

“National Housekeeping:”
Rethinking Nationalism through the Irish Housewives Association
by
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Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 2017

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Abstract:

While Ireland remained neutral throughout the Second World War, it was not spared from the economic and social consequences of the conflict. This time in Ireland is known as ‘the Emergency’ and shortages of essential goods exacerbated poverty, often with fatal consequences for the worst off. In 1941, Hilda Tweedy organized a petition signed by Irish women that was sent to Government in pursuit of a variety of policies intended to alleviate some of the harshest suffering caused by economic turmoil and minimal government intervention. This petition ultimately laid the groundwork for the subsequent formation of the Irish Housewives Association in 1942. This Association was involved in a wide array of activities, but consumer protection and the cost of living were of preeminent concern throughout their existence. The Irish Housewives Association has received some historical attention for its feminist activities, but I propose that many of their initiatives can be usefully analyzed through theories of nationalism. I argue that the theoretical innovations of everyday nationalism and consumer nationalism possess previously unrecognized utility for illuminating women’s experience throughout this period of Irish history.

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Introduction:

Nationalism and The Irish Housewives Association

My research interest in the Irish Housewives Association was ignited while taking a History of Nationalism course as a graduate student. When I received the syllabus for this course, I was initially shocked by the absence of any female scholars and became further perplexed to discover the complete silence about women and gender within any of the core texts. I could understand this omission within some of the texts written in the first part of the twentieth century, such as Carlton Hayes' *Essays on Nationalism* published in 1926, and Hans Kohn's *The Idea of Nationalism* published in 1944; they were written before women's history developed as a coherent field and challenged the marginalization of women within the discipline. However, I could afford no such leniency to scholars of nationalism who published throughout the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. I searched high and low through the texts of Ernest Gellner,¹ Benedict Anderson,² E.J. Hobsbawm,³ and Anthony Smith⁴ in search of any discussion about women's involvement with nationalism or the gendered power dynamics of the nation, alas with no success. When I looked outside of the confines of the course syllabus for scholarship about women, gender and nationalism, I discovered a productive body of literature which approached the topic in diverse ways. A frequent refrain within this scholarship was the disappointed sense

¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

³ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1986). A later survey of recent theories of nationalism written by Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998) includes 4 pages acknowledging gender theories of nations, however this is at the end of the book in a section entitled "Beyond Modernism?" and it shows a very superficial engagement with these theories. He concludes that "'gender-nation' theories have considerable work to do if they are to provide a more comprehensive causal analysis of... the formation of nations and the spread and intensity of nationalism," (210) without seeming to understand that theories which only explore the male experience of nationalism cannot truly be considered comprehensive either.

that regardless of how much feminist scholars published about nationalism, the “mainstream” masculinist theorists and teachers of nationalism remained uninterested in reading what they produced. This critique certainly aligns with my experience; despite taking a course on nationalism more than thirty-five years after feminists began publishing their critiques and contributions, there was no evidence that my professor had ever encountered them.

The following introduction will begin with definitions of some of the key terms for this thesis. Next, I will briefly survey the general literature about women, gender and nationalism, before delving into the particularities of historical scholarship within the context of Ireland. My review of this literature suggests that there is an undue preoccupation with violent nationalist conflict and politics at the state level. It further suggests that there is a dearth of scholarship which investigates women as historical actors throughout the mid to late twentieth century within Irish nationalist movements. To conclude this introduction, I will situate the Irish Housewives Association within this historiographic tradition by demonstrating that through drawing on the theoretical insights of everyday nationalism, we can illuminate a clearly overlooked chapter in the history of Irish nationalism.

Defining Terms

In order to impose a measure of clarity on the following historiographical analysis, I will define the key terms of gender, state, civil society, and nation. All these terms are contested concepts which have evolved over decades of academic debate. As knowledge is always situated and in a process of becoming, attempting to fix a firm and final definition to any of these terms is an impossible endeavour. I shall, however, provide an outline of some important elements in the

evolution of these concepts in order to gain a useful working meaning for the purposes of this study.

Gender first entered feminist vocabulary in order to move away from the biological determinism implicit in the term sex. Since one of the pursuits of feminism has been to contest sex essentialism, it was necessary to invent new terminology to do so. While sex denotes the biological body, by the mid-1970s, gender was utilized to describe the social construction of difference between male and female.⁵ Gender began to supplant the language of “sex roles” to describe the differences between masculinities and femininities. A focus on gender further inspired historians to be more attentive to the social relations between men and women rather than treating women’s experience in isolation. However, feminists have never been a unified group, and this division between material bodies and socially constructed gender was challenged by several preeminent feminist philosophers such as Donna Haraway, Moira Gatens, and Elizabeth Grosz, who were critical of the sanitization of the biological body from feminist studies.⁶ Their critical stance can be succinctly summarized by Haraway who argued that “the political and epistemological effort to remove women from the category of nature and to place them in culture as constructed and self-constructing social subjects in history,” has effectively quarantined the concept of gender “from the infections of biological sex.”⁷ They highlight that social knowledge is always situated from, and projected onto, sexed physical bodies. Scholars have also been increasingly inclined to blur distinctions between the sex/gender divide in order

⁵ Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 159.

⁶ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: the Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, New York and London, 1991); Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1994); Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* (1st ed. London; New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁷ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 134.

to highlight that bodies can also be analyzed as a mode of discourse.⁸ However, the details of the debates surrounding the sex/gender distinction are not of great concern to this thesis, and for our purposes, it is simply worth knowing that gender was initially used to denote social construction as opposed to biological determinism.

The project of defining gender for the purposes of history was significantly advanced by Joan Scott's timely intervention into the field in 1986. Scott believed that women's history was unproductively stalled around historical description and needed to advance its theoretical toolkit in order to deliver on promises that women's history was more than simply "additive" to existing historical narratives. Scott sought to help women's history fulfill its transformational potential through utilizing gender as a category of historical analysis. Scott intervened against what she perceived as an ahistorical and reductionist treatment of gender which perpetuated a belief in the "fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition."⁹ By drawing on Derrida's use of deconstruction, and Foucault's concept of decentralized and diffuse power, she encouraged gender historians to become attentive to the relationship between discourse and power. Scott divides her definition of gender into two interrelated but analytically distinct components: (1) "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes," and (2) "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power."¹⁰ Scott's invitation to use gender as a category of analysis was well-received and a new generation of productive literature was published which revolutionized women's history, while also

⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 7

⁹ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91 no.5 (Dec. 1986): 1065.

¹⁰ Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis," 1067.

fundamentally changing how topics such as the economy and international relations were explored.¹¹

Scott's approach, however, had some detractors. In 1989, Judith Bennett expressed concern that, “[p]ursued on its own, the Scottian study of gender ignores women *qua* women,” and is overly abstract at the expense of “material reality.”¹² Barbara Jeanne Fields likewise commented in 1989 that, “if not kept strictly in their place,” categories of analysis tend to “get above themselves and go masquerading as persons, mingling on equal terms with human beings and sometimes crowding them out altogether.”¹³ Similarly, in 2008, Jeanne Boydston suspected that gender as a category of analysis was no longer imbued with the historically contingent qualities Scott intended. Boydston feared that as a category, gender was assumed to unfold much in the same way and time across diverse societies.¹⁴ In order to remedy this, Boydston suggested taking gender as a question of analysis, rather than a category.

The use of gender in this thesis retains its original purposes of denoting socially constructed roles and behaviours that mark boundaries and relationships between masculine and feminine. Furthermore, it draws on Scott's contribution in order to focus on how gendered

¹¹ Andrew J. Rotter, “Gender Relations, Foreign Relations: The United States and South Asia, 1947–1964,” *Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (1994): 518–542; Frank Costigliola, “‘Unceasing Pressure for Penetration’: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan’s Formation of the Cold War,” *Journal of American History* 83, no. 2 (1997): 1309–1333; Simon Duncan and Birgit Pfau-Effinger, *Gender, Economy and Culture in the European Union* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Kristin Hoganson, “What’s Gender Got to Do with It? Women and Foreign Relations History,” *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 2 (2005): 14–18; Jane L. Parpart, and Marysia Zalewski, *Rethinking the Man Question: Sex, Gender and Violence in International Relations* (New York: Zed Books, 2008); Deborah Simonton and Anne Montenach, *Female Agency in the Urban Economy: Gender in European Towns, 1640–1830* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Diane Cady, *The Gender of Money in Middle English Literature: Value and Economy in Late Medieval England* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2019).

¹² Judith Bennett, “Feminism and History” *Gender & History* 1, no. 3 (1989): 258.

¹³ Barbara Jeanne Fields, “Categories of Analysis? Not in my Book” in *Viewpoints, Excerpts from the ACLS Conference in the Humanities in the 1990s*, American Council of Learned Societies Occasional Papers Series 10 (New York: ACLS, 2989): 30.

¹⁴ Jeanne Boydston, “Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis,” *Gender & History* 20 no. 3 (Nov. 2008): 559.

discourse makes power visible. However, this thesis is also aware of the potential limitations of such a use of gender, and as such, it retains a significant focus on women as historical actors. Therefore, I also draw on Boydston's recommendation to approach gender as a question which can only be answered through examining intersecting variables and historical contingencies, rather than presuming it to be a predetermined category. Through a case study of the Irish Housewives Association, this thesis adopts the insights of gender history in order to illuminate the centrality of discourse and power, while simultaneously retaining a focus on women as historical actors since the material experience of women has often been obscured throughout this period of Irish history in favour of more abstract analysis.

In order to grasp the relationship between gender relations and national projects, it is necessary to theorize the state as a distinct sphere from nation and from civil society.¹⁵ The very nature of what constitutes a state changes over time, as early agrarian, feudal, and imperial states all contain fundamental differences from modern states. For our purposes, the state will be treated as a modern, democratic state, and my definition will ignore potential differences which could arise from analyzing fascist or communist states.

In 1918, Max Weber produced the most popular definition of the state as the “form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of *legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory.”¹⁶ This monopoly informs the boundaries of state sovereignty, which must be recognized internally by the populace, and externally by a community of other states. Scholars have since added that the state is composed of various order-enforcing agencies which combine elements of both coercion and repression, thus showing the state to be a

¹⁵ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 10.

¹⁶ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” in *Max Weber: The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Own and Tracy Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 33.

managerial institution. More recently, there has been a tradition, originating in the work of Gramsci, Althusser and Poulantzas, which questions the unitary definition of the state in order to show how it incorporates institutions with roles that seem strictly private (the church, media, and school), while also highlighting that the state coordinates competing economic interests and factions of capital. While power in the state is shared between heterogeneous agencies which do not produce unitary effects, it is still useful to see the state as machinery for the exercise of governance over a given population.¹⁷ While the state must incorporate elements of civil society, these should still be treated as distinct spheres. Civil society are those groupings and institutions outside of the official state rubric, such as trade unions, schools, clubs, the media, the family, and churches; these groups inform the state, but are also informed by it. The Irish Housewives Association is located within the sphere of civil society, and its story is defined by both antagonism and cooperation with the Irish state, as well as stances in between.

Defining the nation proves to be a much more difficult endeavour than defining the state and civil society. The nation is undoubtedly one of the most powerful agents of our time, for both politics and individual identity, however, the philosophy behind it is notoriously incoherent and difficult to pin down. In 1861, John Stuart Mill defined the nation as a group of people united by “common sympathies which do not exist between them and any others” which culminates in a desire to be under the same government, a government composed by a portion of themselves.¹⁸ Mill goes on to provide a laundry list of qualities that produce this feeling, including race and descent, language, religion, geography, and political antecedents.¹⁹ Many scholars define nations with this “laundry list” approach, however this is never completely

¹⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis, Floya Anthias, *Woman, Nation, State* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1989), 5.

¹⁸ John Stuart Mill, *Representative Government*, (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 181.

¹⁹ Mill, *Representative Government*, 181.

satisfactory as there are always exceptions to whatever list of qualities are said to define a nation. In 1882, Ernest Renan sidestepped these problems by defining a nation as a spiritual principle comprised of a past heritage of shared memories and a present desire to live together.²⁰ He uses the metaphor of “a daily plebiscite” to explain the nation’s existence.²¹ This definition has certain merits which laundry list explanations do not and it has provided a useful foundation for later definitions of nations. Through a focus on consent, it illuminates the elusive quality of nations which is impossible to detect through considering exclusively material qualities.

Benedict Anderson approaches the nation in an anthropological spirit as an “imagined community” which is both “inherently limited and sovereign.”²² It is imagined, because despite a sense of shared identity, the vast majority of people within a nation will never meet, or have any form of relationship with each other; “print capitalism” in the form of novels and daily newspapers are, for Anderson, crucial inventions for the possibility of such imagined communities. He suggests that nationalism is not so much one political ideology amongst others, such as liberalism or communism, but rather, a pervasive way of imagining and ordering the world. Anderson's approach to nations elicited a response from Partha Chatterjee, who, while not disagreeing with Anderson's fundamental thesis, disputed Anderson's claim that the Americas and Europe developed nations which were fundamentally “modular”, meaning they provided blueprints which were simply adopted by the rest of the world. For Chatterjee, if the only nations available are “modular” ones, what is left for the rest of the world to imagine? He explains: “History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual

²⁰ Ernest Renan, *What is a Nation?* (Toronto: Tapir Press, 1996): 80.

²¹ Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’, 81.

²² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5-6.

consumers of modernity... Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized.”²³ He goes on to suggest that this difficulty arises because “we have all taken the claims of nationalism to be a *political* movement much too literally and much too seriously.”²⁴ For Chatterjee, nations in the colonized world have both an inner domain, concerned with spiritual and cultural matters, and an outer domain, concerned with the economy and statecraft. The inner domain is often defined in opposition to the colonizer, while the outer domain often seeks to emulate the proficiencies of the colonizer.

The inner/outer divide does not graft easily onto the public/private divide which has a longstanding history in the West. Yet the inner/outer distinction is useful when considering the particularities of the nation within the context of post-independence Ireland, which, despite being firmly a part of the Western world, also has a unique experience of colonization. After independence, Irish national elites sought to distinguish the nation’s inner cultural domain by highlighting its Catholic, Gaelic and rural qualities, which underscored a perceived moral purity in contrast with their definition of the British metropole. However, the same national elite simultaneously modelled the new state in every fundamental way on their colonial predecessor, with a focus on the capitalist economy, state sovereignty, party politics, and adoption of the discourse of modernity and progress.

Michael Billig offered a significant reconceptualization of nationalism through his concept of banal nationalism. He was critical of existing theories of nationalism which focused disproportionately on the inception of nations but did little to explain how or why nations continue to be, perhaps, *the most* important and universal political unit and form of identity in the

²³ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5.

²⁴ Ibid., 5.

present day.²⁵ Furthermore, he felt that approaches to nationalism tended to only see nationalism at the periphery, in the violent actions of extremists, separatists, and usually, some non-Western “other”.²⁶ Here lies the contradiction Billig sought to address, the omnipresent force of nationalism allowed it to fall into the hegemonic background until a crisis of the nation brought it to the fore. The continued presence of the nation was taken to be so obvious that it remained uninterrogated. Through focusing on overlooked, or banal expressions of nationalism, he gave academics the tools needed to more critically examine the world shaping power of nationalism in their own lives. Billig’s contribution has been described as “a breath of fresh air” for the many students of nationalism who “had grown more than a little tired of arguing about civic vs. ethnic nationalism or the distinction between benign patriotism from more dangerous nationalism.”²⁷ Banal nationalism aims to show how the idea of the nation is maintained through non-violent means on a daily basis, and when the idea of the nation thus propagated no longer attracts attention, it has achieved its aim as a hegemonic project.²⁸ Billig highlights quotidian examples such as the self-evident use of “us” and “them” within the national media to denote insiders and outsiders to the nation, or the omnipresent “unwaved flag” of American stars and stripes in the packaging of consumer products in the United States. For Billig, these banal cues enforce national identities as normalized and obvious, allowing them to easily be drawn on by state

²⁵ Billig does not address the challenge that Indigenous peoples seeking transnational solidarity may pose to this statement about the universal significance of nationhood. However, Indigenous people seeking transnational solidarities are still very much impacted by the current configuration of nation states. The very rejection of, for example, a Canadian national identity in favour of a Mohawk identity that does not adhere to the Canadian/American border is made so difficult precisely because it is a disruption to the nation as the primary and universal unit of identity. Even those who seek to reject or alter the current global configuration of nations are still impacted by this hegemonic status quo.

²⁶ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 5.

