After two of the four bombs were found and England was quickly placed under lockdown, ten of the eleven team members were apprehended and placed into police custody at Heathrow Airport. The police interrogated Marian Price first, but she gave little indication of her knowledge and involvement in the bombing. The only clue of her role came just before 3:00pm when “Marian raised her wrist and looked pointedly at her watch,” alerting the police that the two remaining bombs had just detonated.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 120.

<sup>110</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 120.

<sup>111</sup> *I, Dolours*, 48:16

<sup>112</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 126.

Dolours was next to be questioned, but she refused to speak to the police officers – the entire team remained loyal to one another, as well as to the Republican cause. The sisters, in particular, recognized the danger of serving time as a female Irish Republican in British jails, but recognized too that the movement was larger than their own discomfort and fear. Soon after the Old Bailey bomb detonated, killing no one, the IRA bombing team was transported to a nearby police station to await their trials. There, the police offered prison uniforms to the team, “but the Price sisters and several others refused” because they did not want to be treated as criminals “but as captured soldiers from a legitimate army – as political prisoners.”<sup>113</sup> They preferred nakedness to the dishonor of the title “criminal,” thus using their bodies as leverage. Immediately, the sisters worked to use their femininity to their advantage – by refusing the prisoner’s garb, the sisters sent a message that their Republican spirits would not be broken. Their ties to previous Republican women held firm.

During their trial, the two Price sisters were referred to as “The Crazy Prices” and “The Sisters of Terror” by the British media – two names that were strongly tied to their femininity and the stereotype of hysterical women. By referring to them as such, the media worked to undermine their violent accomplishments. The media attempted to pass the sisters as weak and emotional, rather than cunning and calculated. The sisters were tried in England and both received life sentences at Brixton Prison for their crimes.<sup>114</sup> As the judge read their sentences, several of the defendants “demanded to be treated as political prisoners or sent to serve their sentences in Northern Ireland.”<sup>115</sup> Although the team had refused to acknowledge their role in the IRA during the trial in order to protect the organization, after their sentencing, they all began to

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<sup>113</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 130.

<sup>114</sup> Rosemary Rogers, “Wild Irish Women: A Most Sorrowful Mystery,” *Irish America*, June 2019. <https://irishamerica.com/2019/05/wild-irish-women-a-most-sorrowful-mystery/>.

<sup>115</sup> Richard Eder, “8 Get Life Terms in London Blast,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1973. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1973/11/16/80815484.html?pageNumber=9>.

talk at once, “making shrill political speeches as their relatives and friends applauded from the public gallery.”<sup>116</sup> They claimed that they would not be the last IRA team to bring the violence of Northern Ireland to England and announced that Ireland would never bend the knee to the British crown. They argued that they would not surrender the fight, even as they waited in prison. Before they left the courtroom, Dolours and Marian announced that they were going on a hunger strike – “they would refuse food until they were granted status as political prisoners and returned to Northern Ireland to serve their sentences.”<sup>117</sup> They knew that they would return to Northern Ireland, either via the British government or via death by starvation.

As neither sister intended to remain in Brixton prison long because they assumed the British would acquiesce to their demands of returning to Northern Ireland, they had stopped eating, refusing anything except water, before they entered the prison. Keefe asserts that by engaging in a hunger strike to force the British government to acquiesce to their demands, “the Price sisters were invoking a long-standing tradition of Irish resistance... it was a quintessential weapon of passive aggression.”<sup>118</sup> Although hunger striking was

*An old and foolish custom, that if a man  
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve  
Upon another's threshold till he die,  
The common people, for all time to come,  
Will raise a heavy cry against the threshold.*<sup>119</sup>

Though this W.B. Yeats poem addresses only the masculine side of hunger striking, the Price sisters were following in the footsteps of their female ancestors by participating in such an activity. They looked back to female suffragettes and Republican political prisoners of the past for inspiration and guidance, as well as hoped that their individual defiance would be enough to

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<sup>116</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 141.

<sup>117</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 142.

<sup>118</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 149.

<sup>119</sup> W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats* (Stratford-on-Avon: The Shakespeare Head Press, 1908), 8, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/49609/49609-h/49609-h.htm>.



sway British leaders.<sup>120</sup> The Price sisters were willing to become martyrs for the cause because they recognized the weight and gravity of what their easily avoidable deaths would do for Irish Republicanism – their prison experience could be used as propaganda. They knew that Catholics and Republicans in Northern Ireland would rally behind the IRA if the British government allowed them to die in British custody, especially because they were young women. Tensions between the British and Republicans were so high that, had the sisters died in prison, the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland would become unmanageable. However damaging the hunger strike was to the British image, the government did not want to bend to the sisters' demands. Instead, after the strike had been going on for about two weeks, the government ordered that Dolours and Marian be force-fed in order to stay alive. This cruel and brutal tactic was heavily criticized, but the Home Office replied "that British prison officials were not in the habit of allowing their inmates to kill themselves."<sup>121</sup> Although controversial, force-feeding managed to keep the sisters alive for over 200 days.

Throughout their strike, Dolours and Marian remained firm in their declaration that they were political prisoners, and the public, and particularly like-minded women rallied behind them. In London, a Women's Liberation group fasted outside Brixton prison to show their solidarity with the sisters, as well as to highlight the injustices done unto the Prices.<sup>122</sup> Similar demonstrations took place across Northern Ireland, often leading to minor, though violent, disturbances.<sup>123</sup> When the prison doctors refused to continue the force feeding based on clinical, not political, judgements, the sisters were moved to the terminal ward of Brixton Prison, where

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<sup>120</sup> "Six Facts about Suffragette Hunger Strikes," Museum of London, October 5, 2018, <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/six-things-you-didnt-know-about-suffragette-hunger-strikes>.

<sup>121</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 153.

<sup>122</sup> "Hunger Strikers' Return Demanded: Women fast Outside Brixton." *The Irish People*, (New York, N&), Feb. 16, 1974, 1.

<sup>123</sup> "Hunger Strikers," *The Irish People*, Feb. 16, 1974, 2.

the pair expected to die.<sup>124</sup> However, 206 days into their hunger strike, a male IRA prisoner on hunger strike on the Isle of Wight died, and the British government balked out of fear of Republican backlash and violence if the same were to happen to the Prices – because they were women, it is likely that the public outrage would have been greater. Because of this, in March of 1975, two years after the initial London bombing, Dolours and Marian Price were repatriated to Northern Ireland.

For what was to be the remainder of their prison sentences, the sisters were sent to Armagh Gaol, a women’s prison about an hour outside of Belfast. Here, they felt that they were fulfilling a family tradition, as the Price Family “had the great honor of having three generations of women in [their] family spend time in Armagh Gaol.”<sup>125</sup> Because their female ancestors had given so much of their lives to the cause, the sisters saw it as only right that they should, too. Their relatives’ stories of their accomplishments, as well as their prison sentences, greatly influenced how the sisters acted in the movement. Soon after arriving at Armagh Gaol, though, it was clear that the sister’s relationship with food was irrevocably damaged and both developed severe cases of anorexia.<sup>126</sup> In 1980, Marian Price was released from Armagh Gaol in order to get treatment for her eating disorder – “to leave her in prison would be to leave her to die” of voluntary starvation.<sup>127</sup> Dolours was left in prison until 1981 before being released on the same grounds. Eight years after their botched bombing expedition in London, both Price sisters were out from behind bars.

Dolours and Marian Price were the poster children of what women, and only women, could accomplish within the IRA – they were active, violent, and, ultimately, leaders of the

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<sup>124</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 158.

<sup>125</sup> *I, Dolours*, 6:31

<sup>126</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 179.

<sup>127</sup> Keefe, *Say Nothing*, 179.

Republican movement. They were vastly underestimated because of their supposed frailty and femininity, but were violent, cunning, and vindictive members of the cause. They were heavily steeped in the Republican mindset due to their familial connection to previous Republican organizations, so they were loyal to the cause from the moment they joined. They never doubted their position within the movement, nor did their dedication falter or wane. Dolours Price explained that she and other staunch Republicans “had spent [their] lives learning [Republicanism] as a way of life and [they] have spent [their] lives being taught that it was a glorious way of life, that it was a proud and honorable way of life.”<sup>128</sup> Their indoctrination into the Irish Republican movement vastly impacted the way in which the sisters approached the Troubles of Northern Ireland.

### ***Martina Anderson***

Martina Anderson was born about 10 years after the Price Sisters – right as the tensions and violence in Northern Ireland were rising. As such, she was greatly influenced both by her own Republican family members and by the female members of the IRA. Because of the Price sisters’ dedication to the cause and their trailblazing, Anderson was able to participate in more violent roles in the movement. Their legacy shaped her involvement.

Martina Anderson was born in the Bogside region of Derry, Northern Ireland in 1962 to a Protestant father and a Catholic, Republican mother. Their home, because her father was quite nonpolitical and her mother was staunchly Republican, was a “very Republican household, so... [the family] lived in a house that was constantly raided at all hours of the morning, during day, or

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<sup>128</sup> *I, Dolours*, 26:29

at night.”<sup>129</sup> If any IRA violence occurred in Derry, the Anderson home “was one of those that the door was kicked in” because of her mother’s family’s staunch Republican views.<sup>130</sup> Anderson’s early years were defined by her mother’s lessons and stories about her own Republican activities. When Anderson was eight years old, a British bomb detonated outside of their home, killing her father. As a result of his death at the hands of the British, Anderson became fully indoctrinated in the Republican cause. She leaned into radical Republicanism because she “felt [she] couldn’t walk away” from the cause, nor could she remain in Derry “without trying to change the kind of lives that [they] were” living – lives of violence, loss, and sectarian hatred.<sup>131</sup> She refused to “just be an observer or a witness to the wrongs that were happening” against the Catholic population of Northern Ireland.<sup>132</sup>

By the time Anderson was sixteen, all of her Catholic friends in Derry had been arrested and questioned by the British Army about their ties to the IRA. It “happened to all of [the Derry youth] at 16 years of age. This was standard practice and [they] were taken away for four hours. [They] were fingerprinted; [they] were photographed; and what [the British] called screened” for Republican radicalization.<sup>133</sup> Although they were young, and not yet members of the IRA, the British authorities recognized the power that these young, teenage activists had on the political and social dynamics of Derry – the previous, large-scale rebellions, such as the Easter Rebellion, were spearheaded by Irish youth. Anderson and other young activists would protest across the region by blocking roads and sitting on bridges in order to make people aware of the injustices Catholics faced on a daily basis, and particularly focused upon the mistreatment of Republican

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<sup>129</sup> *Mna an IRA (Women of the IRA)*, Season 1, episode 4, “Martina Anderson.” Produced by Vanessa Gildea. Aired January 27, 2012, on TV4. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAvB2pOJ-II&has\\_verified=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAvB2pOJ-II&has_verified=1). 9:15; *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 2:55.

<sup>130</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 9:15.

<sup>131</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 0:35.

<sup>132</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 0:14.

<sup>133</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 9:50.

prisoners in Northern Irish and British jails.<sup>134</sup> They worked to ensure that the majority Catholic population of Derry fully recognized and understood their situation.

In 1981, by eighteen and after a few years of activism, Anderson became a pledged and loyal member of the Derry chapter of the IRA. She claimed in an interview that highlighted female IRA members that she wanted to join the organization because she was “an Irish Republican... born into a sectarian state, a city that was gerrymandered,... into a town that had Bloody Sunday and internment.”<sup>135</sup> She joined the group in the midst of the H-Block hunger strike, a prisoner-led protest in which ten IRA prisoners died of starvation during the summer of 1981. She joined during a time defined by its high, and still escalating tensions. It was an era characterized by increasing conflict as the British refused to yield to the inmates’ demands to be considered political prisoners, not merely criminals. Although the male leaders of the organization initially told her to go away and not join the IRA because she would either end up in jail or the cemetery, Anderson joined the “Republican movement and the struggle” to rid Northern Ireland of British influence in order to do her part to promote the cause, and because she saw it as her only option.<sup>136</sup> She believed that any person, male or female, who had been raised so strongly in Republican politics, must dedicate themselves to the movement – she could not understand how people could turn their backs on the cause after experiencing the British injustices.

In 1980, after one of her first official IRA operations, the British arrested her and charged her with possession of a firearm and causing an explosion in the city of Belfast, both legitimate charges.<sup>137</sup> She was held in custody at Armagh Prison for two months before her trial. While

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<sup>134</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 9:50.

<sup>135</sup> Donna Deeney, “Sinn Fein’s Martina Anderson Defends her IRA Past,” *Belfast Telegraph* (Belfast, Northern Ireland), May 17, 2019.

<sup>136</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 1:32.

<sup>137</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 10:30.

there, Anderson was deeply influenced by the other, older women who had already dedicated much of their lives to the Republican cause. They told her stories of their Republican exploits of the past, as well as the efforts of their own mothers. She saw their drive, their focus, and their loyalty to each other and recognized that she “had a choice to make” before her trial.<sup>138</sup> She had to either return to court and go to trial, or she “had to go on the run.”<sup>139</sup> She had to pick between becoming a prisoner or a fugitive. It is quite likely that, had she not encountered these Republican women while waiting for her trial, she would not have remained as involved in the cause as she did, as she would have simply become a prisoner – an actor removed from the stage. Because of their wholehearted dedication to Republicanism, these older women influenced her decision and her willingness to support the cause.

When Anderson was released from Armagh Prison to await her trial, she decided to go on the run. She thought at the time that “this [was] the rest of [her] life” – she would not be returning home again, nor would she see her family, as they would be at risk.<sup>140</sup> Anderson remained on the run for over four years and joined an active IRA unit in Britain in order to continue serving the cause. In 1985, she and fellow IRA member, Ella O’Dwyer, were arrested by British forces in Glasgow after plotting to participate in a large bombing in Brighton.<sup>141</sup> The pair were sent to Brixton Prison, the same all-male facility where the Price sisters staged their hunger strike, in London. There were “600 men, and O’Dwyer and [Anderson] were the only two women there.”<sup>142</sup> There, the pair were subjected to “daily strip searches – five and six strip searches every day. And that’s the way it was for thirteen months.”<sup>143</sup> However, “no records

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<sup>138</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 12:02.

<sup>139</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 12:06.

<sup>140</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 12:48.

<sup>141</sup> Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, “The Gendering of Women’s Terrorism,” in *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 72.

<sup>142</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 15:05.

<sup>143</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 15:30.

[were] kept of searches, nor complaints made by prisoners about strip searches,” and “no prisoner had the right to challenge being strip searched,” so the two women were legally unable to protect themselves.<sup>144</sup> The British prison authorities intended to break the women’s spirits during their cruel and inhumane confinement. The pair both relied heavily upon the lessons and teachings of previous Republican women – they knew that they must remain strong and dedicated to the cause, especially in the face of British injustice.

After waiting for thirteen months for their trial, both Anderson and O’Dwyer were sentenced to life imprisonment at Durham Prison in England. While in residence there, the two women suffered daily beatings, strip searches, and were rarely given the chance to see one another. Although they worked to improve their prison conditions through personal activism, agency, their efforts were largely in vain. The two women spent eight years at Durham before being transferred to Maghaberry Prison in Lisburn, Northern Ireland, in accordance with the ceasefire of 1994.<sup>145</sup> This IRA ceasefire came as a result of a series of negotiations with the British government that worked to encourage peace between the two factions by releasing some IRA prisoners provided the IRA violence ended.<sup>146</sup> The IRA, however, broke this agreement in 1996 by detonating large bombs in London and Manchester. They remained there for four more years before they were released under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, a peace accord that worked to end the violence in Northern Ireland by granting releasing IRA prisoners and demilitarizing large swaths of Northern Ireland, in 1998.<sup>147</sup>

After her release from prison, thirteen years after her initial arrest, Anderson became involved in community work in Derry and endeavored to mend social and political divisions, as

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<sup>144</sup> Nina Hutchinson, “The Law and a New Campaign,” *Socialist Lawyer*, no. 5 (Spring 1988), 14.

<sup>145</sup> Mary S. Corcoran, “Normalization and Its Discontents: Constructing the ‘Irreconcilable’ Female Political Prisoner in Northern Ireland,” *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (May 2007), 414.

<sup>146</sup> “The IRA Declares a Ceasefire (1994),” Alpha History, <https://alphahistory.com/northernireland/ira-declares-ceasefire-1994/>.

<sup>147</sup> Good Friday Agreement, Belfast, Northern Ireland, section 10, page 30.

opposed to heightening them through acts of violence. She remained loyal to the cause, but shifted away from her fighting past, similar to both Price sisters. She had “been given another opportunity to assist and to help in another world, in another life” and dedicated her time and efforts to promoting unity.<sup>148</sup> She recognized that she “would have preferred to live in a world” that was not defined by violence, conflict, and hatred, but was driven by her staunch loyalty and dedication to the Republican cause – she was raised surrounded by Republican women, and was heavily influenced by their lives and stories.<sup>149</sup> It was their stories of standing up to British imposition that led her to fight for her rights as a prisoner. It was their devotion to the cause that encouraged her to go on the run, instead of sitting her trial. Nearly every aspect of her life was impacted by the Republican women that came before her. To this day, Anderson is a member of the Sinn Fein political party and considers herself a Republican. Her loyalty to the cause has not waned in recent years, and it is likely that her dedication will continue to influence the youth of Northern Ireland.