²⁷ Craig Calhoun, “The Rhetoric of Nationalism” in *Everyday Nationhood: Theorising Culture, Identity and Belonging After Banal Nationalism*, eds. Michael Skey and Marco Antonsich (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). 17.

²⁸ Atsuko Ichijo, “Banal Nationalism and UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage List: Cases of Washoku and the Gastronomic Meal of the French,” in *Everyday Nationhood: Theorising Culture, Identity and Belonging After Banal Nationalism*, ed. Skey, Michael and Marco Antonsich (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 261.

actors in times of crisis or foreign invasions. Banal nationalism demonstrates how power relationships are centred around the national and suggests that when the normalized nation is unreflectively accepted, it provides a powerful tool for elites to achieve their ends. Banal, thus used, indicates the overlooked, but also retains more insidious implications, reflective of Arendt's concept of the banality of evil.

Scholars such as Tim Edensor, Jon E. Fox, and Cynthia Miller-Idriss used Billig's scholarship as a springboard for their related, yet distinct, concept of "everyday nationalism". While banal nationalism emphasizes how elites (usually the state) make use of what is taken for granted through the normalization of the nation, everyday nationalism is better equipped to study the creation and maintenance of nationhood from below, through the everyday acts of ordinary people. This national project may or may not be congruent with what the national elite envision or seek to maintain.²⁹ In 2008, Fox and Miller-Idriss outlined four primary ways in which the nation is produced and reproduced in everyday life: 'talking the nation', 'choosing the nation', 'performing the nation', and 'consuming the nation'.³⁰ Talking the nation refers to the ways in which the nation is discursively constructed and negotiated through routine talk in everyday interactions. Choosing the nation refers to the ways in which the nation shapes the variety of decisions people make daily. Performing the nation refers to the invocation of national symbols and the production of national sensibilities through their ritual enactment. Consuming the nation refers to the expression of national difference through the tastes and preferences of people through everyday consumption habits.³¹ For this thesis, talking the nation and consuming the

²⁹ Ichijo, "Banal Nationalism and UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List", 261.

³⁰ Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," *Ethnicities*, 8, no. 4 (2008): 537-538.

³¹ Ibid., 538-553.

nation are the two most significant tools employed towards understanding the Irish Housewives Association through the framework of everyday nationalism.

Everyday nationalism explores the way people subjectively connect meaningful relationships between the nation and everyday life, thus allowing scholars to move between macro and micro levels of analysis. This approach does not view the nation as a ‘laundry list’ of fixed qualities, nor does it seek to distinguish between a supposedly productive civic nationalism and violent ethnic nationalism, but rather, approaches the nation as a constellation, or cultural matrix. This cultural matrix is constantly in the process of becoming through complex interactions between everyday life, popular culture, and civil society, wherein people make and remake connections between the local and the national, the national and the global.³² In the words of Fox and Miller-Idriss, “[w]hen national frames are discursively invoked, social actors become national actors, diverse phenomena become national phenomena and everyday stories become national stories.”³³ The concept of everyday nationalism illustrates that however institutionalized the nation may become, it is still “perpetually open to context, to elaboration and to imaginative reconstruction.”³⁴ Rather than focusing on the relationship between nationalism and the administrative elite who govern the state, everyday nationalism is a tool to explore the relevance of nation for citizens and daily society. This distinction is useful for scholars who wish to avoid the conflation between nation and state which can easily become muddled.

My working definition of nationalism is primarily influenced by the theoretical insights of everyday nationalism as it is best equipped to explore nationhood from below. However, this

³² Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), vii.

³³ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood,” 540.

³⁴ Edensor, *National Identity* vii.

thesis also relies on the scholarship of Anderson who emphasizes the imagined qualities of nations; Chatterjee who highlights the inner and outer elements of post-colonial nation building; and Billig who is critical of studies of nationalism which disproportionately focus on the violent and exceptional.

Pioneering Scholars of Women, Gender and Nationalism

Before delving into the particularities of historical writing about women, gender and nationalism within the context of Ireland, I will briefly survey trends within the literature more generally. While scholars have approached the topic in a variety of interesting ways, there are certainly discernable trends within the literature. The most commonly adopted approaches focus on: (1) women's participation in national liberation movements and conflicts, (2) the relationships between feminism and nationalism, and (3) the gendered discourses and structures of nationalism at the state level, with a focus on the institutions of citizenship, constitutions, political parties and militaries. These three dominant themes within the broader scholarship about nationalism are also replicated (albeit, with some variation) within the literature specifically focused on the Irish context. I will conclude by suggesting that my research on the Irish Housewives Association fills a conspicuous gap within the literature on women, gender and nationalism. It does so by utilizing the theoretical framework of everyday nationalism which has feminist potential that has yet to be fully realized. This conclusion stems from my critique that most scholarship about women, gender, and nationalism shows a disproportionate preoccupation with violent nationalist movements and politics at the state level.

Scholars who approach nations and nationalism from a postcolonial perspective or through the experience of non-Western nations have been foundational in redressing the absence

of women and gender within the literature. In 1986 Kumari Jayawardena published *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* which expanded on research previously published in 1982. Focusing on the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this book explores the intersection of feminism and nationalism within Egypt, Iran, Turkey, India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia. Jayawardena emphasizes women's participation in revolutionary anti-colonial and democratic movements, explaining "the role of women in such struggles has not been given adequate attention; one hears only of the 'heroes' and little of the numerous 'heroines'."³⁵ She illustrates how the struggle for women's emancipation "was necessarily bound up with the fight for national liberation and formed an essential part of the democratic struggles of the period."³⁶ However, Jayawardena laments that many of the "new women" of the period "relapsed into their domestic roles."³⁷

Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World explains that the most striking feature of early nationalist and revolutionary agitation in these countries is that women of all classes went into the streets to demonstrate on issues of national concern, and often ultimately achieved legal equality with men at the juridical level.³⁸ However, despite the immense contribution of women to these nationalist movements, the newly created states failed to improve the subordinate status of women within the patriarchal structures of family and society.³⁹ The two topics which emerge most poignantly from this text are the interrelated and tumultuous relationship between feminism and nationalism and women's active participation in national liberation movements.

³⁵ Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986), i.

³⁶ Ibid., i-ii.

³⁷ Ibid., ii.

³⁸ Ibid., 22,24.

³⁹ Ibid., 24.

In Anne McClintock's book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, she argues that "imperialism cannot be fully understood without a theory of gender power,"⁴⁰ and demonstrates that "imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of Western, industrial modernity."⁴¹ Her emphasis on the gendered dynamics of imperialism informs her approach to nations and nationalism. She explains that apart from Frantz Fanon, male theorists of nationalism have seldom been moved to explore how nationalism is implicated in gender power.⁴² She further explains that when writing in 1995, white feminists were still reluctant to explore nationalism as a feminist concern. Building on her research regarding imperialism's cult of domesticity and feminization of the land, McClintock highlights how nations are frequently figured through discourses of familial relations and domestic space. The root of the term nation, *natio* means to be born, and the frequent use of terms such as "motherland", "fatherland", "homelands", a "family of nations" and the "adoption" of a foreigner to a new nation are only some examples of the centrality of this terminology to nations. For McClintock, the trope of family is important as it offers a supposedly "natural" justification for the existence of "national hierarchy within a putative organic *unity* of interests."⁴³ The use of familial terminology depicts social differences in power as a category of nature since the subordination of woman to man and child to adult is deemed a "natural" fact.

The remainder of McClintock's investigation into the gendered dynamics of nationalism focuses on women's unequal relationship to citizenship and on the tumultuous events in South Africa from the 1940s onwards regarding the "bloodied contest over national power."⁴⁴ Like

⁴⁰ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

⁴² Ibid., 353.

⁴³ Ibid., 357.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

Jayawardena, McClintock emphasizes women's role in anti-colonial nationalist conflict, but she also contributes a more thorough analysis of gendered state institutions which uphold the nation.

George Mosse stands out as one of the few male theorists of nationalism who incorporates gender as a crucial element within their research. Furthermore, he contributes to the first generation of literature on the topic through highlighting the centrality of sexuality to the nation building project and its maintenance. His trailblazing 1985 book *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*, illustrates the interdependent relationship between modern state formation, the history of nationalism, and the traditions of bourgeois respectability. With a focus on Germany, Mosse analyzes emergent norms of masculinity and shows how appropriate gendered and heterosexual behaviour are crucial in the formation of insiders and outsiders to the nation. He explains that increased state centralization through "the practical techniques of physicians, educators, and police"⁴⁵ spread a national identity premised on the new middle-class moral code of respectable sexual behaviour and gender roles. The triumph of the nuclear family and idealization of a public private divide was underpinned by the development of nationalism and its accompanying politics of bourgeois respectability. Mosse's study of nationalism and sexuality explores how the modern state is supported by, and promotes, discourses and structures of gender power relations and normative sexuality. His linkages between gender and sexuality have remained relevant and continue to be developed in more recent scholarship on nationalism.

In 2000, two different multi-author books were published which expand and deepen Mosse's focus on sexuality by applying it to warfare and state institutions within different national contexts. Both *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, edited by Tamar

⁴⁵ George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, Ltd., 1985), 9.

Mayer, and *Women, States, and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?*, edited by Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault, explore the intersections of gender and sexuality with nationalism and the state. Mayer illustrates that many nations premise their identity on rigid and fixed concepts of gender and despite the rhetoric of equality, the nation usually becomes the property of men. She draws on Judith Butler's theories of gender performance to demonstrate that through the repetition of acceptable gendered behaviour, men and women inform the construction of normative national identities. These usually revolve around the positioning of men as protectors of the nation and women as the biological and ideological reproducers of the nation's purity, indicating that nationalism becomes the language through which sexual control and repression is exercised.⁴⁶ Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault reflect on the proliferation of "new" nationalisms after the fall of the Soviet Union and highlight the disturbing centrality of sexual violence against women as a weapon of nationalist warfare. The themes of gender, sexuality and nation were picked up again in a refreshing manner in 2018 with the publication of *Gendering Nationalism: Intersections of Nation, Gender and Sexuality*.⁴⁷ This eclectic book is comprised of multiple chapters produced by authors who span an impressive range of regions and topics. Like most publications addressing this topic, it retains a focus on violent nationalist movements and state politics, however, it also incorporates the under explored gendered dynamics of transnational migration which became all the more pertinent in the twenty-first century.

Nira Yuval-Davis is a central scholar for the history of women, gender and the nation. In 1989, Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias co-edited a volume entitled *Woman, Nation and State*. The

⁴⁶ Tamar Mayer, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.

⁴⁷ Jon Mulholland, Nicola Montagna, Erin Sanders-McDonagh, *Gendering Nationalism: Intersections of Nation, Gender and Sexuality* (Springer International Publishing, 2018).

papers within this book “examine the relationship between women, the national and the state in the specificity of their particular societies at a given historical moment.”⁴⁸ The chapters explore case studies from various countries and demonstrate how state policies on immigration, welfare, and citizenship impact women. While the introduction of the book explains the aim is to illustrate how “women affect and are affected by national and ethnic processes and how these relate to the state,”⁴⁹ the majority of its chapters focus more substantially on how women are affected, constructed and shaped by national state policies. Women’s agency, or power to affect these structures, remains underdeveloped. In 1997, Yuval-Davis published *Gender and Nation*, which retains many of the themes from her previous publications but switches the emphasis from women to gender. This book identifies numerous pertinent themes which emerge from the intersection of gender with nation. She explores how rights and duties of citizenship are gendered, the gendered nature of militaries and wars, and the complex relationship between feminism and nationalism. Yuval-Davis acknowledges that the state, civil society and family are three separate but interrelated spheres of the nation, however, her analysis remains focused on the state level.

This overview of the most significant theoretical contributions to the study of women, gender, and nations illustrates several common themes and issues of academic interest. When scholars explore how women actively participate in the nation, there is a preoccupation with nationalist liberation movements and times of national crisis. In many ways, it makes sense to focus on these moments of intense nationalist conflict because, as pointed out by Jayawardena, the dynamics of guerrilla warfare and street politics facilitate the public participation of women

⁴⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis, Floya Anthias, *Woman, Nation, State* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1989), 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1.

in the nationalist project on an unparalleled level. The historiographical consensus which arises from a focus on national liberation movements is that women usually achieved unprecedented rights and opportunities for public participation during this tumultuous period, only to see these rights and their voice in the nation diminished after formal statehood is achieved. While this orthodoxy is by no means erroneous, such a focus obscures the myriad of other ways that women participate in the life of the nation and the development of nationalism.

A second dominant theme within this scholarship is the relationship between feminism and nationalism. This research illustrates the complex interactions between the two ideologies which prove to be extremely fluid depending on the place and time under study; however, such an approach can easily become unproductively preoccupied with evaluating the feminist credentials of nationalist movements. This is an overly narrow approach which precludes deeper theorization about gender and nation. Scholars who choose not to focus on women's involvement with nationalist liberation movements, or the relationship between feminism and nationalism, tend to explore the gendered discourses and structures of the nation, most frequently through an analysis of state policies and institutions.⁵⁰ This approach has provided an invaluable corrective to the otherwise frequent treatment of the state as gender neutral. However, it has the drawback of focusing on power which emanates from the state and formal party politics rather than on the agency of women who operate within such national power structures.

⁵⁰ Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*; Yuval-Davis and Anthias, *Woman, Nation, State*; and several chapters in Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997); Sita Ranchod-Nilsson, and Mary Ann Tetreault, *Women, States and Nationalism : At Home in the Nation?* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2000).

Women, Gender and Nationalism in Ireland

I will now shift to examine scholarship about women, gender and nationalism within the historical context of Ireland. This historical research can be generally divided according to three dominant trends, which incorporate aspects of the previously discussed themes found within the broader theoretical literature. The first and most popular approach focuses on the role of women within nationalist liberation movements involved in the creation of the Irish Free State; the second trend highlights the role of gender in state institutions and national discourses; and the third approach explores the role of women and the significance of gender within the violent period known as ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland.

The vast majority of scholarship about women and Irish nationalism focuses on climactic moments of conflict and warfare between 1916-1923, with the Easter Rising, the War of Independence and the Civil War receiving the most historical attention.⁵¹ The first wave of feminist scholarship about this period in Irish history, from 1916-23, takes a “great woman” approach. Constance de Markievicz is the most famous woman within this literature due to her founding role in Fianna Éireann and Cumann na mBan, as well as her leadership in the Easter Rising and subsequent imprisonment.⁵² Margaret Skinnider, Kathleen Clarke and Helena Molony are also popular women within the nationalist history for their active participation in the Easter

⁵¹ Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1983); Margaret Ward, *The Missing Sex: Putting Women into Irish History* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1991); Sinéad McCoole, *Guns & Chiffon: Women Revolutionaries and Kilmainham Gaol 1916-1923* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1997); Sinéad McCoole, *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years 1900-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Cal McCarthy, *Cumann Na mBan and the Irish Revolution* (Cork: Collins Press, 2007); Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish Republican Women 1900-1922* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2010); Liz Gillis, *Women of the Irish Revolution* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2014); Mary McAuliffe and Liz Gillis, *Richmond Barracks 1916: We were there: 77 Women of the Easter Rising* (Dublin: Dublin City Council, 2016).

⁵² Séán O’Faoláin, *Constance Markievicz* (London: Sphere Books, 1934); Anne Marreco, *The Rebel Countess: The Life and Times of Constance Markievicz* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967); Jacqueline Van Voris, *Constance De Markievicz in the Cause of Ireland* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1967); Diana Norman, *Terrible Beauty: A Life of Constance Markievicz, 1868-1927* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987).

Rising and leadership in various nationalist organizations. Maud Gonne is a similarly significant figure within the historical literature for founding Inghinidhe na hÉireann and for her imprisonment for nationalist activities, while Hanna Sheehy Skeffington has received historical attention for her combination of radical Irish republicanism and international feminism.

Many of the women who took a leading role in Irish nationalist movements within this timeframe left a considerable paper trail of their political activity in the form of published or unpublished autobiographies, letters, and numerous publications in various nationalist newspapers and feminist journals. The relative abundance of accessible primary sources contributes to the popularity of monographs focusing on this period and biographies tracing the lives of these outstanding women. This body of scholarship aims to understand what role politically active women played in nationalist liberation movements. It further illustrates that in the years which followed formal statehood, women were forced out of public roles and active governance of the nation.