### ***Rose Dugdale***

Rose Dugdale, although not an officially pledged member of the IRA, was in conversation with the women of the IRA, notably the Price Sisters. While Dolours and Marian were in prison on their hunger strike, Dugdale dedicated her actions to the sisters – she advocated for their repatriation through violence, kidnappings, and theft. Although she ultimately failed in her endeavours, her connection to the other women of the movement was strong and lasting. She was a die-hard Republican woman.

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<sup>148</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 22:30.

<sup>149</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Martina Anderson,” 23:50.



Rose Dugdale came into her staunch Irish Republicanism through rather unconventional means. Born as the heiress apparent to a British aristocratic family in 1941, Dugdale epitomized the old-fashioned ideals and power structures that many Irish Republicans worked to upturn. She was raised at her father's East Devon country estate "riding horses, being jolly, smartly dressed and giggling."<sup>150</sup> She was entirely devoted to her "smart, handsome, lean and athletic" father, Colonel Dugdale.<sup>151</sup> As a child, she was educated at Miss Ironside's, a girls' school for children of the aristocracy, in South Kensington, London. She "came out in the 1958 season, the last year girls were presented to the queen, owing to the diminishing 'class' of participants," though was already disdainful of the traditions of the aristocracy.<sup>152</sup> She attended the debutante events to please her parents, but was plotting her way to escape her fate. After her debut, Dugdale attended the University of Oxford and Mount Holyoke before taking a lectureship position in Economics at Bedford College in Bedford, England. It was at Bedford that Dugdale transformed from "academic to activist... she railed against the Vietnam War, the iniquities of capitalism and, above all, the English yoke in Ireland."<sup>153</sup> She was so influenced by her fellow faculty members, as well as by her students that she took her activism to a new level. By 1972, Dugdale left her aristocratic background and fully devoted her life to fighting for the freedom of Ireland.

Although Dugdale considered herself to be entirely loyal to the Republican cause, many IRA officials questioned her true dedication. Dugdale herself admitted that "people tend[ed] to be very prejudice[d] if you came from England. You're always a Brit and if you c[a]me from

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<sup>150</sup> Max Carter, "How Rose Dugdale Went From British Debutante to IRA 'Freedom Fighter,'" *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Nov. 11, 2020.

<sup>151</sup> Carter, "Freedom Fighter," Nov. 11, 2020.

<sup>152</sup> Carter, "Freedom Fighter," Nov. 11, 2020.

<sup>153</sup> Carter, "Freedom Fighter," Nov. 11, 2020.

[her] background, which was a bit curious, it d[id]n't inspire great confidence."<sup>154</sup> Dugdale, however, thought that the British presence in Northern Ireland was "pure horror. It was exactly the behavior of a colonial army" and was "exactly what you expected the Brits to be doing. They were literally coming in and smashing" everything around them.<sup>155</sup> Because of these injustices, Dugdale maintained that everyone in Britain should work to "support the cause to free the Irish people from the stranglehold which was the British imperialism relationship."<sup>156</sup> She was willing to do everything in her power to rid Ireland of all traces of British power and presence.

Although Dugdale was never fully accepted into the strict hierarchy of the IRA because of her background, she was still very involved in violent Republican activities. In January of 1974, Dugdale was a part of a group of "Irish Republican guerrillas" who "hijacked a helicopter... and tried to drop two milk churns packed with explosives on a police station where British troops [were] stationed" on the border of Northern Ireland.<sup>157</sup> Although the job was unsuccessful in destroying the target of Strabane, it did make clear that the British needed to heighten their defense efforts around their encampments from the air, as well as the land as the Republican efforts were strengthening.<sup>158</sup> After the failed aerial bombing, Dugdale, like Anderson, and her compatriots were forced to go on the run in order to avoid conviction and jail time. Because Dugdale did not have family ties in Ireland, however, her decision to go on the run was far easier than Anderson's. While Dugdale was fleeing from British police, however, she joined forces with 3 other IRA members and participated in the largest air robbery in Irish history.

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<sup>154</sup> *Mna an IRA (Women of the IRA)*, Season 1, episode 1, "Rose Dugdale." Produced by Vanessa Gildea. Aired January 5, 2012, on TV4. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czIVSwwuLJc&has\\_verified=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czIVSwwuLJc&has_verified=1), 1:21.

<sup>155</sup> *Mna an IRA*, "Rose Dugdale," 9:15.

<sup>156</sup> *Mna an IRA*, "Rose Dugdale," 10:30.

<sup>157</sup> "Copter Hijacked in Ulster Attack," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Jan. 25, 1974.

<sup>158</sup> *Mna an IRA*, "Rose Dugdale," 11:45.

The group's new target was Russborough House, a large estate situated in the Wicklow Mountains of the Republic of Ireland, and known for its large and impressive art collection.<sup>159</sup> With Dugdale at the helm of the operation, the group stormed the estate, "pistol-whipped and tied up" Sir Alfred and Lady Clementine Beit, the two owners of the home, and stole 19 paintings by Gainsborough, Goya, Hals, Guardi, van Ruisdael, Rubens, Velazquez, and Vermeer.<sup>160</sup> In their ransom note, they "demanded, in exchange for the art, half a million Irish pounds and the transfer to a Northern Ireland prison for Dolours and Marian Price," who were in the midst of their hunger strike in Brixton Prison.<sup>161</sup> Their demands, however, were not met, and the group was forced to go back on the run. Although Dugdale fully recognized that she was not a true member of the IRA, and instead served as an auxiliary member of the Republican movement, she worked to show her dedication and loyalty to its causes of justice and freedom. Even though she was not officially welcomed into the IRA ranks, she still participated in similar, violent guerrilla activities against the Loyalists and British.

Ten days after the robbery at Russborough House, Dugdale was arrested in Cork and tried for robbery and attempted bombing. The IRA, however, disavowed the robbery because Dugdale, a Brit, was the leader of the group.<sup>162</sup> They refused to take credit for an attack on Irish soil that was spearheaded by a Brit. At her sentencing, Dugdale declared herself "proudly and incorruptibly guilty" of her charges – she wanted to take credit for her violent actions and make clear that she did not regret her decisions.<sup>163</sup> Within the first few months of her nine year sentence at Limerick Prison, Dugdale discovered that she was pregnant by Eddie Gallagher, an official, Irish member of the IRA who was in prison for kidnapping and holding Tiede Herrema,

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<sup>159</sup> Carter, "Freedom Fighter," Nov. 11, 2020.

<sup>160</sup> Katharine Weber, "The Woman Who Stole Vermeer' Revisits the Strange Tale of A British Heiress Who Became a Notorious Art Thief," *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Nov. 20, 2020.

<sup>161</sup> Weber, "Notorious Art Thief," Nov. 20, 2020.

<sup>162</sup> Carter, "Freedom Fighter," Nov. 11, 2020.

<sup>163</sup> *Mna an IRA*, "Rose Dugdale," 13:00.

a Dutch industrialist, hostage in a vain attempt to force Northern Irish authorities to release Dugdale.<sup>164</sup> Because the British government did not shorten her prison term on account of her pregnancy, nor on account of Gallagher's actions, she gave birth to a baby boy, Ruairi, while imprisoned.<sup>165</sup> Ruairi lived at Limerick Prison with Dugdale for four months before she joined a hunger strike. At that point, British prison authorities removed the child from his mother and the prison and placed him with a foster family, both so that he could have a more normal life and because the authorities did not want the child to be raised surrounded by so many staunch Republican women.<sup>166</sup> The British fear of having the current generation of Republican women raise a child in their ideology was far greater than the potential negative psychological effects associated with taking an infant child from his mother.

When Dugdale was released from prison in October of 1980, she was reunited with Ruairi and continued her Republican campaigns. Although she did not participate in more violent IRA campaigns after her release because she wanted to ensure that she would be able to raise Ruairi, she "attended demonstrations on behalf of the hunger strikers" in the H-Block prison and Long Kesh and remained entirely loyal to the cause.<sup>167</sup> She continued to fight for the Republican movement through protests, marches, and public meetings, even though she was no longer violent. She worked to show that she did not need to be a full IRA member, nor did she need to be strictly violent to support and promote Republicanism in Northern Ireland.

Although Dugdale's indoctrination into Irish Republican politics was far from ordinary, she remained loyal to the cause long after her prison sentence was completed. Because she had spent so much time with radicals during her higher education, she still learned the stories of

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<sup>164</sup> *Mna an IRA*, "Rose Dugdale," 15:24

<sup>165</sup> *Mna an IRA*, "Rose Dugdale," 15:00.

<sup>166</sup> *Mna an IRA*, "Rose Dugdale," 16:00.