Scholarship which highlights the role of women between 1916-1923 often seeks to place “the contradictions between nationalism and feminism [which] continue to overwhelm us,”⁵³ into historical perspective. Some women such as Markievicz thought that national independence would ensure Irish women’s liberation, while other women such as Skeffington believed that to allow nationalist claims to come before feminist claims set a dangerous precedent. However, there is no doubt that all these women were both feminists and nationalists despite different emphases.⁵⁴ An examination of Irish nationalist organizations at the beginning of the twentieth century shows that movements for national political rights were inseparable from movements

⁵³ Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 3.

⁵⁴ Kathryn Kirkpatrick, *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 2.

calling for women's rights, cultural rights and workers' rights. These were not separate and distinct issues but an intertwined eruption against the status quo of colonial domination.⁵⁵ However, after the creation of an independent Irish state, these diverse concerns were streamlined into a focus on formal party politics, the capitalist economy, political sovereignty and Catholic morality; feminist and socialist visions of the nation were largely discarded by the male leadership.

Scholarship focused on the involvement of exceptional women within the nationalist liberation movement provides a necessary corrective to the erasure of women from this crucial period of Irish history. Reflective of Jayawardena's critique that much is written of national heroes, and little of national heroines, Margaret Ward, a foundational scholar in the study of women and nationalism in Ireland, questioned why all the politically active women throughout Irish history had disappeared into obscurity apart from Countess Markievicz. Beginning in the early 1980s, Ward almost single handedly generated academic interest about women's involvement with revolutionary nationalist movements in Ireland through numerous publications focusing on this period. However, in keeping with the broader nationalist analyses of its time, this scholarship also contributes to an approach which views women's national participation in Ireland as confined within extreme moments of political crises and highlights the involvement of only the most extraordinary women.

Beginning in the early 2000s, we see two new trends emerge within feminist scholarship about Irish nationalism. First, there is an increased effort to look beyond the revolutionary period of 1916-1923 in order to survey other significant moments of women's participation in Irish

⁵⁵ Carol Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 20.

nationalism. Secondly, there is a transition away from the focus on women as historical actors in order to develop a more nuanced theoretical application of gender as a category of analysis. *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Hags*, published in 2004, surveys women, gender, and Irish nationalism between 1641-1990 and encompasses both emerging trends. The authors challenge the perspective that women appear on the national stage in 1916-1923, seemingly out of nowhere, and instead aim to show how “women have engaged with nationalism in many varied and complex ways.”⁵⁶ The chapters in this book highlight women’s participation in political uprisings in 1641, 1798 and 1848, as well as their paramilitary involvement and subsequent imprisonment during ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the book highlights deep-rooted cultural conceptions of gender which underpin the Irish nation. However, despite the desire to show the varied and complex ways that women participate in nationalism, the focus remains on political uprisings and violent conflict, albeit through examples from various moments in Irish history.

An understanding of how gender operates within the context of the Irish nation has been advanced through approaches which consider textual representations of women through the lens of critical discourse analysis. Louise Ryan significantly contributes to this field of research by sharpening the use of gender and by stepping outside the 1916-1923 timeframe with her monograph *Gender, Identity and the Irish Press, 1922-1937: Embodying the Nation*. Through her discursive analysis of provincial and national newspapers between 1922-1937, Ryan illustrates how the gendered nation is rhetorically constructed while simultaneously illuminating the centrality of heterosexual Catholic morality within the formation of the Irish state. Ryan contextualizes her research by outlining the longstanding dominant colonial rhetorical and

⁵⁶ Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward eds., *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Hags* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004) 3.

symbolic portrayal of the unruly Irish female body as representative of the unruly land and its unruly people. Alternatively, the dominant nationalist representation of the female body depicts it as passive and abused, and symbolic of the violation of the land and its populace. Thus, the plethora of womanly representations of Ireland and Irishness which blur the boundaries between the representations of a nation and actual women – Erin, Hibernia, Mother Ireland, Shan Van Vocht, Cathleen ni Houlihan and Dark Rosaleen.⁵⁷

Ryan argues that between the period from the establishment of the state in 1922, to the Constitution in 1937, images of “woman” as “both the essence of traditional Irish virtue and morality as well as the threat of immorality and sexual impurity,”⁵⁸ are particularly apparent. The crisis of legitimacy in the wake of the bloody Civil War partially explains this heightened focus on women’s bodies, which provided a crucial platform for state authority and control when other issues such as poverty, unemployment and political unrest proved more difficult to manage. Importantly, Ryan contextualizes her research by drawing on Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* which highlights that national newspapers are absolutely crucial within the nation-building process. Ryan’s critical discourse analysis illuminates previously invisible gender-specific aspects of this imagined community through building a comprehensive picture of the nation through diverse images of womanhood.

Heather Ingman analyzes the intersection of gender and nation through a textual deconstruction of fiction written by Irish women throughout the twentieth century. She draws on Julia Kristeva’s theories of nationalism in order to “place the dialog between Irish feminism and nationalism in a wider theoretical context.”⁵⁹ Through drawing on Kristevan theory and focusing

⁵⁷ Louise Ryan, *Gender, Identity, and the Irish Press, 1922-1937: Embodying the Nation* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 2002), 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁹ Heather Ingman, *Twentieth-Century Fiction by Irish Women: Nation and Gender* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 3.

on individual authors, Ingman aims to reconcile the homogenizing impulses of both gender and nation through a focus on the particularity of the individual.⁶⁰ Ingman proposes that the female Irish authors she studies emphasize diversity within the nation and the rights of the individual; she proposes that women are often well situated to combat totalitarianism “since they are frequently positioned as strangers and exiles within the public life of the nation.”⁶¹ Ingman’s research illuminates alternative visions of Ireland produced by women whose voices and contributions have frequently been silenced and obscured within the cultural production of the nation.

Sikata Banerjee significantly contributes to scholarship about gender and Irish nationalism with her 2012 book *Muscular Nationalism: Gender, Violence, and Empire in India and Ireland, 1914-2004*. Banerjee draws on the framework first established by Mosse, however, she focuses extensively on the relational social dynamic between masculinity and femininity within Ireland and India, whereas Mosse’s scholarship focuses more exclusively on manhood and masculinity within Germany.⁶² Banerjee traces a genealogy of muscular nationalism which she defines as the intersection of a “specific vision of masculinity with the political doctrine of nationalism.”⁶³ This masculine ideal is juxtaposed with a “chaste female body that both symbolizes national honor and provides a moral code for lives of women in the nation.”⁶⁴ Banerjee’s study investigates how muscular nationalism accommodates women as political actors within violent national contexts and explores the gender trouble that women’s

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁶¹ Ibid., 6.

⁶² Sikata Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism: Gender, Violence, and Empire in India and Ireland, 1914-2004* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 4.

⁶³ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.

transgressions induced.⁶⁵ She attempts to balance the ideals espoused by muscular nationalism with the ways these were enacted and transgressed by women as political actors. Banerjee focuses on Cumann na mBan, the revival of the Irish Republican Army, and the subsequent Armagh prison protests, known as the ‘dirty protests’ in Northern Ireland in 1980. Banerjee significantly advances the concept of gender within the Irish nationalist context by highlighting the relational dynamics between femininity and masculinity which have often been obscured through the conflation of gender with womanhood. She further expands the theoretical validity of muscular nationalism through interrogating the relationship between gender roles and the actual historical actions of individuals. However, like the vast majority of scholars, she retains a focus on moments of national crisis and violence when exploring the agency of women, thus relegating the involvement of women to the realm of the exceptional.

The final major body of research about women, gender and Irish nationalism focuses on women’s role in the period of violent sectarian turmoil known as ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland. Publications about ‘the Troubles’ largely indicate that women’s patterns of involvement replicate observable trends common to other periods of nationalist turmoil. Women were involved heavily throughout the militant phase, often sacrificing everything for the cause with negligible recognition, or as one nationalist woman put it: “Women are the backbone of the struggle; they are the ones carrying the war here and they are not receiving the recognition they deserve.”⁶⁶ When the peace processes came about, women were notably excluded from the negotiations. Many of the monographs about Northern Ireland seek to disrupt the sectarian divides and include both nationalist and unionist women in their research. The scholarship about

⁶⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁶ Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), ix.

Northern Ireland also continues to explore the tenuous and shifting relationship between nationalism and feminism. Research on women and gender within ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland makes extensive use of oral testimony from interviews, often conducted over several years.⁶⁷ This has the benefit of bringing the voices of diverse women into the history of Irish nationalism who have otherwise been marginalized. The written sources which inform most of the historical literature are disproportionately skewed to reflect the experiences of elite women in leadership roles, while the oral sources which inform the body of literature about ‘the Troubles’ include a diverse range of women who span all levels of nationalist (and unionist) participation.

The Irish Housewives Association

Having provided an overview of the general approaches taken to scholarship about women, gender, and nationalism within Ireland, I will situate my own contribution to the literature. While there has been an increased effort to expand the horizon beyond the limited 1916-1923 period, the scholarship still shows a preoccupation with political conflict and nationalist warfare. Historians have reached further back in history to highlight moments of nationalistic uprising which seem to be precursors to the later revolutionary period, such as the United Irish Rising of 1789, the Young Ireland movement of 1848 and the Land League of 1879. However, after 1923, research on women as historical actors virtually disappears until the early 1970s, when they reemerge in studies of ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland. The period after the Civil War and before ‘the Troubles’ is almost exclusively concerned with examining the relationship between gender and the state power, with a particular focus on how the 1937

⁶⁷ Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence*; Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided: Gender, Religion, and Politics in Northern Ireland* (London: Routledge 1997); Tara Keenan-Thompson, *Irish Women and Street Politics, 1956-1973: 'this could be contagious'* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010).

Constitution enshrined women's role within the domestic sphere. Other scholarship about this period examines gender through textual representations. While this scholarship is fascinating, the exclusive focus on discourse and institutions leads me to wonder what women were actually doing throughout this period? I argue that women do not actually disappear from national public life until turmoil and conflict seemingly call them forward once more, but the belief that they do largely stems from how scholars approach and define the phenomena of nationalism.

In many ways, this skewed perspective is reflective of issues that hamper research on nationalism more generally. There is an almost automatic conflation of the concept of nationalism with violence and warfare or with state institutions. Michael Billig identifies this trend in his book *Banal Nationalism*, where he explains that "in both popular and academic writing, nationalism is associated with those who struggle to create new states or with extreme right-wing politics."⁶⁸ Books about nationalism are expected to discuss "dangerous and powerful passions, outlining a psychology of extraordinary emotions."⁶⁹ However, for scholars influenced by the research agenda of banal and everyday nationalism, confining nationalism to abnormal moments of violence or spectacular displays does little to explain its role as one of the most powerful and omnipresent ideologies, nor does it explain the way in which nationalism forms an everyday common-sense identity for the vast majority of people worldwide.

Much of the scholarship which explores the gendered dimensions of nationalism remains fixated with politics at the state level through examining ways in which citizenship, constitutions, and formal party politics are shaped by gendered discourses and structures. This scholarship has been absolutely crucial for illuminating dimensions of these concepts which

⁶⁸ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 4.

⁶⁹ Billig, 4.

would otherwise be invisible with a gender-blind approach. However, it has the drawback of emphasizing how women are shaped by the institutions of the state and can thus often posit them as passive subjects who are affected by nationalism without significantly affecting it. Women are frequently barred from equal participation in governance at the state level, and as long as our analysis of nationalism remains fixated on state politics, women will only appear at the margins. As pointed out previously, when scholarship does illuminate women's active role in shaping the nation, there is a disproportionate emphasis placed on national liberation movements and violent conflict. This is understandable as such moments often provide the clearest examples of women's public participation alongside their male counterparts. Women's involvement in paramilitary activities and public displays of violence is, however, incredibly transgressive of normative gender roles, thus ensuring that women seem to only temporarily play a part on the nationalist stage in these infrequent moments of extreme crisis.

We tend to only see women as affecting the nation when they transgress the gender roles allotted to them. When historians explore the significance of traditionally female gender roles within the context of the nation, the conversation is usually limited to how women are limited by state structures. This overly dichotomous way of approaching the literature on women, gender and nationalism contributes to the invisibility of women as actors outside of moments of crisis and turmoil. Scholars of women, gender and nationalism have yet to realize the feminist potential in the theoretical innovations of everyday nationalism. Thus, by studying the Irish Housewives Association, we not only illuminate women's agency in the often-overlooked mid-twentieth century period, we further suggest that through broadening our scope beyond violent crises and statecraft, we gain a deeper understanding of how women utilize gender power to shape the nation. In a very brief, yet provocative booklet by Carol Coulter, she is critical of a historical

perspective which assumes that women virtually disappeared after the foundation of the Irish state. This perspective leads to the conclusion that later women's movements and Mary Robinson's election as president in 1990, "sprang into being without any obvious antecedents."⁷⁰ Coulter proposes instead that there is another kind of national politics, "marginalized and driven underground by the institutional politics in operation since the foundation of the state," which is "decentralised, communalist, [and] responsive to local demands and needs."⁷¹

By elaborating on the groundwork established by Coulter, this thesis suggests that the Irish Housewives Association operated precisely in the decentralized, communalist and localized manner, which for Coulter, provides the "hidden tradition" in the history of Irish nationalism. Oftentimes, the Irish Housewives Association espoused alternative ideals for the Irish nation than those promoted by Ireland's male political leaders and they utilized different political strategies than state politicians to achieve their vision. Importantly, much of what the Irish Housewives Association sought to achieve, such as price controls, school meals for children, timely and affordable public transportation, hygienic food handling, informative food packaging, and improved cleanliness for public washrooms, may seem mundane, however these things significantly impacted the way everyday life was experienced in Ireland. Tim Edensor's study of national identity highlights the centrality of everyday life in shaping a shared "structure of feeling" which underpins the continued centrality of the nation as a hegemonic and common-sense identity.⁷²

The local and the national are merged through institutionalized everyday orderings. It is the persistence of common patterns over time which forge a common shared sense that this is

⁷⁰ Carol Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 2.

⁷¹ Coulter, 2.

⁷² Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 19.

"*how things are here* and this is *how we do things*,"⁷³ and the IHA actively shaped and improved these shared patterns within Ireland. It is important that we investigate this, because, while there is a plethora of scholarship focused on the inception of the nation and the role of nationalism in the achievement of statehood, there is a dearth of scholarship considering the maintenance of national identity and its formative power in everyday life. Too often the national is presumed or taken for granted within historical scholarship. It is certainly time to investigate how the nation's ever-present power to provide a common-sense identity is upheld through patterns on both macro and micro levels. An approach which highlights the maintenance of nations shows that they are not static structures, but rather, ones which change over time and are negotiated by differing interest groups. It is a project which is perennially undergoing revisions and this thesis aims to show that Irish women have indeed been vocal participants in the project of nationhood throughout the twentieth century.

At present, there is only one article and two books published on the Irish Housewives Association. The nine-page article, published in 2011 by Aisling Farrell, focuses on the IHA's work for price controls and clean food during "the Emergency".⁷⁴ The first book on the IHA, published in 1992 and entitled *A Link in the Chain: The Story of the Irish Housewives Association, 1942-1992*, is a memoir written by Hilda Tweedy, the founder of the IHA.⁷⁵ The title of her memoir is intended to denote the role of the Association as a link in the chain between feminist movements in Irish history. As such, the memoir is centred around the Association's feminist activities, with the majority of chapters focusing on their central role in the

⁷³ Edensor, 19.

⁷⁴ Aisling Farrell, "'Harassed Housewives Fight the Consumer's Battle': The Formation of the Irish Housewives Association and the Campaign for Price Control, Clean Food, and Equitable Distribution in the Ireland of 'the Emergency,'" *Saothar* 36, (2011): 49-58.

⁷⁵ Hilda Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain: The Story of the Irish Housewives Association, 1942-1992* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1992).

establishment of a Council for the Status of Women, their affiliation with the International Alliance of Women, and their endorsement of women who ran as political candidates. Tweedy felt that the book never received the recognition it deserved, and in 2012, Alan Hayes sought to remedy this with a new multi-author book entitled *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association: Links in the Chain*. As indicated by the title, this book retains a focus on the IHA's feminist activities.⁷⁶ Thus, while the IHA's pivotal position in the establishment of women's rights in Ireland has been established, there has been very little consideration of the Association's other wide reaching and diverse activities.

The aim of this thesis is to tell the story of the IHA's diverse initiatives through the analytical lens of everyday nationalism. The first chapter of this thesis outlines the origins of the Irish Housewives Association. It explores some of the early initiatives undertaken, as well as some controversies, which demonstrated the limits of what this fledgling Association could press for within a conservative state heavily influenced by Catholic morality. It emphasizes that the IHA frequently rhetorically invoked the nation to justify and buttress their initiatives, thus illuminating the centrality of 'talking the nation'. The second chapter explores the IHA's activities and initiatives through the framework of 'consuming the nation'. This chapter highlights the centrality of the IHA in protecting citizens from exploitation while also promoting the consumption of Irish made goods. This thesis aims to highlight the involvement of women in Irish national life throughout the mid-twentieth century and thus challenge the presumed inactivity of women in this period. Furthermore, it hopes to demonstrate that everyday nationalism has feminist potential that has yet to be fully uncovered.

⁷⁶ Of the 11 chapters in this book, only one deals directly with their work for consumer protection, which is the central focus area of this thesis. Alan Hayes, ed., *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association: Links in the Chain*, (Dublin: Arlen House, 2012).

Chapter One: “Housewives’ Petition”

Hilda Tweedy begins her memoir of the Irish Housewives Association by asking readers to cast their minds back to 1941. Likewise, I believe this is the logical starting point for any historical exploration into the IHA’s origins, purpose and impact. Ireland took a neutral stance throughout the Second World War and was thus cut off from many essential imports. The standard of living dropped dramatically, and this period of time was known in Ireland as ‘the Emergency’. Ireland suffered shortages of essential goods and food items, often with fatal consequences for the worst off. Many families experienced increased levels of tuberculosis, malnutrition and infant mortality.⁷⁷ Tweedy recalled that there “was no rationing, prices soared and scarce goods disappeared under the counter,” and she notes that “children in particular suffered a lot.”⁷⁸ Industrial production in Ireland fell by 25 percent during the war,⁷⁹ and the cost of living index rose by 70 percent between 1938 and 1944.⁸⁰ While Ireland avoided the material destruction of the Second World War, it was not spared the economic and social consequences. Tweedy, who had returned to Ireland in 1936 after teaching in Egypt, sought to alleviate the suffering caused by the Emergency.

The Emergency inspired a proliferation of feeding centres across Ireland, particularly within Dublin, where conditions were the worst. While the St. John Ambulance Brigade had been providing meals for the poor since the early 1920s, their provisions were quite inadequate to deal with the Emergency problems. A Quaker organization called the Society of Friends began

⁷⁷ Lindsay Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child: maternity and child health in Dublin, 1922-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 90.

⁷⁸ Hilda Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain: The Story of the Irish Housewives Association, 1942-1992* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1992), 11.

⁷⁹ Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985, Politics and Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 244.

⁸⁰ Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 92.

to recruit staff of the Dublin Bewley's Cafe for various "feeding initiatives" in response to the Emergency.⁸¹ Judge Wylie and a group of supporters opened nonprofit 'Goodwill Restaurants' which provided cheap and nutritious meals. Meanwhile, the Mount Street Club ran a co-operative for unemployed men which provided plots of land to grow fruits and vegetables which were otherwise out of reach for most consumers.⁸² The Marrowbone Lane Committee, initiated by the well-known Dublin pediatrician Dr. Robert Collis, aimed to ensure sick children did not return from hospitals to the conditions which had placed them there in the first place. The Marrowbone Lane Fund strove to provide better nourishment and housing for children of the unemployed and their mothers. Dr. Robert Collis explained:

This work is of such absolute national importance that there is no doubt that it should not be treated in any way as a charity. Every expectant mother should be able to obtain as her right a proper balanced meal a day, the necessary funds being supplied by organized society (i.e. the City or Central Health body), but until such a time as this principle is accepted, the Marrowbone Lane Committee are anxious to continue helping.⁸³

Tweedy likewise felt that such issues of massive national importance should not be left to charity alone and she believed that the sporadic remedy of 'food-drops' was utterly insufficient. She explains, "I did not want to be just another organisation to alleviate conditions on the surface, but rather to get to the root of the matter, to attack the causes of such hardship."⁸⁴ This would prove difficult because independent Ireland drew heavily on the nineteenth-century tradition of charitable assistance to address issues of welfare, particularly when social welfare issues impinged in any way on the family.⁸⁵ Many religious leaders felt that charity should be

⁸¹ Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 96.

⁸² Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 11.

⁸³ National Archives (hereafter NA), Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-1-1, Marrowbone Lane pamphlet.

⁸⁴ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 12.

⁸⁵ Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 90-112.

distributed on a sectarian basis and that social welfare was the responsibility of the churches and not the government. The Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, for example, believed that “Catholics should administer charity to Catholics, and Protestants to Protestants.”⁸⁶ Tweedy, however, felt that this arrangement was no longer sufficient for the citizens of Ireland. She expressed a belief in the right to food before the United Nations popularized such discourse.

In February 1941, Tweedy wrote to a small number of friends whom she felt would share her interest in alleviating the harsh conditions plaguing the Irish nation. She began her letter with the question: “What does Marrowbone Lane mean to you?” and invited recipients to meet at her home to discuss what must be done. She divided the women into two groups of about five or six, but recalls growing nervous about the whole project the night before the first group was intended to arrive.⁸⁷ Andrée Sheehy Skeffington, daughter-in-law to renowned Irish republicans and international feminists, Hannah and Frank Sheehy Skeffington, was on Tweedy’s list for the second night; however, Tweedy felt that Andrée was the only woman on the list with sufficient political experience and know-how to shape her “rather nebulous idea into a working project.”⁸⁸ Andrée’s experience involved work with the Labour Party’s Pearse Street Council of Action, which was an initiative designed to monitor food prices during the Emergency.⁸⁹ Tweedy called Andrée and asked her to attend the first meeting instead of the second, to which she agreed.

The five women involved with the first meeting, Hilda Tweedy, Andrée Sheehy Skeffington, Marguerite Skelton, Sheila Mallagh and Nancye Simmons, decided that the best course of action was to gather signatures from women for a petition. They would send this

⁸⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁸⁷ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 12.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁹ Farrell, “‘Harassed Housewives Fight the Consumer’s Battle,’” 50.

petition to the Government, opposition parties, and the press before Budget Day, 5 May 1941. In *A Link in the Chain*, Tweedy recalls the frantic night spent typing up as many copies as possible, “three copies at a time on an ancient portable type-writer. No word processors or photo-copying machines then!”⁹⁰ Their petition, entitled “Memorandum on the Food and Fuel Emergency” began with only 51 signatures, however, this number eventually grew to 640.

Firstly, the “Memorandum on the Food and Fuel Emergency” addressed the production of food. It recommended compulsory tillage by farmers of at least 40 percent of arable land in the coming season and urged the Government to give credit facilities to farmers at a lower rate of interest and to provide farmers with free lease of any extra machinery required for increased tillage. It further urged the Government to pay farmers a fair price for all agricultural produce and recommended that plotholders who could afford neither seeds nor tools be provided them free of charge. Next it moved on to address the distribution of food. It called for all essential foodstuffs to be entered into a national registry and then immediately and effectively rationed at a standard price in reach of all. It urged the Government to establish a market for fruit and vegetables to be sold at cost to the unemployed. It called on the Government to carefully control the export of essential foods in order to ensure reasonable prices within the domestic market.⁹¹

The production and distribution of fuel was the next issue addressed in the memorandum. It called on the Government to support an intensive turf cutting campaign which would employ labourers at livable minimum wage. It called on the Government to resist the indiscriminate cutting of trees by having experts mark trees available for cutting. Furthermore, it suggested prohibiting the use of coal to fuel pleasure cars and controlling the consumption of gas and

⁹⁰ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 14.

⁹¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-1-1, Food and Fuel Memorandum, 1941.

electricity for industrial and domestic use. It urged a national registration and pooling of all coal to then be sold at a standard price. It requested that the government fix a pro rata price for coal bought in small quantities, so the poor were not handicapped. The memorandum urged the government to take over the transport, storage and distribution of turf to stop the price from continually soaring and to curtail the inefficiency of distribution. The authors further called for more efficient suppression of black markets in order to keep petrol available for all essential services.⁹²

The memorandum concluded with demands for several special measures. For the poor and unemployed, it urged the Government to increase the unemployment allowance to match the cost of living. The signatories further requested that the Government raise the age limit for free milk for children of the unemployed from five to eight years, and to expand the program to all children whose parents could not afford milk in sufficient quantities. They insisted on the establishment of a proper mid-day meal for school children and demanded a free milk scheme for nursing and expectant mothers. They further called on the Government to enforce an order for the pasteurization of all milk, except from tuberculin tested herds. They requested that the Government organize a comprehensive plan embracing all existing communal feeding centres. The women felt that coordination was necessary between existing communal kitchens in order to identify communities being neglected by preexisting arrangements. Communication and rationalization of the process would streamline their reach and avoid redundancies and waste. Finally, the memorandum suggested a permanent scheme for the salvage of waste on a national level.⁹³

⁹² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-1-1, Food and Fuel Memorandum, 1941.

⁹³ Ibid.

The Food and Fuel Memorandum caught the imagination of the national press and was dubbed the “Housewives’ Petition” by the *Evening Mail, Irish Times* and *Irish Press*.⁹⁴ The publicity generated by the “Housewives’ Petition”, coupled with the increasing severity of Emergency conditions, forced the Irish government to abandon its ad hoc approach to shortages, which largely relied on retailer and consumer constraint, in favour of a more comprehensive and efficient rationing scheme.⁹⁵ While the Minister of Supplies, Seán Lemass, had been given unprecedented and wide-ranging economic powers in 1939, earning him the title ‘economic overlord’ and ‘dictator’ by historians, he was quite reluctant to use those powers until the Food and Fuel Memorandum clearly exposed the shortcomings and inefficiency of his voluntary system.⁹⁶ From the outset, Tweedy showed a preoccupation with the material conditions of everyday life and her efforts were instrumental in alleviating the experience of the Emergency for Irish citizens.⁹⁷

While some demands of the Food and Fuel Memorandum were addressed, such as a national registry of essential foodstuffs and the creation of a rationing scheme,⁹⁸ most of the other requests made in the memorandum were ignored. Louie Bennet, chief executive of the Irish Women Workers Union (IWWU) and early signatory of the memorandum, contacted Andrée and Hilda, suggesting that they not let the momentum generated by the petition go to waste and offered the IWWU hall as a venue for a meeting of the signatories.⁹⁹ Tweedy remembered “naively wondering if the hall would be large enough to hold them,” but reflects that she need

⁹⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-1-1, Newspaper Clippings.

⁹⁵ Ciarán Bryan, “Rationing in Emergency Ireland, 1939-48” (PhD Thesis, National University of Ireland, 2014), 63.

⁹⁶ Bryce Evans, “The IHA and the Introduction of Rationing in Ireland” in *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association*, 97-98.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 99.

⁹⁸ The ration system was officially introduced in January 1942.

⁹⁹ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 15.

not have worried as only “forty turned up and twelve stayed to form the Irish Housewives Committee on 12 May 1942.”¹⁰⁰ The Association’s early work focused on issues raised by the original memorandum, with consumer protection, public health, school meals, and the salvage of waste being top priorities. While the Association initially organized during the Emergency years, they did not see their usefulness coming to a close with the end of the Second World War. They recognized that “conditions will not be normal for a long time,” and “there will always be work for us to do” on the above issues.¹⁰¹

By 1946, their membership was growing significantly, and the organization formulated an official constitution. The constitution explained that the IHA was non-party and non-sectarian and that its aim was to unite housewives so that they would recognize, and gain recognition for, their right to play an active part in all spheres of planning for the community.¹⁰² Their declared objectives included securing “all such reforms as are necessary to establish a real equality of liberties, status and opportunity for all persons” and to pursue policies “to defend consumers’ rights as they are affected by supply, distribution and price of essential commodities, to suggest legislation or take practical steps to safeguard their interests,” as well as “generally to deal with matters affecting the home.”¹⁰³ They generated their information through a variety of methods, including gathering and analyzing statistical information and having discussions “with women in every walk of life” on “their daily problems.”¹⁰⁴ Their guiding technique became “educate, investigate, agitate” as they honed their skills for lobbying TD’s¹⁰⁵ and senators, writing letters to

¹⁰⁰ The name is later changed from Committee to Association. Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 15.

¹⁰¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-1, 3rd Annual Report, 1945.

¹⁰² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-1, IHA Constitution, 1946.

¹⁰³ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 18.

¹⁰⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-3-4, Memorandum on Population Problems, June 1948.

¹⁰⁵ Abbreviation for members of the Irish legislature known as Teachta Dála.

the press and convincing state and semi-state bodies to support their initiatives.¹⁰⁶ Over the next 50 years, the Irish Housewives Association expanded to over 1200 members; despite being a relatively small Association in terms of membership, the IHA exercised a wide-reaching influence which actively shaped the daily life of Irish citizens throughout the second half of the twentieth century. This committed, albeit small group of women “quickly built up a reputation for reliability and tenacity of purpose.”¹⁰⁷ They were an effective lobbying group which quickly gained the attention of government; during Éamon de Valera’s term as Taoiseach (1951-1954), it was the duty of one of his senior staff to keep a file on the activities of the Irish Housewives, indicating the influential position attained by this Association.¹⁰⁸

While Dublin always remained the central branch for the Association, affiliated branches existed for varying durations across Arklow, Bray, Cavan, Cork, Drogheda, Dundalk, Dun Laoghaire, Ennis, Limerick, Mount Merrion, Naas, New Ross and Skerries. IHA branches across the country frequently organized direct action in the form of boycotts against unjustifiably high food and milk prices. The Dublin branch spearheaded the lobbying of State officials on national policy issues through writing letters to the relevant government representatives, submitting memorandums on the cost of living and public health concerns, making their views known through the press, and involving themselves on Government-initiated boards, councils and public meetings. Furthermore, the IHA was at the forefront in appealing to international law and standards to press for their objectives within the post-war landscape of Europe. The other branches utilized similar techniques to put pressure on their municipal governments about issues of more local concern, reflecting the decentralized, communalist and localized practices which

¹⁰⁶ Farrell, “Harassed Housewives,” 50.

¹⁰⁷ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 16.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Carol Coulter refers to as the hidden tradition of women in Irish national life.¹⁰⁹ An article from the *Limerick Weekly Echo* describes in a rousing manner the type of work conducted by the local chapters:

Limerick housewives are *demanding* that the ladies' toilet, in Cecil Street, be repaired and cleaned up immediately. If the City Council is wise, it will jump to it and get the job done without any further discussion. Only a fool would invite the Housewives' Association to engage in a dispute with him and we have no doubt the Council will show its wisdom by doing what it is asked to do. These Associations of Housewives are probably the most powerful and influential organisations in the country. Woe betide anyone who falls foul of them. They are a terror to all who procrastinate and a menace to the peace of mind of those in public life who like to talk rather than act. The community has cause to be thankful to the Housewives' Association for getting many things done that would otherwise be left undone. May it long prosper and continue to be the inspiration of the laggard and inefficient public officials whose frailties would keep us in the Middle Ages if they were not jerked out of their complacency.¹¹⁰

The ladies' toilet in Cecil Street was only one of numerous issues of concern which the IHA tackled to ensure that community affairs ran smoothly. While the organization frequently pursued large-scale structural change through state policies, they did not neglect the more mundane problems of everyday life. They expressed a vision of nationhood which was attentive to overlooked social groups and geographical regions, indicating a perceived connection between healthy individuals, healthy communities and healthy nations. In a time when the gendered political and economic forces of the Irish State attempted to curtail women's access to institutional power, the Irish Housewives Association "developed for women in Ireland the real meaning of citizenship."¹¹¹

While the Association was open to all religions, political beliefs and classes, Tweedy lamented that "we never really succeeding in ridding ourselves of a middle-class image," and

¹⁰⁹ Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition*, 2.

¹¹⁰ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-3-2-4, *Limerick Weekly Echo* "Limerick Housewives" 15/02/1968.

¹¹¹ Margaret Mac Curtain, "Foreword" in *A Link in the Chain*, 7.

acknowledges that “this has been a weakness in the IHA.”¹¹² However, the very nature of their work in consumer protection and public health reform ensured that the needs of economically vulnerable citizens remained at the forefront of their various campaigns. The Association tried to always keep membership fees as low as possible in an effort to remain open to women of all class backgrounds but this put them in the position of being constantly underfunded, meaning they had to invest substantial time and effort into fund raising which could have been better spent pursuing initiatives they were concerned with. Furthermore, a lack of time was as much a factor as a lack of money behind the marginal membership of working-class women. Working-class women lacked access to servants and were responsible for all the housework and child rearing duties and were more likely to have large families. Furthermore, they often had to navigate the difficult web of charitable assistance which was a time consuming and burdensome responsibility. In the words of Tweedy, “most were occupied solely with the mechanics of living.”¹¹³

Hilda Tweedy was herself a Protestant, as were a disproportionate number of the Association’s founding members because information about the Association originally spread through word of mouth within social circles. However, it did not take long before large numbers of Catholic women joined, more accurately reflecting the demographics of the country.¹¹⁴ While there were certainly elements of a general Christian ethos in the Irish Housewives Association, the lack of a palpably Catholic affiliation left the organization open to critique from the male hierarchy of the Catholic Church, especially during its early years. While I can find no explicit mention of any Jewish women involved in the Association, their Annual Reports record sharing

¹¹² Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 15,16.