<sup>167</sup> *Mna an IRA*, "Rose Dugdale," 24:57

British injustices that other Republicans grew up hearing – her indoctrination came late, but was nearly as thorough. She fully recognized that as a participant in guerrilla activities, she might have had to kill people.<sup>168</sup> She “accept[ed] the possibility that there may be a time when you may or may not want to kill people, but at the end of the day, it [was] the only way to deal with them.”<sup>169</sup> Dugdale was so radicalized by Republicanism that she was willing to do whatever it took to achieve the goals of the movement. In spite of her charmed upbringing, and likely because of a strong desire to rebel against it, Dugdale was convinced that Republicanism was the best way to solve the issues in Northern Ireland. She wanted all of the citizens of Northern Ireland, whether they be Catholic or Protestant, to be represented in one, unified Irish government. Although she was not steeped in Republicanism from an early age as the Price sisters and Anderson were, Dugdale developed her own, strong ties to the movement through her friendships and relationships with other Republicans. Even though she was not born to be a Republican, she lived her life dedicated to the cause.

Dugdale claimed that there was something to be said for people who participated in armed struggles, as they are able to challenge authority figures in a way that others cannot. They understand the power dynamics of such situations on a deeper, more meaningful level because of their actions and participation in such a violent experience.<sup>170</sup> She believed that the only people who can fully understand and judge the situation in Northern Ireland are those who actually participated. These fighting women, the Price sisters, Anderson, and Dugdale, all recognized the importance of the Republican cause, as well as the true weight and impact of the violence that hounded Northern Ireland. They knew that their violent actions might negatively affect innocent civilians in Belfast, Derry, and England, but they saw their cause as mightier and more easily

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<sup>168</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Rose Dugdale,” 10:05.

<sup>169</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Rose Dugdale,” 10:30.

<sup>170</sup> *Mna an IRA*, “Rose Dugdale,” 23:00.

justified than the British goals. Their strong devotion to Republicanism dominated their lives. These women were all deeply connected to the Irish Republican women of the previous generations – whether directly, or indirectly. Their actions, both as members of the IRA and as prisoners, were informed by these past women. Without this influence, it is likely that the women of the IRA would have stayed in typically female roles. They would have remained teachers, nurses, and cleaners, as opposed to taking on dangerous and violent roles within the movement. Instead, these women worked to subvert female stereotypes and forge a new path for radical women – they created a new space for themselves in the movement. It was because of the women of the past that the women of the Troubles could help promote the cause.

## **The Peacekeepers:**

This section highlights the female peacekeepers of the Troubles – the women who sought peace, unity, and community above all else—above personal safety, above family, above violence. These women, Betty Williams and Mairead Maguire, led the largest, most active peace organization in Northern Irish history and worked to create a space in which women from all religious and political backgrounds could unite for a common, peaceful cause. Unlike in the previous sections, this chapter will discuss Maguire and Williams together, rather than as two separate sub-sections because their work was so closely connected, it would be nearly impossible to discuss one without the other. Although the two women came from quite different families and neighborhoods in Belfast, the pair were able to put aside their differences in order to promote a lasting, meaningful peace. They, and their organization, are significant to the Troubles, as well as to this project, in part because of their lack of generational ties to the Republican movement. Because these women were not raised surrounded by staunch political views, but rather in more tolerant households, they were more willing to promote unity and justice across religious and political barriers. It is evident that this tolerant education shaped how these women viewed both their space in society, as well as the conflict as a whole. The women who were not indoctrinated from an early age were far more willing to see their fellow citizens as individuals, as opposed to allies and enemies.

***Women for Peace - Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Betty Williams***

Mairead Corrigan Maguire was born in January 1944 to a staunchly Roman Catholic family in Belfast. Her parents, Margaret and Andrew, were relatively poor, working class Catholics, but were not actively involved in the Republican Movement. As a result of her parents' lack of involvement within the cause, Maguire was not heavily influenced by the heroic stories of Republicans that children like the Price sisters were – she learned, instead, about how the conflict affected those around her, as well as the negative impacts that violence could have on such a delicate community. When she was a teenager, Maguire “devoted a great deal of time... to charity work in the Catholic organization Legion of Mary,” a group that promoted welfare for the Catholic minority.<sup>171</sup> This organization, made up of millions of Catholics, supported peace missions through good work, prayer, and acts of service.<sup>172</sup> She then became involved in “voluntary social work among children and teenagers in various Catholic neighborhoods in Belfast,” that were particularly impacted by the growing sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.<sup>173</sup> She also frequently visited the inmates at Long Kesh prison, also known as the H Block where the hunger strikes later took place, providing them with news of the outside world.<sup>174</sup> By 21, Maguire was working as a secretary for the Guinness brewery, where she served until 1976. From a young age, Maguire was involved in peace and charity organizations in Northern Ireland – she was more interested in ensuring that scars were mended than in promoting violence and political awareness.

Elizabeth “Betty” Williams was born May 22, 1943 in West Belfast, a predominantly Catholic enclave. Her father was a Protestant butcher and her mother was a Catholic homemaker. Both of her parents worked to promote a sense of religious tolerance and peace within their

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<sup>171</sup> “Mairead Corrigan,” Nobel Peace Prize 1976, accessed February 26, 2021, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1976/corrigan/lecture/>.

<sup>172</sup> “The Legion of Mary,” The Legion of Mary, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://www.legionofmary.ie/about>.

<sup>173</sup> “Mairead Corrigan,” Nobel Peace Prize 1976.

<sup>174</sup> “Mairead Corrigan,” Nobel Peace Prize 1976.



family – they strayed far away from Loyalist or Republican politics because of their unusual marriage.<sup>175</sup> Throughout her teenage years, Williams attended Catholic schools in Belfast, but was never radicalized in Republicanism due to her family’s dual-religious background – theirs was a home of unity, not violence and politics.<sup>176</sup> After her secondary education, Williams took a secretarial course before working in an office until 1976. Though the two women did not know one another growing up, their lives soon became intertwined.

On August 10th, 1976, there was a large, violent demonstration in the Catholic areas of Belfast to commemorate the widespread and random arrests of Northern Irish Catholics five years prior. In the middle of the afternoon, “the British Army opened fire on a vehicle which they believed to be the get-away car from a previous ambush.”<sup>177</sup> The car that the British targeted, however, was driven by two young IRA volunteers, uninvolved in the violence of the day, who were killed by the British bullets.<sup>178</sup> The men then lost control of their car and ran into Anne Maguire and her three young children. Anne, Maguire’s sister, was seriously injured in the crash and remained unconscious for several days, and “three of her children, the oldest of whom was eight years and the youngest only six weeks, were killed” by a combination of impact and British bullets.<sup>179</sup> Williams happened to witness the entire event and was deeply affected by what she had seen, calling it “the most awful thing anybody could have seen in their life, and it just burst a dam inside. You just had to say, let’s do something about it. Somebody’s got to do something about this.”<sup>180</sup> As a result, she “decided to organize a petition ‘calling on the gunmen to stop’”

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<sup>175</sup> “Betty Williams,” Nobel Peace Prize 1976, accessed February 26, 2021, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1976/williams/facts/>.

<sup>176</sup> Ed O’Loughlin, “Betty Williams, Peace Laureate From Northern Ireland, Dies at 76,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/21/world/europe/betty-williams-dead.html>.

<sup>177</sup> Nell McCafferty, “The Peace People at War,” in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volume V*, ed. Angela Bourke, Siobhan Kilfeather, et. al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 1488.

<sup>178</sup> McCafferty, “The Peace People at War,” 1488.

<sup>179</sup> Gerry Adams, *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 254.

<sup>180</sup> Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan Maguire, interview by Elaine Grand, *Good Afternoon*, Thames Television, September 15, 1976,

their violent retaliations in order to promote peace and unity.<sup>181</sup> Maguire, similarly affected by the deaths of her niece and nephews, recorded an interview calling for an end to the violence that was plaguing Northern Ireland.<sup>182</sup> When Maguire heard that Williams was also promoting peace in the neighborhood, she invited Williams to the funeral of the children so that they could begin to work for peace together.

Thus, Women for Peace, soon renamed the Community of Peace People in order to include men, in Northern Ireland was born. The two women saw this tragedy as “an opportunity to say that [they did not] want violence; [they were] no longer going to be held ransom by the man holding the guns” – referring both to the violent members of the IRA and the British Army.<sup>183</sup> Williams and Maguire believed that, in order to ensure that the three children did not die in vain, there must be long lasting peace in Northern Ireland. They must work to unite Catholics and Protestants, Republicans and Loyalists, to protect the future generations of Northern Ireland.

Additionally, their goal, beyond creating peace, was to fundamentally change the narrative of Northern Irish society and masculinity. For generations, both Catholics and Protestants had “glorified the gunman,” his actions, and his way of life.<sup>184</sup> Both sides of the conflict had sung “songs about men with guns who t[oo]k life and destroy[ed] society” in the desperate pursuit of their own form of justice and heroism.<sup>185</sup> They told stories of large, strong men who had crushed their enemies in order to protect their wives, children, and holdings. It was this depiction of Irish men that Maguire and Williams actively worked to upend. They wanted

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<https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2018/11/06/interview-with-betty-williams-and-mairead-corrigan-maguire-sept-15-1976-2/>.