¹¹³ Ibid., 16.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 15.

information and sending delegates to cooperate on various initiatives with the Jewish Friendship Club.¹¹⁵ The IHA sought to prioritize the needs of all women and children in Ireland regardless of their religious affiliation or political leanings and spent considerable time with marginalized groups such as women prisoners and elderly people in care homes.

Mid-twentieth century Ireland was a largely conservative, Catholic, and poor country by Western European standards. To grasp the economic context, it is worthwhile to briefly consider Ireland's history of colonization. While Ireland "belonged to the same geo-cultural locale, the same orbit of capital, as the major European imperial powers, it was integrated into that orbit in a very different way than its main European neighbours."¹¹⁶ As England's first colonial holding, Ireland was integrated into global markets through imperial mercantilist policy wherein trade was mediated through the British metropole in an effort to strengthen the British economy and prevent the colony from developing independent trade relations. Ireland was an agricultural supplier to Britain, and this prevented the diversification of their economy, kept their industry underdeveloped and thereby established "the structures that would condition future economic dependence."¹¹⁷ Colonial capitalist rationalization of agriculture put an increased emphasis on grazing and cash crops such as barley for the brewing industry. Meanwhile, the registration of many of these industries, such as Guinness, in England was "consistent with a long-lasting pattern of net capital outflow from Ireland, where relatively low levels of investment are returned with an inversely proportionate measure of capital extraction."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ This was a club ran primarily by Jewish women to support elderly Jewish citizens in Ireland. NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 22nd Annual Report, 1963-64; 24th Annual Report, 1965-66.

¹¹⁶ Joe Cleary, "Misplaced Ideas? Colonialism, Location, and Dislocation in Irish Studies" in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Clare Carroll and Patricia King (Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press: 2003), 24.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁸ David Lloyd, "After History: Historicism and Irish Postcolonial Studies" in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Clare Carroll and Patricia King (Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press: 2003), 55.

After independence Ireland pursued autarkic economic policies which it later abandoned in the 1960s in favour of a dependent development approach where Ireland sought foreign direct investment, primarily from the United States, and joined the EEC. However, these policies proved hardly better equipped to handle Ireland's economic conditions than its predecessors and left the country vulnerable to cyclical and unpredictable shifts in international markets. In 1980 Ireland had the highest debt of any country in the EEC and by 1987 emigration from the Republic reached "40 000 people per annum, something not witnessed since the bleak decade of the 1950s."¹¹⁹

Both of Ireland's two major political parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were considered centre-right throughout the twentieth century. There are a great number of similarities between the two parties who trace their roots to opposing sides in the Civil War. Throughout the twentieth century, Fianna Fáil was more nationalist in outlook and pursued more conservative economic policies while Fine Gael was more pro-European in outlook, and despite being socially conservative, pursued a more liberal economic agenda. Ireland's Labour Party was less influential but often formed coalitions with Fine Gael. Sinn Féin, which had dissolved and merged with other parties following the Civil War, reemerged in the 1970s and brought more left-wing ideologies into the Irish political landscape. This brief background of Ireland's economic and political characteristics is important because cultural and historical constraints shaped both the concerns of the IHA and the solutions they pursued.

¹¹⁹ Cleary, "Misplaced Ideas", 18.

National Housekeeping

Andrée Sheehy Skeffington and Hilda Tweedy strategically chose the name “Housewife” to capitalize on the label given to them by the press.¹²⁰ Tweedy felt that by dubbing the memorandum the ‘Housewives Petition’ the press was attempting to put them down because “women interested in home problems” were not “expected to understand the same problems on a national level.”¹²¹ Andrée Sheehy Skeffington thought this challenge provided the perfect opportunity to speak up for women in the home.¹²² However, when they approached the influential Hanna Sheehy Skeffington about their newly formed association, they were rebuked, with Hanna saying: “You are not married to the house you know.”¹²³ It is worth dwelling on Hanna Sheehy Skeffington’s response to the name of the Irish Housewives Association as it provides crucial insight into the shifting political climate which shaped women’s ability to participate in Irish national public life.

Hanna and her husband Frank were involved with Irish nationalism throughout the tumultuous time of the Easter Rising, War of Independence and subsequent Civil War. The nature of guerrilla warfare and anti-colonial national independence movements required the involvement of all sections of society, including women. However, the establishment of independent statehood for Ireland entrenched a particularly conservative version of Irish nationalism and stripped the nationalist movement of its more subversive and fluid qualities. The open mass movements which characterized Irish nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth

¹²⁰ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 15.

¹²¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife* (1948).

¹²² Rosemary Cullen Owens, “Remembering Hilda and Andrée and Their Work” in *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association: Links in the Chain*, ed. Alan Hayes, (Dublin: Arlen House, 2012), 87.

¹²³ Margaret Ward, *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington* (Cork, Attic Press, 1997), 338.

century were more welcoming to women than the institutions of parliament and statecraft which dominated following the achievement of independent statehood.¹²⁴

To grasp the different political context which dominated before the 1937 Constitution, it is instructive to look at the ethos of influential women's organizations at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Inghinidhe na hEireann founded in 1900 by Maud Gonne, the Irish Women's Workers Union (IWWU) founded in 1911, and Cumann na mBan formed in 1914. These various associations fought both alongside and independently of their male counterparts. While the struggle for equal treatment within the nationalist movement was certainly an uphill battle, the discourse of women's equality was frequently and powerfully evoked by all of these organizations.¹²⁵ Calls for women's rights were analogous to calls for worker's rights, cultural rights and political rights, meaning they were strengthened by emancipatory discursive matrix of the time. Thousands of women flocked to various Irish nationalist movements throughout this period, and hundreds of women joined the Irish Citizen Army and participated fully in all activities.¹²⁶

Inghinidhe na hEireann imagined a community "in which feminism and nationalism neither conflicted nor competed, but rather co-existed in harmony."¹²⁷ The organization's newspaper, *Bean na hEireann*, espoused the belief that women needed to break out from the confines of domesticity and that they would be guaranteed political equality when an independent Irish state was finally achieved.¹²⁸ Inghinidhe na hEireann declared that their work

¹²⁴ Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition*; Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*; Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, "Equality v. Difference the Construction of Womanhood in Modern Irish Feminist Thought" in *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association*, ed. Alan Hayes.

¹²⁵ Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 41-44.

¹²⁶ Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition*, 21.

¹²⁷ Valiulis "Equality v. Difference the Construction of Womanhood in Modern Irish Feminist Thought," 40.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 41.

for Ireland's independence had "exploded forever that silly 'women's sphere' idea, which always stifles the high courage and patriotism which is in every Irishwoman's heart."¹²⁹ This statement, however, would prove to be manifestly idealistic. Despite the promise made in the 1916 Proclamation of equality between the sexes and the socialist ideals of many leading radical Irish republicans and trade unionists, what actually came into being after Independence was a "highly centralised state, modelled in every significant way on its colonial predecessor."¹³⁰

The 1916 Proclamation addressed both Irishmen and Irishwomen and promised equal rights and equal opportunities to all the nation's children. Furthermore, the 1922 Constitution gave all adult women the vote and equal civil rights. Powerful women within the Irish nationalist movement such as Kathleen Lynn, Jenny Wyse Power and Rosamund Jacob spoke strongly for women's equality during discussions about the constitution and were supported by their male counterparts, who were reported saying: "any Irish man who could oppose women's claim for equality would be acting in an unIrish spirit."¹³¹ However, from 1922 onwards, there was an onslaught of attacks against women's legal equality. President of Dáil Éireann, Éamon de Valera restructured the cabinet so that the only woman, Countess Markievicz, lost her position; there would not be a woman in the cabinet again for over 50 years.¹³² The 1926 Civil Service Act allowed discrimination on the basis of sex in competitive exams for positions. In 1932 legislation forced women to retire from school teaching positions after marriage and this was later extended to public service positions. Women were removed from jury service in 1927 - a right they previously had under British administration and in 1935 a criminal law amendment act ensured

¹²⁹ *Bean na hEireann*, No.20, n.y., Editorial Notes, quoted in Valiulis, "Equality v. Difference" in *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association*, 42.

¹³⁰ Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition*, 23.

¹³¹ Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 125.

¹³² Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 164-165; Mary Cullen, "The Unbroken Chain of the Irish Women's Movement" in *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association*, 29.

women would be fined and imprisoned for prostitution while the clients were left untouched.

Further employment acts allowed for employers to limit, or prohibit altogether, the employment of women in industrial occupations.¹³³

The attacks upon women's political and economic freedoms reached their zenith in 1937 when the Fianna Fáil government replaced the more radical 1922 Constitution with a new Constitution, designed to entrench the Party's newly achieved political power. Article 41 of the 1937 Constitution declared the family as "the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State," and stated that "[i]n particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home."¹³⁴ While in theory this clause could be interpreted to mean the State would offer material support to mothers, in reality it served only to offer a constitutional basis for employment discrimination, the exclusion of women from politics, and the legal consideration of women as exclusively mothers and wives.

Historian J. J. Lee, referring to the reality that many women were forced to find work due to widespread poverty, has astutely commented that Article 41 "was honoured more in the breach than in the observance."¹³⁵ Women in twentieth-century Ireland found themselves operating within a series of contradictions. The state offered an idyllic image of the Irish housewife, who served her nation by acting as the bulwark of family life through service to her husband and children. However, even if women desired to assume their allotted role, the economic realities

¹³³ Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition*, 25.

¹³⁴ *Constitution of Ireland*, 1937, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html#article41>

¹³⁵ J.J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 207.

and lack of state sponsored social support meant this was unattainable for many. Women found themselves pushed out of labour unions and political parties for the sake of national imaginings of fictitious gender roles. Coulter reflects that “both the letter of the Constitution, the accompanying legislation and the spirit it embodied, militated heavily against the involvement of women in public life, and by the end of the Second World War most of those women who had devoted decades of their lives to the creation of a different society and political system in Ireland had virtually disappeared.”¹³⁶

This brings us to the chasm between Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and the new generation of Irish women, which Andrée Sheehy Skeffington and Hilda Tweedy represented, regarding the label ‘housewife’. Maryann Valiulis argues that within varying political contexts, Irish feminists have chosen to differently emphasize either women’s equality or difference as the foundation for women’s rights, without necessarily rejecting a belief in the validity of both.¹³⁷ Feminist discourse is never static and must respond to the shifting national contexts which shape the horizons of possibilities and most pressing concerns of the day. This process is inevitably selective as women use elements of political thought which appear relevant or favourable to their aims, ignore or take issues with others, and also add new arguments and ideas.¹³⁸ In tumultuous times of political upheaval and radically decentralized power, such as the period preceding the Easter Rising, War of Independence and Civil War, women were able to advance the more radical argument of their equality with men as the foundation for rights. However, when more repressive patriarchal institutions dominate, as they did following 1937, women increasingly found it more effective to justify their political presence on the basis of their unique qualities and

¹³⁶ Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition*, 27.

¹³⁷ Valiulis “Equality v. Difference”.

¹³⁸ Mary Cullen, “The Potential of Gender History” in *Gender and Power in Irish History*, ed. Maryann Valiulis (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 19.

experiences as women.¹³⁹ The Irish State defined women based on their difference from men and sanctioned the domestic sphere as their proper place, thus forcing women to operate within these confines.

Hanna Sheehy Skeffington was involved in nationalist politics at a more radical time when the discourse of women's equality was credibly invoked, and thus she was disparaging of what she perceived to be the regressive label of 'housewife'. The Irish Housewives Association, however, imbued the term with more subversive and expansive elements. Rather than seeing women's role in the home as the basis for their exclusion from national public life, they used it as the very justification for women's right to participate in the political life of the nation. For the IHA, "housewife" and "citizen" were not separate and distinct categories, but mutually reinforcing identities wherein the obligation for women's active participation in public life stemmed from their duties within the private sphere.¹⁴⁰ In the IHA's First Annual Report of June 1943, they explained: "We think that in National Housekeeping the housewife's point of view is too often ignored, and we intend to keep on putting it."¹⁴¹ They recognized that too many Irish women saw politics as simply the "insulting and libelous speeches" which male politicians hurled at each other in the Dáil Éireann, and urged them instead to realize that "politics means the price of food and clothes, the efficiency of schools and hospitals, working conditions for men and women, and in fact, every aspect of our everyday life."¹⁴² The IHA demonstrated an early grasp of the feminist idiom that the personal is political. In the forward to the 1948 edition of their magazine, *The Irish Housewife*, chairwoman Marie Mortished explained: "For those of us

¹³⁹ Valiulis, "Equality v. Difference." 38

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-1, 1st Annual Report, June 1943.

¹⁴² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*, 1951.

who are not too overburdened by chores and managing, our National economy and the housewives' contribution to it is a subject of vital interest.”¹⁴³

The IHA's use of the term “National Housekeeping” was a powerful rhetorical tool which scaled politics at the state level as simply an extension of the housewives' duties on the individual level. This scaling of the nation is further reinforced through the term “domestic” which denotes both the sphere of internal national politics as well as the private home. In the 1946 edition of their magazine, chairwoman Susan Manning explained that the everyday difficulties housewives faced while trying to provide for their families “are increased by the fact that these matters of great domestic interest are solidly in the hands of men. Strange as it may seem, there is not a woman in the Ministry of Supplies. Nor is there a woman ‘Minister of Home Affairs’ with powers such as the Minister for External Affairs possesses.”¹⁴⁴ For the IHA, women's grasp on domestic matters relating to the household made them ideally suited for a central role in the domestic decision making of Ireland.

The IHA's frequent use of the term “community” was likewise ambiguous enough to signify various geographic levels and posit their position in “women's matters” as foundational for a position in matters of the nation. Community can denote a small regional location, but as pointed out by scholars of nationalism, community and nation are often used as coterminous as well.¹⁴⁵ The declared objective of the IHA to “unite housewives in order to gain recognition for their right to play an active part in all spheres of planning for the community,”¹⁴⁶ could be interpreted as a statement of women's right to have a say in local issues, or in a more radical

¹⁴³ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*, 1948.

¹⁴⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*, 1946.

¹⁴⁵ Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community*, (London: Sage, 1996), 123; Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 1.

¹⁴⁶ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-1, IHA Constitution, 1946.

sense as their right to involvement in national politics. An example from the Association's 1948 Annual Report shows their treatment of community and nation as synonymous: "Help us to represent a larger section of the community by joining our Association, and make your contribution to planning for a healthier, happier nation."¹⁴⁷ The IHA's activities suggest they viewed the national community as existing at both a local and state level. It is impossible to determine whether the IHA's deployment of nationalist rhetoric was a self-conscious decision. Regardless, its omnipresence within the Association indicates that they did not see it as possible to justify their political intervention into the everyday lives of citizens without 'talking the nation'.

The discursive strength of the "housewife" facilitated the IHA's claim for a rightful place in domestic national politics. It was by nature of women's difference from men and their special duties within the household that they argued for an equal position within national political institutions. In 1948 the IHA declared that "if we have the will and courage necessary we can take our place with confidence in the front ranks of the Nation's builders for our future – not as a menial but as an honoured partner."¹⁴⁸ In the Silver Jubilee edition of the IHA's magazine, the *Irish Housewife*, Tweedy reflected that, "We were the housekeepers in our own home and we felt we should utilize our talents and experience in the national housekeeping."¹⁴⁹ Their position as housewives grounded their occasionally scathing critiques of the Government. In 1948, the IHA explained that "[a]ny good housekeeper, when she sees her stocks running low, will try to divide them equally, and so eke them out as long as possible, but then there are no women in our high Government offices. Perhaps that accounts for the short-sightedness of the Government's

¹⁴⁷ Italics added, NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-1, 6th Annual Report, 1948.

¹⁴⁸ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*, 1948.