<sup>181</sup> McCafferty, “The Peace People at War,” 1488.

<sup>182</sup> McCafferty, “The Peace People at War,” 1488.

<sup>183</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>184</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>185</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

the masculine hero not to be a violent gunman, but a man who “cares about the one next to him, who [is] involved in his society, who [is] working... to build his society up.”<sup>186</sup> A proper man, they postulated, was not one who fought violently for his beliefs, but one who was vocal about peace, unity, and community. They worked to promote the idea that there was an alternative to taking on a violent role in society – there were other ways to have one’s voice heard. There was a way to be a man while still encouraging peaceful activities. Although the women did not explicitly discuss the traditional role of Irish women, it was clear through their devotion to peace that they thought Irish women should also promote unity and family, rather than support or participate in violence.

Maguire and Williams planned the first peace rally for their new organization, the Community of Peace People, initially known as “Women for Peace,” for the Saturday after the crash and promoted it on TV and on the radio. Williams invited “anyone [who] would care to come to this rally on Saturday, including the Protestant people of Northern Ireland.”<sup>187</sup> At their first event, the women hosted a crowd of over 10,000 people, predominantly made up of working women and mothers. Women from Sandy Row and Shankill Road, both staunchly Loyalist neighborhoods of Belfast, were standing next to and discussing solutions with women from Andersonstown and Twinbrook, the Republican strongholds of the city.<sup>188</sup> Maguire and Williams, because they had come from such different backgrounds, created an environment in which all of the protestors could unify behind the peaceful movement, in which “the ordinary people [could come] out to say that they [did not] want the violence” that was overtaking their communities nor the constant fear that plagued their lives.<sup>189</sup> The event had “no speeches, no analysis of why [the

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<sup>186</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>187</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>188</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>189</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

protesters] were there;” the entire event was significant not because of its powerful verbal rhetoric, but because of the clear show of unity and support for peace in Northern Ireland.<sup>190</sup> The only thing that united them all was their strong desire for peace and justice. Mere weeks after its founding, the Community of Peace People, with Maguire and Williams at the helm, was organizing weekly peace marches and demonstrations – predominantly made up of women – across England and Northern Ireland to demand an end to the senseless violence.

One of the defining features of Williams and Maguire’s organization was its staunchly nonpolitical view – the two women were not raised in politically active households, so both remained nearly entirely removed from the political sphere and encouraged their Protestant and Catholic members to ignore their differences. Both women claimed that “because politics was a dirty business in Northern Ireland,” the best way to promote peace and the general welfare of society was to simply “believe in the people of Northern Ireland,” not in the politics or government of the region.<sup>191</sup> They did not want to give the political leaders the power to speak on behalf of “the ordinary men and women in the street of Northern Ireland.”<sup>192</sup> For too long, the common people, and especially women, had been without agency, so the peace movement was a way for Northern Irish citizens to act on their own behalf. However, although the organization was advocating for female agency, they still believed that women should fill the stereotypical roles of wives and peacekeepers. The women also hypothesized that the only way for the Protestant and Catholic communities to unite in peace was to encourage them to “build their future” together as neighbors, friends, and allies.<sup>193</sup> As such, active discussions of politics and

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<sup>190</sup> McCafferty, “The Peace People at War,” 1488.

<sup>191</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>192</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>193</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

differences were discouraged among the peacekeepers, though it was impossible to fully prohibit such conversations.

Williams and Mairead's grassroots peace movement spread across Northern Ireland, quickly gaining support from over 100,000 citizens from both sides of the sectarian divide, as well as garnering international publicity for trying to accomplish the impossible. According to Robert B. Semple, Jr., within four weeks of the initial tragedy, the "two Belfast women [had] created more optimism and hope than anyone ha[d] seen in this dismal province in years" – they were the champions of the Northern Irish Peace Movement.<sup>194</sup> They spent all of their time "walk[ing] peace, talk[ing] peace, think[ing] peace."<sup>195</sup> They worked for a lasting future where all members of Northern Irish society would "live together... build together.... act together" in unity and against the violence and politics that divided them.<sup>196</sup> They dreamed of a society that would be defined by a "good, constructive, lasting peace" that would encourage Catholics and Protestants to live and work together.<sup>197</sup> Each and every individual would have the opportunity to determine their own fate and their own version of peace – whether it be religious tolerance, political unity, or simply respecting opposing beliefs.

In 1976, Maguire and Williams were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their "courageous efforts in founding a movement to put an end to the violent conflict in Northern Ireland."<sup>198</sup> They were highly praised for their ability to create a powerful grassroots movement in such a divided society.<sup>199</sup> In accepting their awards, Williams and Maguire wanted to "show the world that the people of Northern Ireland [could] be para-peace people... guerrilla people"

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<sup>194</sup> Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Two Women Bring New Hope to Ulster," *New York Times*, September 6, 1976, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1976/09/06/issue.html>.

<sup>195</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>196</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>197</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>198</sup> "Mairead Corrigan," Nobel Peace Prize 1976.

<sup>199</sup> "Mairead Corrigan," Nobel Peace Prize 1976.

who could “show the whole world just how good” and peaceful they could be.<sup>200</sup> They worked to flip the typical narrative of Northern Ireland to show although the region was defined by violence and paramilitary activity, peace was an achievable and admirable mission there.

Soon after they won the Nobel Peace Prize, however, the Community of Peace People began losing ground and public support. Although the organization was meant to be apolitical, many members of the IRA, and Gerry Adams in particular, criticized the group for only speaking out about Republican acts of violence, instead of all unjust deaths. For example, “four days after the deaths of the Maguire children, a twelve-year-old girl was shot and killed by British soldiers in South Armagh; the ‘Peace People’ offered no criticism.”<sup>201</sup> The organization, and particularly Maguire and Williams, were verbally attacked “for supporting the RUC and the British Army” rather than condemning their violent actions.<sup>202</sup> It seemed that the Peace People were far more willing to gloss over British mistreatment and focus on IRA violence.

Their primary detractors, particularly members of the IRA, thought that any peace that Williams and Maguire preached would be artificial as the pair could not promote a sense of peace if they did not first fix the conditions that generated the conflict.<sup>203</sup> Those that criticized the group believed that without discussions of politics and grievances by both sides of the conflict, no true, lasting resolution would be made. Notably, although their most outspoken critics were male members of violent organizations, the Maguire and Williams were not widely critiqued for being women, largely because Irish society deemed peace and passivity to be a woman’s role – they were merely criticized for their lofty, nonpolitical aims. They were accused of working to secure a false peace.

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<sup>200</sup> Williams and Maguire, interview by Elain Grand, Sept. 15, 1976.

<sup>201</sup> Adams, *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography*, 254.

<sup>202</sup> Robert W. White and Ed Moloney, *Ruairi O’Bradaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 252.

<sup>203</sup> White and Moloney, *Ruairi O’Bradaigh*, 252.

By the late 1970s, the Community of Peace People was largely disbanded. Author and journalist Ed O’Loughlin notes that, although the organization did not ultimately accomplish what its founders set out to do, “the Peace People were the first sign of mass public resistance to paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland, uniting members of the Catholic and Protestant communities” for the first time in generations.<sup>204</sup> After the organization disbanded, Williams and Maguire both continued to support peace initiatives in Northern Ireland until the Good Friday Agreement, though separate from one another due to differences in how they wanted the peace movement to move forward. They joined forces one last time in 2006 to found the Nobel Women’s Initiative, an organization designed to promote women’s peace movements, with four other female Nobel Peace Prize winners.<sup>205</sup> The women knew that peace, unity, and community were achievable and necessary.

The Peacekeepers were the women with little to no connection to previous Republican women and movements – Williams and Maguire were not indoctrinated into the cause. As a result, they rejected the violent activities of the era in favor of social movements that worked to promote a lasting and meaningful peace. Instead of actively working against the stereotypical bonds that held them, however, these women leaned into their femininity and motherhood to create a sense of credibility – they were using their female agency to protect the future generations of Irish women. Although Williams and Maguire ultimately failed in their efforts, their devotion to peace was strong and genuine.

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<sup>204</sup> O’Loughlin, “Betty Williams,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2020.

<sup>205</sup> “Mairead Corrigan,” Nobel Peace Prize 1976.

## **The Politician:**

Despite the utility of categorizations and units of analysis as a means to examine women in the Irish Republican cause, there are also limits to such an approach, which fails to give space to those who did not quite fit neatly into such boxes. Bernadette Devlin crosses the boundaries of my organizational scheme, as a fighter for the Republican cause as well as a peacekeeper in Northern Ireland. She had strong familial and generational ties to the Irish Republican cause, though did not participate in violent roles in the IRA, or other such paramilitary organizations. However, although she was not a fighter, per se, Devlin actively worked to promote Republicanism in her politics. Her indoctrination did not encourage her to pursue a violent position in the movement, but she was thoroughly a member of the cause. That being said, she also sought peace for Northern Ireland through socialism, as opposed to a strictly peace-based organization. As a politician, she worked to unify both groups – the Fighters and the Peacekeepers – under one, common, united Irish Republic.

## ***Bernadette Devlin***

Bernadette Devlin was born in Cookstown, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland in April of 1947 to a large Catholic family that was heavily steeped in Irish Republicanism. When Devlin was nine years old, her father, John, the family member “whom she credits with instilling into her a knowledge of Irish history,” passed away and the family was forced to depend on state welfare benefits to survive.<sup>206</sup> Although John was not an active member of the IRA, nor did he

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<sup>206</sup> “Bernadette Devlin McAliskey (1947- ),” A Century of Women, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.acenturyofwomen.com/bernadette-devlin/>.



participate in any violent actions, he supported the IRA cause and their methods. In 1967, 10 years after her father's death, her mother, Lizzie, died, leaving Devlin to raise her younger siblings while attending Queen's University Belfast for psychology. Devlin, although she did not become a member of the IRA, was heavily influenced by her family's devotion to the Republican cause, as well as supported the Catholic fight for civil rights in Northern Ireland.

While at Queen's, Devlin helped to found the "college-based civil rights movement, People's Democracy," a Socialist group that sought the political and civil rights of Northern Ireland's Catholic population.<sup>207</sup> The goals of the organization were to establish a "socialist republic for all of Ireland," work to end the gerrymandering of Catholic electoral districts, and to ensure that Northern Irish Catholics were given the same rights as Northern Irish Protestants.<sup>208</sup> The group, while it was not strictly Republican nor violent, organized marches and protests to promote their cause. They believed that the only way to fully achieve this mission was to unite the entire island of Ireland under one, socialist government. As a part of her role in the People's Democracy, Devlin attended several Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) meetings and marches to spread awareness for the People's Democracy's cause. The goal of the NICRA, as well as of the People's democracy, was to ensure that Catholics in Northern Ireland were treated properly on a daily basis – the group sought to bring an end to the injustices Catholics faced at the hands of the Protestants.<sup>209</sup> At many of these events, the attendees were stopped by police and questioned.<sup>210</sup> The leaders of the NICRA encouraged the marchers to

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<sup>207</sup> Kitty Holland, "Bernadette McAliskey: 'I am Astounded I Survived. I Made Made Mad Decisions,'" *The Irish Times*, Sept. 22, 2016, <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/bernadette-mcaliskey-i-am-astounded-i-survived-i-made-mad-decisions-1.2798293>.

<sup>208</sup> "The People's Democracy March - Chronology of Main Events," CAIN Web Service, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/chron.htm>.

<sup>209</sup> "About Us," Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, accessed 13 March, 2021, <http://www.nicivilrights.org/about-us/>.

<sup>210</sup> "Bernadette Devlin McAliskey," A Century of Women.

“disperse rather than confront the police,” in order to avoid police retaliation and brutality – the group, although it was not strictly seeking peace, refused to turn to violence in order to promote their cause. This explicit inaction, however, pushed the more radical members, including Devlin, to strengthen their “socialist views and increase[their] political activities.”<sup>211</sup> They refused to allow the police force and counter-protesters to stand in the way of their campaign. The radical leaders of the group “displayed no timorousness in facing up to the unionist establishment,” and worked to encourage moderate Catholics to support the Republican cause.<sup>212</sup> By including the less radicalized Catholic population, they expanded their support base, as well as humanized their cause. They drew upon “the rhetoric, tactics and imagery of the African American civil rights campaign, the US anti-war movement and student protest in Europe” to develop their marches and protests.<sup>213</sup> They worked to broaden their campaign and ensure that their cause was not simply a radical one.

In 1969, at 21 years old, Devlin was expelled from Queen’s for her socialist activities. Her leadership in the People’s Democracy threatened the student life status quo at the university, and Devlin was removed from the school. Soon after her expulsion, however, she ran for British Parliament in order to continue promoting her Socialist cause on a “unity” ticket, meaning she sought peace for Irish Catholics and Protestants.<sup>214</sup> In 1969, Devlin was elected to the British House of Commons, representing Mid-Ulster. The seat “had heretofore been considered a safe, Conservative seat,” but her radical socialist ideals helped encourage younger members of Northern Irish society to vote for her, as they thought that their voices were better represented by Devlin than by her older, Conservative opposition.<sup>215</sup> At the time of her election, she was the

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<sup>211</sup> “Bernadette McAliskey,” *A Century of Women*.

<sup>212</sup> Emer Nolan, *Five Irish Women* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019): 84.

<sup>213</sup> Nolan, *Five Irish Women*, 84.

<sup>214</sup> “Bernadette McAliskey,” *The Irish Times*.

<sup>215</sup> Dorothy Steffens, “who sings of bernadette?,” *Off Our Backs* vol. 1, no. 7 (June 26, 1970): 1.

youngest woman ever elected to Parliament in the UK. Upon her entrance into Westminster, “Devlin was mobbed by journalists and photographers: one commentator mused that this long-haired, fashionably short-skirted young woman looked like an Alice in Wonderland” – a small child amongst the mighty giants of Parliament.<sup>216</sup> By referring to her as such a small and naive character, the British media sought to weaken her political seat. Because she was such a young woman, untrained in the political life of Westminster, the conservative British newspapers believed that they could downplay her radical successes by demeaning her accomplishments. Devlin, however, used their underestimation to her advantage. She played into their stereotyped viewpoints while actively working against the men of Parliament. She refused to let the other members of Westminster intimidate her or silence her.

Quickly, Devlin became bold and assertive, targeting Conservative Unionists in her maiden speech to Westminster. She claimed that the “honorable gentlemen of Parliament” could not comprehend the struggle in Northern Ireland as “there never was born an Englishman who understands the Irish people. A man who is alien to the ordinary working Irish people cannot understand them” or their plight.<sup>217</sup> She asserted that the Unionist Government of Northern Ireland actively worked to “force an image of the civil rights movement that it was nothing more than a Catholic uprising,” something that was nearly impossible to overcome when the “ruling minority are the government and control not only political matters, but the so-called impartial forces of law and order.”<sup>218</sup> In response to the obvious bias in the Northern Irish government, Devlin addressed the fact that the leaders of the civil rights movement simply could not call the organization a non-sectarian movement, nor could they say that they were supporting the rights

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<sup>216</sup> Nolan, *Five Irish Women*, 84.

<sup>217</sup> Bernadette Devlin, “Maiden Speech” (speech, Westminster, London, April, 1969), Alpha History, <https://alphahistory.com/northernireland/bernadette-devlins-maiden-speech-parliament-1969/>.

<sup>218</sup> Devlin, “Maiden Speech.”

of both Catholics and Protestants when, clearly, they were beaten into the Catholic areas of Belfast and Derry, never the Protestant neighborhoods.<sup>219</sup> By only pushing marches and protests back into Catholic regions, the government was able to suggest that the issues in Northern Ireland were merely a Catholic problem – they were more easily able “to divide the people who [were] dependent upon them” and shift voters towards their cause.<sup>220</sup> This effectively worked to heighten the divide and tensions in the region. In her maiden speech, Devlin effectively broke the Irish female stereotype of a demure, quiet mother figure – she was aggressive, passionate, and truthful. She did not work to protect the feelings of those around her, and instead defended her position and her people. Her rhetoric reflected the ideas of her Irish Republican predecessors in that she fully recognized that the best people to rule Ireland were the Irish themselves.

In addition to discussing the growing inequalities and the poor relationship between Catholics and Protestants, Devlin briefly addressed the presence of British troops in Northern Ireland. She claimed that the only reason these troops were sent was in response to the “apathy, neglect, and lack of understanding which [the] House [of Commons had] shown to these people in Ulster.”<sup>221</sup> She argued that the British Government believed that this pseudo-martial law was the only solution to correct the damage wrought by over fifty years of abandonment. Devlin argued, however, that “the one point in common among Ulstermen [was] that they [were] not very fond of Englishmen who [told] them what to do” or how to act.<sup>222</sup> Although she did not specifically address the growing violence in Belfast and Derry, Devlin made it very clear that the situation in Northern Ireland would not be helped by any form of government imposition – the British presence would only exacerbate the already tense environment. She clearly agreed with

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<sup>219</sup> Devlin, “Maiden Speech.”

<sup>220</sup> Devlin, “Maiden Speech.”

<sup>221</sup> Devlin, “Maiden Speech.”