¹⁴⁹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 25th Annual Report, 1966-67.

rationing policy.”¹⁵⁰ This rhetorical strategy was persistent throughout the Association’s history and in 1969, for another example, when the IHA was exasperated with the continually climbing prices which negated any benefits from wage increases, they explained:

As housewives, we all have our own incomes policy, related, naturally, in the closest possible way to prices, so it has always seemed impossible to us that the National Housekeepers could afford the haphazardness of working without such a policy. If the effects we are experiencing now can be traced, even in part, to bad housekeeping, perhaps this is due in some measure to the lack of women in Government at Ministerial level.¹⁵¹

For the IHA, political decision making was simply housekeeping on the national scale. The IHA strategically employed the term housewife to argue for the necessity of women’s involvement in national politics at a time when male politicians were employing the term for the exact opposite reasons. This rhetorical strategy was further strengthened by concerns about the “national stock” which flourished in the early to mid-twentieth century, wherein maternity and child welfare were increasingly linked with national regeneration.¹⁵² Furthermore, by borrowing the language and identity given to them in the 1937 Constitution and by the national press, the IHA possessed a shield against accusations of impropriety and transgression of women’s appropriate roles. The IHA effectively wielded both their identities as housewives and the language of nationalism to promote their agenda and protect themselves from outside attacks.

The language employed by the Irish Housewives’ Association and the aims of their agenda did not develop within an isolated bubble, but rather, they drew from a long tradition of maternalist politics. Maternalism has roots in nineteenth century domestic ideologies which

¹⁵⁰ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*, 1948.

¹⁵¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 27th Annual Report, 1968-69.

¹⁵² Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 56.

stressed women's differences from men. This idealization of domesticity converged with rising concerns about social reform, child labour and living conditions, as well as activist interpretations of the gospel, in order to create a new style of politics accessible to women.¹⁵³ Maternalism operated on two levels, extolling the virtues of domesticity while simultaneously creating space and legitimacy for women's public relationships to politics and the state. Thus, maternalism employed the traditional notions of womanliness while also challenging "the boundaries between public and private, women and men, state and civil society."¹⁵⁴ In the foreword to *A Link in the Chain*, renowned feminist historian Margaret MacCurtain explains, "conscious of the dual role of women in the mid-century [the IHA] presented to the public the solid frontage of the Irish housewife; strategically they instructed their members on how to negotiate the complex maze of the Irish party machinery."¹⁵⁵

Historians have been attentive to the absolutely crucial role played by women's movements and maternalist politics in the development of social welfare policies across the Europe and North America.¹⁵⁶ Maternalist discourses effectively transformed ideals of motherhood as a private and apolitical experience into a public institution requiring support from the state in the form of policies and legislation. However, the discourses of mother-activism are remarkably fluid and can be utilized toward a variety of aims. *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right*, published in 1997, shows the variety of concerns which have been addressed and promoted through maternalist politics.¹⁵⁷ These range from environmental

¹⁵³ Seth Koven and Sonya Michel eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 10.

¹⁵⁴ Koven and Michel, *Mothers of a New World*, 6.

¹⁵⁵ Margaret Mac Curtain, "Foreword" in *A Link in the Chain*, 8.

¹⁵⁶ Koven and Michel, *Mothers of a New World*.

¹⁵⁷ Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck and Diana Taylor eds., *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right* (Hanover: University Press of New England for Dartmouth College, 1997).

regulations, social welfare and consumer protection, to white supremacism and the promotion of fascist ideologies.

The creation of a Housewives' Association was not unique to Ireland and its equivalent was, in fact, a widespread phenomenon across the Western world throughout the twentieth century. While all housewife organizations drew from a similar discursive reservoir grounded in maternalism, they mobilized this language for a variety of aims. The origins of the British Housewives' League (BHL), for example, are remarkably similar to the Irish Housewives Association, however, the BHL pursued radically different policies on behalf of the housewife consumer. The BHL was formed in 1946 by housewives who were exasperated about the long waits in queues and food shortages. These British housewives' solicited signatures for a petition expressing their concerns which they sent to the Government. However, while the IHA was asking the Government for more wide-reaching rationing and stricter price controls, the BHL was demanding less Government intervention in the economy and a return to free-market capitalism.¹⁵⁸

Both the IHA and BHL declared their organizations to be non-partisan. For the IHA, non-partisan meant their organization was representative of a broad-based alliance of housewives, who aimed to balance both criticism of, and cooperation with, whichever party held power. While there is no question that the majority of the policies pursued by the IHA were left-leaning and at times, quite radical, this was largely due to the fact that these policies would have brought the most material improvement to the lives of women and children in what was a predominantly poor country. The IHA cautiously avoided radical rhetoric and ideological arguments, choosing

¹⁵⁸ James Hinton, "Militant Housewives: The British Housewives' League and the Attlee Government," *History Workshop Journal* 38, no.1 (1994): 131.

instead to frame their objectives as common-sense suggestions in the practical interest of the nation. In James Hinton's article about the British Housewives' League, he explains: "The BHL was non-partisan, not because it represented a broad-based alliance of housewives across the political spectrum, but because most of its members perceived the Conservatives no less than Labour as being committed to a welfare-state consensus which they found deeply alarming."¹⁵⁹ At many points, the BHL espoused a much more radical version of conservatism than the Tories.

One poignant example of the ideological distance between the IHA and BHL relates to their stance on the provision of milk and meals for children at school. While the IHA campaigned ardently for such provisions, the BHL saw them as "part of a conspiracy to destroy the functions of the home."¹⁶⁰ The agenda of the BHL was similar to the Australian Housewives' Association (AHA), who, while not being as far right as the BHL, were certainly conservative in outlook. Historian Judith Smart comments that for the Australian Housewives' Association, "non-Party" was intended to mean "non-Labor."¹⁶¹ Likewise, Italy has a legacy of Housewives' Organizations which range in outlook from conservative to fascist.¹⁶² While the names of the Irish Housewives' Association, the British Housewives' League, the Australian Housewives' Association, and Italian Housewives' Federation, all share roots in maternalism, the IHA differed significantly in their social and political agenda.

In terms of strategy, rhetoric, and aims, the Irish Housewives' Association had the most in common with the National Housewives' League of America, which was an African American

¹⁵⁹ Hinton, "Militant Housewives", 141.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 142.

¹⁶¹ Judith Smart, "The Politics of Consumption: The Housewives' Associations in Southeastern Australia before 1950" *Journal of Women's History* 18, no. 3 (2006): 16.

¹⁶² Annelise Orleck, "Housewives and Motherist Politics in Italy" in *The Politics of Motherhood*, 276.

association intended to raise the economic status of the community. The IHA and the National Housewives' League of America both practiced a strategy of consumer nationalism which will be explored in depth in the following chapter. However, it is also worth mentioning that there are significant parallels between the IHA and the Canadian-based Housewives Consumers Association (HCA), the American-based Central Action Committee against the High Cost of Living (CACHCL), and the Congress of Women's Auxiliaries (CWA).

The Housewives Consumers Association began in Toronto in 1937, reached its peak by early 1948 and ceased activities by the early 1950s.¹⁶³ The HCA utilized maternalist politics to mobilize women and men across Canada to campaign for a managed economy, fair prices, and state management of essential foodstuffs such as milk, bread, and meat.¹⁶⁴ The HCA "mobilized popular support for campaigns demanding more government accountability, policy in the interest of ordinary people, and state intervention in the economy."¹⁶⁵ Ultimately, the Association was silenced and discredited by accusations that it was a communist front. The HCA's platform was almost identical to that of the IHA and the primary difference between the associations was rhetorical. While both associations cloaked their transgressive political agendas in terms of maternalism and strategically evoked their identity as housewives, the HCA tended to adopt familiar discourses of labour unions and the radical left, while the IHA used the language of nationalism to justify their goals.

In the United States, working class housewives led a national meat boycott in 1935. Historian Emily Twarog argues that the women involved with the 1935 meat boycott took up the

¹⁶³ Julie Guard, *Radical Housewives: Price Wars and Food Politics in Mid-Twentieth Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

¹⁶⁴ Julie Guard, "Canada's Citizen Housewives" in *Shopping for Change: Consumer Activism and the Possibilities of Purchasing Power* eds., Louis Hyman and Joseph Tohill (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2017): 123.

¹⁶⁵ Guard, "Canada's Citizen Housewives," 126.

trope of “housewife” to shift the protests “beyond their local communities to ignite a national conversation.”¹⁶⁶ Mary Zuk, a working class housewife from Hamtramck, Michigan spearheaded the meat boycott and was soon elected chairwoman of what would become the local Hamtramck branch of the Central Action Committee against the High Cost of Living (CACHCL). Like the Irish Housewives’ Association, the CACHCL identified government policies as being at the root of the high cost of living. Housewives were outraged by policies of destroying essential foodstuffs to boost prices when women were struggling to feed their families. In addition to direct action in the form of boycotts -- a tactic also frequently employed by the IHA -- the CACHCL delivered a petition to the government with their demands and called for an inquiry into the high price of meat. Mary Zuk became involved with local politics as a councilwoman; however, her career was cut short by communist accusations and red baiting which were used to discredit her amidst a public divorce. Furthermore, newspapers frequently attributed the widespread meat boycotts to “communist agitators” with headlines stating, “Reds Blamed for Housewives’ Meat Boycott.”¹⁶⁷

After the meat boycotts came to a close, women’s activism for consumer protection and against the high cost of living in the United States was largely championed by women’s auxiliaries of the newly organized industrial unions, with the United Automobile Workers (UAW) auxiliary leading the march. The auxiliary leadership strategically crafted an identity rooted in domestic politics and employed the identity of housewife to their advantage.¹⁶⁸ These various labour union auxiliaries came together in 1943 to form an umbrella organization called the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries (CWA). The auxiliary movement believed that the home

¹⁶⁶ Emily E. LaBarbera-Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry: Housewives, Food, and Consumer Protests in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017): 3.

¹⁶⁷ LaBarbera-Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry*, 26.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 30.

belonged at the centre of the labor movement as they sought to “define and defend the American standard of living through consumer activism.”¹⁶⁹ Like the IHA and the HCA, the CWA politicized their responsibilities to clothe and feed their family through the consumer movement, with the intention of alleviating the worst excesses of poverty stemming from a poorly managed economy.

The conditions which promoted working-class activism began shifting with the onslaught of the Cold War. As early as 1939, Hearst newspapers claimed that the nationwide housewives movement was “little more than a Communist plot to sow seeds of discord in the American home.”¹⁷⁰ These accusations would only become more rampant as the century progressed. According to Twarog, the power of anti-communist fear mongering was behind “the slow decline of the Congress of Women’s Auxiliaries and their affiliates.”¹⁷¹ She explains that during the post-war period, unions distanced themselves from consumer activism and cut support for women’s auxiliaries, “essentially putting a halt to effective consumer organizing.”¹⁷² Historian of working-class women, Annelise Orleck, explains that by “the early 1950s national and local Communist hunting committees had torn apart the [housewives] movement, creating dissension and mistrust among the activists.”¹⁷³ The significant challenges that anti-communist attacks and red-baiting posed to housewives’ associations, including the IHA, will be considered in greater depth towards the end of this chapter. For now, it is simply worth noting that while many left-

¹⁶⁹ LaBarbera-Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry*, 31.

¹⁷⁰ Annelise Orleck, ““We are that Mythical Thing Called the Public”: Militant Housewives during the Great Depression” *Feminist Studies* 19, no.1 (1993): 165.

¹⁷¹ LaBarbera-Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry*, 55.

¹⁷² Ibid., 56.

¹⁷³ Orleck, “Mythical Public”, 166.

wing national housewife-led associations campaigned for consumer protection, none had the longevity of the Irish Housewives' Association, which was active for a fifty-year span.

The IHA's reliance on the rhetoric of maternalism did not undercut their work for women's equality. In 1946 the IHA joined the Joint Committee of Women's Societies and Social Workers to fight for: jury service for women on the same terms as men; the establishment of women police officers and the appointment of more women probation officers; the equal treatment in law for a woman found soliciting as her client; and raising the age of consent, which was twelve for girls, to eighteen years.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, in November 1947 the Irish Women Citizens Association was incorporated into the IHA and brought with it an affiliation to the International Alliance of Women (IAW). The Irish Women Citizens Association was an outgrowth of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association which was founded in 1876 to fight for women's suffrage, and after the vote was obtained, for the political education of women. Hilda Tweedy was "justly proud of the continuity between the older radical stream of feminism with the concerns of the new Ireland after the post-war years."¹⁷⁵ The IHA were active and enthusiastic members of the IAW and hosted one of the Triennial Congresses in Dublin in 1961.

The IAW was created by American feminists Elizabeth Stanton, Carrie Chapman and Susan B. Anthony in 1902 and Tweedy reflects that the IHA's affiliation with the International Alliance of Women "opened new doors for us and strengthened our feminist convictions."¹⁷⁶ The

¹⁷⁴ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 20. There was much debate in the organization about if 16 or 18 would be the ideal age of consent. Carolyn Strange has demonstrated that such debates about the legal age of consent were embroiled in the attempt to control the sexual activity of girls and were not simply a question of equality. Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880 - 1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

¹⁷⁵ Margaret MacCurtain, "Hilda Tweedy (1911-2005)" in *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association*, 71.

¹⁷⁶ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 24.

first clause in the IAW Constitution is: “That men and women are born equally free and independent members of the human race, equally endowed with intelligence and ability, and equally entitled to the free exercise of their individual rights and liberty.”¹⁷⁷ From the outset, the IHA was concerned about equal pay for equal work and getting more women into government. They recognized that “making pleas to government was not enough. We needed committed women in political life, women in the places where the decisions were being made.”¹⁷⁸ They endorsed numerous female political candidates throughout their fifty-year span. Furthermore, the IHA’s leadership in the National Commission on the Status of Women in Ireland, beginning in 1968, allowed them to put increased pressure on the government to actualize their feminist principles.

The Children Must be Fed!

Throughout the IHA’s existence, they expressed a steadfast commitment to improving the quality of life for Irish children. They sought to transform the responsibility of feeding and clothing one’s children from a private, individual responsibility into one requiring institutional state support. In 1942, the IHA informed the government that a special rationing scheme was needed for children as they required preferential distribution of citrus fruits, sugar and fresh tuberculin tested milk. They were unsatisfied with the Minister for Supplies, who replied to their memorandum about a special rationing scheme for children, saying it was both unnecessary and impractical at the time. The IHA deplored “the shortsightedness of a policy which neglects our children,” and declared they were “determined to continue our efforts on their behalf.”¹⁷⁹ They

¹⁷⁷ International Alliance of Women Constitution <https://womenalliance.org/principles-and-constitution>.

¹⁷⁸ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 22.

¹⁷⁹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-1, 1st Annual Report, June 1943.

wrote to the Government requesting provisions for pregnant women to receive one hot meal a day, and for nursing mothers and children under five to purchase milk at a reduced rate of two pence per pint.¹⁸⁰ In 1942, the IHA further developed a scheme to ensure that all school children would receive mid-day school meals, as the contemporary School Meal Scheme only reached 12.5% of children attending national schools.¹⁸¹ They worked closely with doctors across Ireland and with the Irish Countrywomen's Association to ensure that their proposal to the Government was attentive to the conditions and difficulties of rural schools. However, the Government ignored their letters and refused to receive their deputation, thus leading the IHA to lament that “whichever way we have turned so far, we have found very little consideration on the part of State authorities for the needs of children.”¹⁸²

On March 13th, 1942, in an event which came to be known as the Dublin Street Incident, the women who would come to form the IHA made headlines by marching through the streets with signs highlighting children's special needs. Malnutrition was rampant and Dublin alone accounted for 60 percent of child deaths across Ireland from gastro-enteritis in 1941.¹⁸³ The women carried posters which read: ‘The Children Must be Fed,’ ‘War on TB’, ‘Pure Milk’, ‘Clean Food’, ‘Fair Prices’, ‘Open the Municipal Kitchens’, ‘Give the Children Dinner and not Bread’.¹⁸⁴ Hilda Tweedy recalls when making the case for the necessity of school meals to the Schools Committee of the Dublin Corporation, one “Reverend gentleman” interrupted and declared “we would be breaking up the sanctity of the home if children were fed at school!”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-1, 1st Annual Report, June 1943.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Owens, “Remembering Hilda and Andrée and Their Work”, 85.

¹⁸⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-1-3, Newspaper Clippings.

¹⁸⁵ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 17.

However, one IHA representative in attendance had the presence of mind to enquire why he did not voice this concern about the children of well-off families who attended boarding schools?¹⁸⁶

The IHA continued to conduct thorough investigations into the nourishment of children in Ireland and conditions at schools and to amass their findings into detailed reports sent to the government and press.

The IHA highlighted frequently appalling conditions at schools and drew attention to the extreme deficiency in calcium which many children from low-income families experienced. The IHA reflected that “we Irish pride ourselves on being a ‘family’ nation, but certainly our Government does not show much thought for the children we have, and though it complains of our low birth-rate, the high cost of living does not encourage us to have large families.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, we see that the IHA buttressed appeals for improvements in the field of child health and welfare by appealing to a sense of Irish national identity. In 1949 the IHA wrote to the five Dublin dailies to renew their cries for cheap milk for youth and school meals for all schoolchildren. The next year the Government agreed to expand the School Meal Scheme, greatly increasing the number of children who benefitted from the program; however, the IHA protested in outrage when in 1955 the Government voted to reduce funding once again for the School Meal Scheme.¹⁸⁸

The IHA threw their complete support behind the ‘Mother and Child Scheme’, which Dr. Noel Browne attempted, unsuccessfully, to implement during his tenure as Minister for Health. This plan entailed free medical services for mothers and their children. It is worth examining this controversial scheme as it sheds light on competing national visions for welfare and health in

¹⁸⁶ Farrell, “Harassed Housewives”, 56.

¹⁸⁷ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*, 1948.

¹⁸⁸ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 13th Annual Report, 1954-55.

Ireland. The Catholic Church, the Irish Medical Association, and the Government were all vocal and active participants in debates about maternal and infant health. However, none of these male dominated institutions were very much interested in the opinions of mothers on the matter; regardless, the IHA remained steadfastly determined to vocalize their perspective. From the 1930s onward, the newly established Irish State began to imbue motherhood and infant health with increased national significance. In 1933, the voluntary Infant Aid Society, with support from the Fianna Fáil government, implemented a free milk scheme for nursing and expectant mothers, with the intent to ensure mothers had enough nourishment to breastfeed. This program, however, was seriously underfunded and reached a negligible percent of the women in need of its services. The 1938 Annual Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health lamented that:

Very little progress has been made in the reduction in infant mortality... A causative factor of the high infant mortality rate in Dublin is the failure to breastfeed. A survey among 1,414 mothers showed that 580 breastfed and 359 partially breastfed their infants, whilst in 475 cases artificial feeding was resorted to. The survey suggests that 60 per cent of Dublin mothers are unable to breastfeed their infants.¹⁸⁹

The 1938 Annual Report connected the dots between malnourishment of mothers as a primary reason for artificial feeding, which was a primary factor behind gastro-enteritis, leading to infant deaths. Women were unable to breastfeed when they themselves were malnourished. In the spring of 1940, Dr. Robert Collis pointed out that only 8% of wives of the unemployed received enough food to meet minimum nutrition levels and the majority were "literally in a state of semi-

¹⁸⁹ Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 65.

starvation.”¹⁹⁰ Calcium deficiencies also meant that the poor were seriously impacted by rickets which causes weakened bones, stunted growth and skeletal deformities.

Lindsey Earner-Byrne’s exemplary monograph, *Mother and Child: Maternity and child welfare in Dublin 1922-60*, highlights that maternal health and welfare were controversial matters in Ireland, “dogged by anxiety regarding the role of charity and religion.”¹⁹¹ The legislation which would come to form the Mother and Child Scheme was first introduced under the 1945 Public Health Bill, but the section relating to mother and infant health was ultimately removed from the Bill. While the Government had rejected the plan in 1945, it was kept alive and was passed into law with the 1947 Health Act.¹⁹² There was little opposition to the 1947 Act when it was still a bill, and it was only after the legislation became law that controversy ensued. The Government postponed implementing the mother-child aspects of the 1947 Act as they perceived it to be an unmanageable fiscal drain.¹⁹³ On July 6th 1949 the *Irish Times* published a letter entitled “Plea to Operate Mother and Child Welfare Scheme” which expressed the IHA’s frustration with the lack of initiative.¹⁹⁴ When Dr. Noel Browne tried to actually implement the Mother and Child Scheme in 1950, the Catholic hierarchy and the medical establishment protested and he received minimal support from his party.¹⁹⁵ When Hilda Tweedy reminisced about the scheme in her memoir, she reflected that, “[t]oday people cannot imagine how a plan to

¹⁹⁰ Cullen Owens “Remembering Hilda and Andree and Their Work”, 85.

¹⁹¹ Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 73.

¹⁹² H. E. Counihan, “The Medical Association and the Mother and Child Scheme” *Irish Journal of Medical Science* 171, no. 2 (2002): 110.

¹⁹³ Eamonn McKee, “Church-State Relations and the Development of Irish Health Policy: The Mother-and-Child Scheme, 1944-53,” *Irish Historical Studies* 25, no. 98 (1986): 170.

¹⁹⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-1-3, Newspaper Clipping.

¹⁹⁵ McKee, “Church-State Relations and the Development of Irish Health Policy,” 170.

improve the health and welfare of women and children of Ireland and would be open to all, could possibly be so controversial.”¹⁹⁶

So, what was the Mother and Child Scheme and why was it so divisive? The proposed service offered free medical and specialist care for women before, during and after childbirth; free care of children’s health to the age of 16, including hospital, specialist and laboratory facilities; and free dental attention for both mothers and children.¹⁹⁷ Dr. Browne stressed that “women could avail or not as they saw fit, without payment, without contribution and without a means test.”¹⁹⁸ A pamphlet advertising the scheme argued it was necessary because 5 out of every 100 infants born in Ireland died, as compared with 3 in England and Wales and 2 in Sweden. It declared that “surely, it is our duty as a Christian nation, to do our utmost to save the mothers and children of the race from avoidable death and disease.”¹⁹⁹ The health and welfare of children was framed through appeals to Irish national identity and by contrasting their measures against the successes of other nations. A large portion of the Irish Medical Association rejected the plan as they desired to protect their private practice from state interference, however, the opposition of the Catholic Church to the scheme proved a more serious factor in its curtailment.

On the 5th of April 1951 the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. John McQuaid wrote a letter to the Taoiseach, Mr. John Costello, which stated:

The Archbishops and Bishops desire to express once again approval of a sane and legitimate health service, which will properly safe-guard the health of mothers and children. The hierarchy cannot approve of any scheme which, in its general tendency, must foster undue control by the state in a sphere so delicate and so intimately concerned with morals as that which deals with gynecology or obstetrics and with the relations between doctor and patient. Neither can the Bishops approve of any scheme which must

¹⁹⁶ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 72.

¹⁹⁷ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-2-2, Mother and Child Scheme Pamphlet.

¹⁹⁸ Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 135.

¹⁹⁹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-2-2, Mother and Child Scheme Pamphlet.

have for practical result the undue lessening of the proper initiative of individuals and associations and the undermining of self-reliance.²⁰⁰

Archbishop McQuaid further argued that, if implemented, the scheme would “constitute a ready-made instrument of totalitarian aggression.”²⁰¹ He premised this argument on the 1937 papal encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* which specifically identified motherhood as a crucial testing ground for communism, stating that communism was “characterised by the rejection of any link that binds woman to the family and the home, and her emancipation is proclaimed as a basic principle... The care of the home and children then devolves upon the collectivity.”²⁰² As to not impinge upon the authority and autonomy of the father, Catholic relief in relation to maternal health tended to operate only when the legitimate family structure had failed as a result of illegitimacy, prostitution, infirmity or death.

While there were no shortage of religious and medical experts providing lectures to working-class women on the need for “good mothering” and the “art of mothercraft”, there was very little offered in the way of material support to mothers within the home. Mothers could write letters to the Archbishop describing their dire and pitiful circumstances in an attempt to portray themselves as a deserving “charity case”. If deemed a “deserving mother” they could expect to receive a one-time disbursement of “anything from £1 to £5.”²⁰³ Thus, the newly proposed bill upset the status quo between church sponsored charity and the minimal role of the state in maternal welfare.²⁰⁴ McQuaid thought the state should “supplement, not supplant”

²⁰⁰ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 72-73.

²⁰¹ McKee, “Church-State Relations and the Development of Irish Health Policy”, 170.

²⁰² Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, 19 March 1937. Libreria Editrice Vaticana. http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19370319_divini-redemptoris.html

²⁰³ Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 80.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 76.

voluntary Catholic charity.²⁰⁵ One pregnant Catholic mother who was dissatisfied with the negligible assistance given to her and her starving family wrote to the Archbishop saying: “I have always recognized that we owe to both church and state. Is there no reciprocal duty?”²⁰⁶ Arguments against the proposed scheme did not show much interest in the possible effects on infant deaths and maternal welfare, and instead expressed concern about government spending, private medical practitioners, the authority of the father, fears of socialism, and Catholic morality.

On 21 March 1951 the IHA called a special meeting to discuss the provisions of the Mother and Child Scheme and a resolution in support of the scheme was passed unanimously; letters declaring the IHA’s stance were sent to the press and Government.²⁰⁷ However, Dr. Noel Browne was quickly losing political support. Tweedy recalled with some amusement one particular public meeting about the Mother and Child Scheme, in which her contribution was drowned out by an audience that shouted ‘Communists’ and ‘Atheists’ and struck up ‘Faith in our Fathers’.²⁰⁸ Ultimately, Dr. Browne had very few supporters other than the IHA, and he resigned on 11 April 1951 when it became clear that the cabinet would not support the scheme. On the day of his resignation, the IHA passed a resolution which they sent to An Taoiseach, Mr. Costello, declaring: “We, the Committee of the IHA, affirm our belief that the principle of equal opportunities, enshrined in our Constitution, should be applied in the sphere of health to those least able to fend for themselves: the mothers and children of Ireland. We consequently re-affirm our support of the Mother and Child scheme as proposed by the Minister for Health.”²⁰⁹ The

²⁰⁵ Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 138.

²⁰⁶ Mrs. M.D., 21 September 1938, Byrne Papers, AB 7. Charity Cases, Box 7 in Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*, 81.

²⁰⁷ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 72.

²⁰⁸ Alan Hayes, introduction to *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association*, 10.

²⁰⁹ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 72,73.

controversy surrounding the Mother and Child scheme is evidence that at a time “when *moral* considerations infused many facets of everyday life in Ireland, the IHA’s assault on the *material* deprivation of the period remains impressive.”²¹⁰ In their 9th Annual Report, the IHA stated:

We feel sure that our members will agree that, although a non-party, non-sectarian organisation, we cannot now take sides, yet we cannot but deplore the manner in which an issue vital to the health of the nation was handled. We re-affirm our belief in the equal rights of all Irish women to happy motherhood, and deplore the resignation of a Minister for Health who had done so much in his term of office for the health of the community.²¹¹

The above quotation also illustrates how the IHA justified their position by referencing “the health of the nation” and the language of maternalism, rather than arguing through ideals of working-class rights, or through the rhetoric of women’s liberation. Despite the IHA’s fervent support for the Mother and Child Scheme, the Government, Catholic hierarchy and Irish Medical Association did not share their vision for Ireland’s future. While later proposals for public health policy would not reach the scope of the initial Mother and Child Scheme, the IHA remained vigilant with providing critical feedback for all future proposals, and in several instances their amendments for more comprehensive care were accepted.²¹²

The IHA was particularly vocal about public health precautions throughout the polio epidemic of 1956. They wrote letters to the Government and distributed information discouraging the holding of public sporting events when great numbers of people were packed together facilitating the spread of disease. They further protested the charge of 2d. for hand washing in public lavatories by the Dublin Corporation.²¹³ The IHA repeatedly urged the

²¹⁰ Evans “The IHA and the Introduction of Rationing in Ireland”, 95

²¹¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 9th Annual Report 1950-51.

²¹² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, see comments on White Paper, 11th Annual Report 1952-52.

²¹³ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 15th Annual Report 1956-57.

Minister for Health to make the polio vaccination free for children, which he declined. However, he later announced that it would be offered at a reduced rate for lower income groups, which the Association felt would not have happened without the information and pressure they supplied.²¹⁴ Much of the IHA's other work towards improvements in public health centred on the hygienic handling of food as this best complemented their work in consumer protection more generally. In 1950 the IHA submitted a 'Memorandum on Food Hygiene' to the Minister for Health which summarized their investigation into the handling of food, disposal of street refuse, and conditions in slaughterhouses. The following year many of the Memorandum's suggestions for food hygiene regulations became law. They further recommended that a portion of food inspector positions should be given to women and that they should receive equal pay for equal work.²¹⁵ In 1966 the IHA were given representation on a newly formed Food Hygiene Advisory Committee by the Minister for Health and in 1970 the IHA organized a National Food Hygiene Week which was led by their branches across the country.²¹⁶

Communist Accusations

The early years of the Irish Housewives Association were hampered by destructive accusations of Communism. The story of these controversies is briefly outlined in Tweedy's memoir and recounted in more detail within the Annual Reports published by the Association. The first accusation of Communist sympathies arose after the IHA received a circular letter from the British Cultural Committee for Peace on 6 April 1949. The circular invited the IHA to send either delegates or a message to the World Congress for Peace to be held in Paris. The letter was

²¹⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 17th Annual Report 1958-59.

²¹⁵ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 122.

²¹⁶ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 126.

read in full to the general meeting the day it was received, and it was unanimously decided that the Central Committee would draft a letter to be sent to the Peace Congress. The Association's 7th Annual Report recounts that "the decision sprang from a desire on the part of members to make a gesture (even if it was only a small and futile one) towards preserving peace."²¹⁷ However, the question had been posed in a rather last minute fashion, without previous discussion or notice on the agenda, so it was decided that the question would be re-opened at the next committee meeting after due notice had been given to all Branch Secretaries. Only two Branch Representatives attended, one from Dun Laoghaire and one from Mt. Merrion, and a thorough discussion ensued about the wisdom of sending any message to the Congress as some of the organizations sponsoring it might be seen to have Communist affiliations. A substantial majority ultimately voted to send a message in support of peace and a draft was carefully written which the members believed could not be construed in any way as supporting Communism. The message was passed unanimously and read:

We, the Irish Housewives Association, being an organisation independent of all political parties, call on the women of the world to sink their political differences and unite to work for peace. We welcome any genuine efforts to preserve peace, and believe that the women of the world, like ourselves, desire peace to bring up their children in a free country, where **freedom from want, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and the civil liberties of the individual are guaranteed.**²¹⁸

The 7th Annual Report claimed that in view of the careful and democratic process behind this message, the Central Committee was greatly surprised by the violent protest made by Mt. Merrion and Bray Representatives, three weeks after the first unanimous decision had been passed. The Central Committee agreed to hold a special general meeting to discuss the entire

²¹⁷ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 7th Annual Report 1949.

²¹⁸ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 7th Annual Report 1949, (bold in original).

matter as soon as the request had been made, however, without waiting for this (which they had requested) the Bray Branch resigned unanimously on May 6th. The Mt. Merrion Branch then proceeded to send a circular to their members and the press, “grossly misrepresenting the action of the Central Committee, implying they had acted dictatorially and had given public backing to Communism.”²¹⁹ The IHA held a special meeting on May 18th to provide an opportunity for questions and criticism, and it was decided by a large majority, with no amendments and no other resolutions proposed, that the following statement would be sent to the press:

As our action in sending a message to the Paris Peace Congress has been misunderstood by some of our members and branches (protests were received from some of our branches including Bray and Mount Merrion), and it appears to be misconstrued by some of the public, we wish to state that our message meant no more than it said, and we deny that it could possibly be taken as implying support of communism. It does not, of course, bind us in any way to acknowledge, or accept, any decisions made, or resolutions passed, by the Paris Congress. We ask fairminded people to re-read our message of peace demanding freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and civil liberties for the individual and to note that it in no sense could be taken as a pro-Communist message.²²⁰

The statement was published in the *Irish Press* (May 24), and the *Evening Mail* (June 10), while the Catholic weekly paper, *The Standard*, published a highly inaccurate version of events on May 20th under the title “Message to Reds Splits Housewives Association”. The Central Committee sent a statement correcting five erroneous claims in *The Standard*’s report and requesting that the editor make the corrections at once, however, they received no reply and no correction was printed. Following this, the Mt. Merrion Branch decided to dissolve on May 30th. The IHA concluded their account of these events by expressing their regret that a message intended to raise a voice for peace, freedom and civil liberty was so severely misinterpreted by

²¹⁹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 7th Annual Report 1949.