<sup>222</sup> Devlin, “Maiden Speech.”

the Republican mindset that her parents instilled in her that the British involvement in Northern Ireland had overstepped its bounds, and should not be allowed to continue. She, an underestimated woman, did not use violence, but passion and aggression to fight against the clear patriarchal system of Parliament in order to ensure that the English men understood the Northern Irish Catholic perspective. She worked to make sure that the men around her recognized her power as a woman and a politician – she was just as capable as the male MPs.

Soon after her election, Devlin went on an Irish Nationalist tour of the United States in order to garner international support for the Republican cause. Devlin “embarked on her hastily arranged visit to the United States in August 1969,” a location where she was “already nearing folk-hero status.”<sup>223</sup> Because of her “spirited defense of a Catholic community in the ‘Battle of the Bogside,’” American activists appreciated her agency and gave her credibility, both as a woman and as a politician. Many Americans supported the fact that her aggression in Parliament garnered some support for the Catholic cause, and she became a pseudo-warrior of Irish-Americans. Additionally, her abject defiance of the government of Northern Ireland “invited many comparisons... to the mythical nationalist figure, Cathleen ni Houlihan,” a figure in Irish lore who “shed an elderly appearance to reveal a regenerative beauty that inspired a young generation of nationalists.”<sup>224</sup> As such, Devlin was elevated to a maternal, generational figure, as well as a fighter for the cause – she became the embodiment of how a radicalized Irish woman could behave in a passionate, though non-violent way. Devlin was the ideal spokesperson for the Northern Irish cause in America: young, charismatic, educated, and a supposedly non-threatening woman, as Irish Americans still considered Irish women to be passive. Because of her radicalized Republican upbringing, her parents influenced her to fully support the

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<sup>223</sup> Matthew J. O’Brien, “Irish America, Race, and Bernadette Devlin’s 1969 American Tour,” *New Hibernia Review/Iris Eireannach Nua* Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 2010): 88.

<sup>224</sup> O’Brien, “Irish America,” 88.

Republican cause, but not radical enough to perform violent actions against the British. Her initial goal for the United States tour was to make the Irish Catholic cause palatable to the majority of Irish Americans.

In her two weeks abroad, she visited New York, California, and the Midwest and met with groups ranging from various cities' Catholic archbishops to the Black Panthers, thus highlighting her goal to promote civil rights for Northern Irish Catholics. Although the tour was intended to increase the publicity of the Northern Irish Catholics' plight, as well as raise money for their cause, Devlin quickly lost the favor and support of Irish Americans because she addressed the fact that many of Irish Americans were quite racist and unwilling to fight for civil rights for all Americans – Irish Americans took Devlin's views as a personal assault.<sup>225</sup> While on tour, she worked to associate the Irish civil rights movement with that of the United States and “marvelled at how the Irish in America failed to draw the obvious parallel between themselves and American blacks”; she claimed that the two groups of people were effectively fighting the same fight.<sup>226</sup> By the time Devlin left the United States, the Catholic leaders of New York and Chicago claimed that she was not welcome back “under any circumstances” because of her direct, verbal attacks on Irish Americans.<sup>227</sup> Although Devlin left America hated by Irish Americans, the aftermath of the tour succeeded in forcing Irish Americans to recognize what Catholics in Northern Ireland were facing, and, in doing so, proved that Irish Republicanism would be the most effective way to grant equal rights to Catholics.

In 1972, Devlin was in Derry and witnessed the Bloody Sunday massacre. When Parliament reconvened later that year, Selwyn Lloyd, a fellow member of the House of

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<sup>225</sup> Tara Keenan-Thomson, “‘Fidel Castro in a Miniskirt’: Bernadette Devlin’s first US tour,” *History Ireland* Issue 4, Vol. 17 (Jul/Aug 2019), <https://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/fidel-castro-in-a-miniskirt-bernadette-devlins-first-us-tour/>.

<sup>226</sup> Keenan-Thomson, “‘Fidel Castro.’”

<sup>227</sup> Keenan-Thomson, “‘Fidel Castro.’”

Commons denied Devlin the right to speak about the massacre, even though there was a rule in the House that all parties present at the scene of violence should be allowed to speak – he effectively worked to silence the Irish Republican voices.<sup>228</sup> In response to her snub, when Home Secretary Reginald Maudling claimed that British paratroopers had fired on the civilians – 13 of whom died – in self-defence, Devlin crossed the House Chamber to slap Maudling in the face.<sup>229</sup> She was horrified at the idea that the Irish Catholics and the Republican cause would continue to be misrepresented by the British Government, even after such a violent event, and refused to sit idly by. Although her small act of violence was not heavily politicized because the male dominated Parliament did not see it as a true threat, it did show how passionate and dedicated Devlin was to her constituents – she was willing to do anything to ensure that they were truthfully represented.

By 1974, Devlin had helped to found the Irish Republican Socialist Party, though she resigned from the Westminster Parliament just a year later. She decided to run for election, though unsuccessfully, to the European Parliament in 1979, and to Dail Eireann, the Irish Government in February and November 1982. After leaving the UK Parliament, and after her unsuccessful attempts to join the European Parliament, Devlin turned to activism, founding the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP), and organizations that work with migrants, travellers, single parents, and people with physical disabilities.<sup>230</sup> To this day, she claims that she cares “passionately about justice, about ideas, about principles” that support marginalized populations.<sup>231</sup> She continues to work for the oppressed.

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<sup>228</sup> “Bernadette McAliskey,” *The Irish Times*.

<sup>229</sup> “Bernadette McAliskey,” *The Irish Times*.

<sup>230</sup> “South Tyrone Empowerment Programme,” NICVA, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.nicva.org/organisation/south-tyrone-empowerment-programme>.

<sup>231</sup> “Bernadette McAliskey,” *The Irish Times*.

This section addresses a woman who was neither fully a fighter nor fully a peacekeeper – she worked for both sides. Although Devlin never joined the IRA, she was heavily influenced by the political leanings of her parents, and her political career was largely informed by their judgments. To this day, Devlin remains loyal to the Republican cause and still believes that there is more work to be done to promote Republicanism in Northern Ireland, as she recognizes that Northern Irish Catholics still are not equal citizens. Devlin's role in the Irish Republican movement is not necessarily unique, though she was one of the few women to join the political field. Because of her staunch Republican upbringing, she walked the line between peace and violence in her daily life, and refused to back down to British imposition. She was passionate about the rights of Northern Irish Catholics, and sought to do all that she could to speak for them. She was Republican through and through, even though she acted in a less violent role than other strong Republican women. Her strong ties to Republicanism allowed her to continue fighting for the cause through activism and politics, rather than through violence.



## **Conclusion:**

For much of Irish history, the island's relationship with England, and then Britain, has been a serious point of contention among the Gaelic Irish, the Anglo-Irish, and the English, themselves. Beginning in the tenth century, England laid claim to Ireland. The English saw the island and its people as a land to conquer, control, cultivate, and civilize. They saw the Gaelic Irish as a group of barbarous heathens destined to be brought forth into the light of English civilization.<sup>232</sup> Under the auspices of a bull from Pope Adrian IV in 1155, King Henry II acted "like a good catholic prince" and conquered Ireland in the name of England and Rome.<sup>233</sup> Ireland eventually became an English colony with little governing power or representation and remained a staunch Catholic region well into the Protestant reign of Queen Elizabeth I. During Elizabeth's reign, however, Irish dissent against English rule grew and they looked "to the Catholic powers of Europe for military assistance in their Irish contests" against the English.<sup>234</sup> Although there were many failed attempts to convert the majority of the Irish people to Protestantism, as Elizabeth's reign progressed, those "loyal and disloyal" to English rule "had become equated with Protestant and Catholic, a division... that was to persist, by and large, for the next five hundred years," as Thomas Bartlett has shown.<sup>235</sup> The Irish feeling toward England was that of a battle for religious freedom and independence—for faith and fatherland<sup>236</sup>.

These negative feelings towards the English continued to develop throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly after William of Orange's forces defeated King

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<sup>232</sup> Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 80.

<sup>233</sup> Pope Adrian IV, "The Bull of Pope Adrian IV Empowering Henry II to Conquer Ireland. A.D. 1155," Yale Law School: The Avalon Project, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/medieval/bullad.asp>.

<sup>234</sup> Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 83.

<sup>235</sup> Bartlett, *Ireland*, 83.

<sup>236</sup> Hiram Morgan, "Faith and Fatherland or Queen and Country? An Unpublished Exchange Between O'Neill and the State at the Height of the Nine Years War," *Dúiche Néill: Journal of the O'Neill Country Historical Society*, (1994): 1.

James II's at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. This battle solidified the Protestant leanings of the English throne, as well as heightened the tensions between the Catholics of the South and the Protestants of the North. This religious, but also social and cultural, animosity continued to simmer into the nineteenth century and came to a head during the Irish Potato Famine in 1845. The Great Hunger occurred when a fungus rapidly spread throughout Ireland and ruined the majority of the potato crops for the next several years. The blight, however, particularly impacted the southern areas of Ireland, as these farms produced nearly exclusively potatoes, whereas farms in the north produced a greater variety of crops. Additionally, because the tenant farmers of Ireland, who were primarily made up of Catholics, relied heavily on the potato as a source of food, the famine effectively wiped out a large portion of a Catholic generation.<sup>237</sup> During this time of starvation, the British government did little to protect Ireland's poor Catholic population. It was soon after the Famine that Irish Catholics began to call for Home Rule – they wanted the opportunity to govern themselves, separate from Great Britain.

Many Irish Catholic children were raised hearing their parents' and grandparents' stories about the injustices they faced at the hands of the British, stretching back to the medieval period. Parents told their children stories about the Irish Republican heroes of previous generations – about men and women who had fought for the rights of Catholics in Ireland, no matter the circumstances or cost.<sup>238</sup> Without the folklore and stories that were passed down from generation to generation of Irish Republicans, without the emphases on justice and unity that were instilled in children from a young age, and without the encouragement to join the fight against British rule, it is unlikely that the tensions between Catholics and Protestants, Republicans and

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<sup>237</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, "The Famine," in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2004): 194.

<sup>238</sup> Eamonn Hughes, "Stories That You Have to Write Down Are Different: Hugo Hamilton's 'The Speckled People' and Contemporary Autobiography," in *The Irish Review (Cork)*, Summer 2012, No. 44 (Summer 2012): 128.

Loyalists, would have reached such high levels during the Troubles. The influence of generational stories vastly impacted the breadth and violent levels of the conflict.

Although many historians view the Troubles as an isolated incident, and although they often fail to address the influence that women had on the Republican cause through their roles as the mothers and teachers who promoted the movement through familial lines, it is evident that the conflict was a nearly inevitable situation brought about by generations of British cruelty. This inevitability became particularly clear after the Easter Rebellion. It is also clear that the influence and action of women allowed the Irish Republican movement to take root. When the British Government targeted the male leaders of the cause in the late 1880s, Republican women stepped in to fill their places. They served as the leaders and masterminds behind various Republican protests, marches, and gatherings, and taught the younger generations of Irish Catholics about the just nature of their cause. They refused to allow the British Government to silence Republican voices. Through their influence, the Republican movement flourished, leading to the Easter Rising and, in turn, adding the spark that lit the Troubles. The stories of these women encouraged later generations of Republican women to stand for the cause and fight for the rights of Irish Catholics.

Though the tensions in Northern Ireland dissipated significantly after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, residual animosity between Catholics and Protestants remained, particularly amongst those who had lost loved ones at the height of the Troubles. These lingering negative sentiments have been renewed in recent years in the context of Brexit. As Irish columnist Fintan O'Toole states: "Brexit is an English nationalist movement," and explains that the Brits are "utterly unprepared for how deeply divided" a post-Brexit UK would

be.<sup>239</sup> As a result of these growing tensions, many politicians have worked to answer how Britain and the EU would deal with the border between Northern Ireland, a country no longer in the European Union, and the Republic of Ireland, a country still in the EU. During Brexit negotiations, all sides nominally “agreed that protecting the Northern Ireland peace deal (the Good Friday agreement) was an absolute priority,” meaning that the border between the two countries would remain open.<sup>240</sup> However, because of EU regulations on certain goods, such as meat and eggs, discussions about a new infrastructure to check these goods at the border remain ongoing.<sup>241</sup> This, in turn, jeopardizes the peace between the two populations because “a physical border infrastructure would be considered a potential target for paramilitaries,” thus heightening the lingering tensions.<sup>242</sup> These threats of violence show just how volatile this region still is, and just how meaningful and influential generational ties to a conflict can be.

As such, this thesis could have begun the generational discussion nearly anywhere in Irish history – the historical precedence of British imperialism, as well as Irish nationalism stretches back tens of generations. However, the majority of the source base regarding women, as well as the largest presence of female violence, is centered from Home Rule to the present. Republican women are nearly entirely absent from previous Irish literature. Indeed, this thesis is both new and significant because of its focus of female generational ties. It helps to explain why the women of the Troubles acted in the manner they did and shows that often the women who had stronger ties to Republicanism via family members and radicalization, were far more likely

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<sup>239</sup> Fintan O’Toole, “Brexit is Being Driven by English Nationalism. And It Will End in Self-Rule.” *European Press Prize*, June 19, 2016,

<https://www.europeanpressprize.com/article/brexit-driven-english-nationalism-will-end-self-rule/>;

Fintan O’Toole, “Brexit Fantasy is About to Come Crashing Down.” *European Press Prize*, June 25, 2016,

<https://www.europeanpressprize.com/article/brexit-driven-english-nationalism-will-end-self-rule/>.

<sup>240</sup> Tom Edgington and Chris Morris, “Brexit: What is the Northern Ireland Protocol and Why are there Checks?” *BBC*, March 15, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53724381>.

<sup>241</sup> Edgington and Morris, “Northern Ireland Protocol.” *BBC*.

<sup>242</sup> “Brexit: The Facts,” *The Irish Times*, 2020, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/brexit/brexit-the-facts>.

to join violent organizations like the IRA than the women who were not lineally connected to the movement. This thesis gives an indication of which women were more likely to become active, judging based on their familial ties to Republicanism – even if they did not take on violent roles, they still promoted the cause. Conversely, women who sought peace were more likely to have been impacted by violence, instead of actively participating in it. These were the women with few ties to the Republican movement, but were still affected by the random, guerrilla fighting of the Troubles – they sought peace and unity above all else. This project is also important because it places women into the historical narrative of the Troubles – a place where they are seldom found. It shows that they were active, cunning, and vindictive members of the movement, much as men were, and equally pivotal to its success.

At the same time, my work is not without its limitations. It would be nearly impossible to address every woman who was influential in the cause, as well as to discuss every woman's familial background in order to fully understand her level of devotion and why or when she joined the cause, because of a lack of source material. There are so few sources that list women by name, obscuring the full extent of their involvement. As such, the women discussed in this thesis represent a sample of Northern Irish women, rather than all women.

Moreover, the organization of this thesis worked to group like-minded women into their respective roles within the Republican movement. However, this grouping system is not perfect. For example, although Devlin was raised in a very Republican household, she did not opt for the violent route that Dolours and Marian Price did, so does not fit into the “Fighters” section. Devlin also did not act in an entirely peaceful manner, so she cannot be categorized as a Peacekeeper. As such, she is one of the many women in Northern Ireland who straddles the line between violence and peace – she was active in the movement, but cannot be defined as either

violent or peaceful. Similarly, Rose Dugdale was not raised to be a Republican woman, nor was she Irish, though she became an active and violent member of the cause. As such, she fits into the “Fighters” chapter based on her ideology, but lacks the familial and generational ties to the movement harbored by her contemporaries. Very few women can solely be defined in one category – there is some level of overlap for many of these women. However, these sections are still helpful in arguing how women were influenced by the previous generations – those who fought were far more likely to have familial ties to earlier Republican movements than those who sought peace.

In addition to the small sample size of women, because the IRA was so secretive about who was involved, as well as in what capacity, the primary source base of the project is not without its holes. The IRA, for example, kept very few records in order to maintain the anonymity of its members, as well as protect them from law enforcement. Similarly, the early women’s organizations, the Ladies’ Land League, Cumann na mBan, and Inghinidhe na hEireann, did not keep records. Many documents, such as the Boston College Tapes, a set of interviews with Dolours Price about her role within the IRA, the leaders of the IRA, and the infamous IRA “disappearings,” will not be released into the public domain until all named parties have passed away. As such, this thesis is founded on the sources available and was limited by these records.

Conversely, due to these limitations, there is plenty of room for this research to continue in the future. As more sources are released for public access, historians can uncover more information and make new discoveries. They will be able to more fully understand how women were involved in, as well as influenced by, the Republican movement. Moreover, the true extent of these women’s violent actions, as well as their place within the IRA hierarchy will be far more

evident. Additionally, there will be more space to understand the interactions between women in violent roles, such as Dolours and Marian Price, and women in more peaceful roles, such as Bernadette Devlin and Mairead Corrigan. Historians will be able to discover how these women conceived of each other as activists.

In addition, as more historians study the women of the early Republican movement and of the Troubles, I believe that the generational connections between the groups of women will become more distinct because of the influx of new source material. As more records become public, I believe that historians will be able to more easily trace the actual family lineage that connects these women to one another. It is so evident that the women of the early Republican movement greatly influenced and impacted the later generations, leaving me certain that by tracing actual genealogy, these tethers will become even clearer. I would be particularly interested to trace a single female family line from the late 1880s through the Troubles in order to understand how a full indoctrination of the Republican cause impacts future generations of women. The women of the movement were so dedicated and influential within Irish Republicanism; I hope that future historians continue to focus upon them and their impressive feats. Without the women, the historiography of the Troubles is missing its key players.