²²⁰ Ibid.

some of its own members, who seemed intent on believing the worst and refusing to wait for an open discussion of all the facts.²²¹ However, the IHA recorded its appreciation for the majority of members who “refused to be panicked into ascribing sinister motives to us, and gave us the support we have learnt to count on from them.”²²² In Hilda Tweedy’s later recollections, she explained that individual members also resigned and that this controversy caused a major setback in terms of membership.²²³ It indicated how powerful the fear of Communism was at the time and how even the mere suggestion of sympathy could be severely damaging to completely unaffiliated organizations.

This, however, was not the last the IHA would hear of Communist accusations. In 1950, *Cavalcade* published an article entitled “An informal and factual article proving there is Communism - but disguised - in Eire!” which listed the Irish Housewives Association as a communist-dominated organization. The IHA took legal action against this libel and upon receiving a letter from their solicitor, the editor of the *Cavalcade* agreed to withdraw the statements as having no foundation and printed an apology.²²⁴ Yet another newspaper article accusing the IHA of Communist leanings was published in a local paper called the *Roscommon Herald*, on April 12th, 1952. This article, titled “Dangerous Trends in Ireland”, incorrectly accused the IHA of participating in rioting in O’Connell Street in response to the Government’s budget. The article claimed that organizations “associated with Marxian activities” pose as friends of the people, but their “assigned mission is to stir up and exploit discontent in order to bring about that condition of chaos from which revolutions emerge.” It went on to claim that the

²²¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 7th Annual Report 1949.

²²² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 7th Annual Report 1949

²²³ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 70.

²²⁴ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 70.

Irish Housewives Association was one body that “has always been used as a medium of expression by those whose ideological allegiance is not in doubt.” The article explained that, “as we expected, the Irish Housewives Association has been very much to the fore in voicing ‘popular indignation’ during the past week,” and says that “it is a mistake to play into the hands of these people.”²²⁵

The IHA’s 11th Annual Report explains that the Committee was unanimous in deciding to bring the matter of the *Roscommon Herald* article to their solicitors, who advised that the article was defamatory and demanded an apology and complete withdrawal on behalf of the IHA. The *Roscommon Herald* refused to publish the apology submitted to them and the IHA issued a writ for libel in October. The IHA was represented by Andrée Skeffington and Mary Andrews, who were waiting in court on July 28th, 1953 when they received news that the *Roscommon Herald* had withdrawn and sought to settle outside of court. The newspaper agreed to publish an apology, pay for legal fees on both sides and pay a token sum of 50 pounds to the IHA.²²⁶ Tweedy reflects that it was certainly the right decision to take legal action because after the *Roscommon Herald* published their apology, the press was careful not to libel them in that manner again.²²⁷

However, as the apology was printed over a year after the initial accusations, much damage had already been done. The controversy had inspired what the 11th Annual Report called ‘Attacks from Within’, wherein several new members, who had joined under special reduced group rates, repeatedly expressed uncompromising hostility towards the Central Committee with little concern for the actual work done by the Association. Some of these members recorded a

²²⁵ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-2-3, newspaper clipping of *Roscommon Herald* April 12/4/1952.

²²⁶ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 70.

²²⁷ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 72.

lack of confidence in the Central Committee on their first meeting, while others started groundless rumours that the Committee was co-opted and not elected.²²⁸ The Report claimed that several of these new members ‘have introduced into the Association a spirit that is more akin to the bitterness of sectarian feuds or of party politics than to the ‘non-party and non-sectarian’ spirit of co-operation in which the Association has worked for the past 11 years.’²²⁹

One of the women who joined the Association with ulterior motives was Úna Byrne. Byrne was involved with the Crumlin Catholic Action Group (CGAG) which put her in contact with one of Archbishop McQuaid’s secretaries, Fr. Liam Martin, who sought to monitor and curtail the Irish Housewives Association. Byrne reported regularly to Martin about her infiltration into the Association which the two of them perceived as a communist scourge.²³⁰ In 1953, IHA central committee members Andrée Skeffington, Mary Andrews, and Kathleen McLarnon Wells confronted Byrne, “demanding to know why Byrne had accused the IHA of being a communist organisation at a meeting of the CCAG.”²³¹ At the following IHA meeting, Byrne accused the IHA of being anti-free speech and she continued to stay in the Association and report to the Catholic hierarchy. Other members of the IHA suspected recruitment of new members was being carried out unfairly with the intention of weakening the Association’s influence, and at the suggestion of their solicitor, the IHA Central Committee voted to temporarily close the membership books.²³² In May 1954, Archbishop McQuaid formed a committee to “keep an eye” on communist activity in Ireland, which became known as the “V-

²²⁸ The IHA Annual Report clarified that three of the fifteen Committee positions were co-opted to fill vacancies that arose *after* the yearly elected was held due to the resignation of three committee members for personal reasons. NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 11th Annual Report, 1952-53.

²²⁹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 11th Annual Report, 1952-53.

²³⁰ James de Haan, “McQuaid’s ‘Old Granny’” *History Ireland* 23, no. 1 (2015): 42.

²³¹ de Hann, “McQuaid”, 42.

²³² Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 71. It is unclear exactly who they believed was behind such recruitment and generally refer to them as individuals hostile to the aims of the IHA.

for-Vigilance” committee. Byrne sent information on IHA activity to the V-for-Vigilance committee, but her reports significantly slowed not long after the committee’s formation,²³³ likely due to the lack of any concrete evidence behind communist accusations.

Andrée Skeffington also chose to leave the IHA at this time as she had been experiencing a prolonged illness and was exhausted from fighting Communist accusations and hostile take-over attempts.²³⁴ Furthermore, Tweedy recollects that this was an extremely disruptive and upsetting time for all members, who were frightened not only for themselves, but also feared that their husbands’ livelihoods might be affected.²³⁵ However, the IHA rightly pointed out that despite the frustration caused by these attacks on the Association’s good name, such attacks were also a tribute to the growing effectiveness and success of their efforts.²³⁶ The late 1940s and early 1950s in Ireland were a high point of anti-communist fervour. The destructive power of Communist accusations illustrates that the socialist nation envisioned by some republican leaders and trade unionists at the outset of the twentieth century, such as James Connolly, was firmly foreclosed. It further speaks to the difficulty in carving out a public space for women within this context. Aisling Farrell suggests that these attacks against the IHA were not motivated purely by the Association’s tendency to advocate public welfare schemes in response to domestic-centric problems, but rather, “what frequently underlay the tone of these attacks was a growing tension that these housewife activists were somehow attempting to politicise the traditional roles of wives and mothers.”²³⁷ In 1949, Rosaleen Mills, a longstanding member of the IHA, summed up the challenge the Association presented to the existing political landscape and gender roles:

²³³ de Hann, “McQuaid”, 43.

²³⁴ Alan Hayes, “Introduction” in *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association*, 11.

²³⁵ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 71.

²³⁶ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 11th Annual Report, 1952-53.

²³⁷ Farrell, “Harassed Housewives”, 56.

Since this organisation has begun to organise the immense latent force that has hitherto been totally inactive in public affairs, it has become usual to write the Housewife with a capital H. To the man in the street she has come to mean the person who constantly chivvies the Powers that Be, from Merrion Street to Moore Street, on the question of the cost of living and the everyday problems of everyday people... To the Statesman the Housewives are a body of citizens who take an intelligent interest in the affairs that concern them, and who are prepared to assist the government by stating clearly what they want and why they want it, and even by making suggestions as to how it might be attained.²³⁸

The IHA was frequently shocked that their initiatives for peace, consumer protection and mother and child welfare could be labelled as communist insurgency by the Association's detractors. However, what some would label as "socialist" within the increasingly conservative and capitalist Irish state, the IHA preferred to label as "common sense suggestions."²³⁹

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the IHA was certainly not the only national housewife consumer movement to experience communist accusations. Why did red-baiting bring about the demise of the Canadian-based Housewife Consumers Association (HCA), the Central Action Committee against the High Cost of Living (CACHCL), and the Congress of Women's Auxiliaries (CWA), yet not the IHA? I hold that there are two primary reasons why the IHA withstood anti-communist attacks, while other movements, with almost identical objectives and platforms, fell victim to such tactics. The first reason is that an organized communist movement was virtually non-existent in Ireland by the mid-twentieth century, meaning communist accusations lacked the credibility that they might have had in Canada or the United States. The electoral records of socialist and labour parties in Ireland had been extremely poor by Western European standards.²⁴⁰ Even the CIA, "rarely known for its tendency to understate 'red' fears,"

²³⁸ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*, 1949.

²³⁹ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 17.

²⁴⁰ Clare Carroll and Patricia King, *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 19.

concluded in 1949 that communism was “an almost insignificant force [in Ireland], and internally at least offers no conceivable threat to the state.”²⁴¹ Ireland’s Labour Party was described by the CIA as only “mildly socialist” and the Communist Party of Ireland had more or less disappeared from the political scene by the close of the Second World War.²⁴²

The second reason that the IHA withstood communist accusations was because they relied on nationalist rhetoric rather than the more explicitly leftist language used by the HCA, CACHCL and CWA. The Second World War offered the Canadian-based Housewives Consumers Association a temporary veneer of patriotism, however, the HCA failed to adopt this discourse in any serious way. The consistent use of nationalist discourse proved to be an effective shield against ideological accusations of communism for the Irish Housewives Association. While all the left-leaning consumer housewives associations discussed herein shared common values and goals, the IHA was the only one to explicitly use its country of origin in its name. The significance of this should not be overlooked; in Canada, for example, when the HCA was accused of being a communist front, newspapers ran articles “sneeringly suggesting that their very name was a fraud, and, invoking the pervasive nativism and xenophobia of the times, the ‘so-called’ housewives, they reported, were not even real Canadians.” The papers went on to warn “real housewives to beware of alleged consumer organizations which did not contain Canadian in the name.”²⁴³ Likewise, while the IHA frequently described their work as national housekeeping, the CACHCL and CWA opted instead to use the term public housekeeping.²⁴⁴ While this difference may appear trivial, “the nation” presumes a unitary identity and interest

²⁴¹ Enda Delaney, “Anti-Communism in Mid-Twentieth-Century Ireland” *The English Historical Review* 126, no. 521 (2011): 884.

²⁴² Delaney, “Anti-Communism”, 884.

²⁴³ Guard, “Canada’s Citizen Housewives”, 131.

²⁴⁴ LaBarbera-Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry*, 7.

while “the public”, prone to factionalism and division, does not. The whole controversy of Communist accusations began when the IHA sent a message to the Peace Congress speaking for “women of the world” rather than the women of the nation. Hilda Tweedy recalled an instance when presenting information to the Tribunal of Inquiry into the Supply of Milk when, after giving evidence, she was “completely surprised when the first question I was asked in cross-examination was, ‘Where were you born?’” and speculated that this came from “a witch hunt for foreign subversives.”²⁴⁵ The CACHCL and CWA’s close connection with labour unions ensured that they were accused of only representing the working-class, a class which laid claim to internationalist solidarity. The CACHCL and CWA, while representing a broad base of women with varying political allegiances, “closely tied their mission to the objectives of organized labor.”²⁴⁶

The fates of the HCA, CACHCL and CWA proved that maternalism could only offer so much protection to politically active women on the left. While some right wing housewives associations, most notably the Australian Housewives’ Association, made nationalistic appeals, the IHA is the only left wing housewives’ association to make serious use of such rhetoric. Within the framework of everyday nationalism, nationhood is constituted and propagated through discursive acts.²⁴⁷ Because the IHA understood and repeatedly defined themselves as National Housekeepers, they discursively invoked the power of nationalism and posited themselves as a crucial component to the social and political life of the nation. A discourse analytical approach to nationalism draws attention to the ways in which nationhood can be

²⁴⁵ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 95-96.

²⁴⁶ LaBarbera-Twarog, *Politics of the Pantry*, 37.

²⁴⁷ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood”, 358.

“creatively and self-consciously deployed and manipulated”²⁴⁸ by ordinary citizens to accomplish their aims. The IHA demonstrated that housewives were not just passive consumers of a national identity constructed by political and economic elites, but also active participants in shaping the meaning of nationhood in Ireland. They asserted that “women are by nature, and by experience in their homes, specially equipped for helping in the Housekeeping of the Nation, and we claim for them a place on any commissions or boards which may be set up to deal with these matters.”²⁴⁹ While the IHA’s use of nationalist rhetoric had a strategic and shielding function, this is not intended to imply their use of such language was disingenuous. The IHA’s effective blend of maternalism and nationalism allowed them to pursue leftist policies in the interest of consumers, women and children for fifty years, even as other comparable associations folded under the anti-communist pressures of the post-war period. While the adoption of nationalist language did not wholly protect them from hostile accusations by anti-communist individuals and groups, it helped prevent these accusations from becoming powerful enough to lead to the IHA’s demise.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 539.

²⁴⁹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Files, 98-17-5-3-9, Memorandum on the Cost of Living, 1948.

Chapter Two: Consumer Nationalism

The Irish Housewives Association pursued activities and campaigns which can be understood through the framework of consumer nationalism. As suggested at the outset of this thesis, one of the revolutionary aspects of Michael Billig's concept of banal nationalism was its power to shift the focus of nationalism away from periods of crisis and turmoil in non-Western countries towards a more critical and self-reflective study of banal, yet prolific everyday expressions of nationalism in the West. This inspired scholars of nationalism, such as Tim Edensor, Jon E. Fox, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, Rhys Jones and Peter Merriman, to develop the idea of everyday nationalism, which shifted the emphasis away from the power emanating from the state in order to highlight the "multiplicity of nationalist discourses and practices affecting, and affected by, individuals and groups within particular places at specific times."²⁵⁰ Understanding the economic facets of nationalism quickly became a central part of this research agenda and the relationship between consumption and identity formation became a topic of inquiry, gaining traction by the early 2000s. Before I introduce and define the concept of consumer nationalism and link it to the Irish Housewives Association, it is useful to first provide an overview of consumer politics.

Until relatively recently, scholars across the humanities and social sciences expressed resistance and skepticism toward any positive correlation between consumption and politics; the very legitimacy of this topic as a field of inquiry was questioned.²⁵¹ For those within the Marxist

²⁵⁰ Rhys Jones and Peter Merriman, "Hot, Banal and Everyday Nationalism: Bilingual Road Signs in Wales," *Political Geography* 28, no. 3 (2009): 172.

²⁵¹ Lawrence B. Glickman, "Consumer Activism, Consumer Regimes, and The Consumer Movement: Rethinking the History of Consumer Politics in the United States" in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 400.

tradition, political consciousness and organization are concentrated at the point of production around labour. The potential for activism at the point of consumption was largely ignored.²⁵² While Marx did note the ever-expanding breadth of new commodities for purchase, he did not theorize about consumption in the modern sense. Marx sought to understand the development of ‘commodity production’ and thus tied consumption into a dialectical relationship with production. Marx defined the commodity as “an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind,”²⁵³ which then enters a process of exchange. Marx broke down the commodity into a use-value and an exchange-value. A commodity’s use-value is its utility in fulfilling a need or want through its material properties. A commodity’s exchange-value is the price it may attain in the marketplace which relates to how much a consumer is willing to pay. Marx keeps use-value and exchange-value distinct within his analysis as the price of use-value is often marginal as compared to exchange-value, meaning the commodity derives socially ascribed market value distinct from the worth of raw materials and labour time; the difference between use-value and exchange-value is absorbed along the retail chain as surplus value. The relationship between use-value and exchange-value is where Marx gets his most important concept for understanding consumption: commodity fetishism.

Marx’s seemingly simple definition of the commodity, quoted above, becomes more complicated. He goes on to explain: “A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”²⁵⁴ As long as the price of a commodity is dictated by its use-value, it remains a simple thing; however, when exchange-value dictates commodity worth, as it

²⁵² Mica Nava, "Consumerism Reconsidered: Buying and Power," *Cultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (1991): 159.

²⁵³ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 trans. Ben Fowkes, (London: Penguin, 1990), 125.

²⁵⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 163.

does under capitalism, people treat commodities as if value is inherent to the object itself rather than flowing from the amount of real labour expended in its production. Commodity fetishism accounts for how the relationship between people and their labour instead assumes “the fantastic form of a relation between things” under capitalism.²⁵⁵ We see that Marx considers the commodity through the sphere of production and exchange without showing concern about the process of consumption.²⁵⁶ However, he established a framework which views the commodity under capitalism in decidedly negative terms as a fetish which, through its metaphysical properties, justifies surplus value generated through the exploitation and alienation of the labourer.

The sphere of consumption was addressed more seriously beginning in the mid-twentieth century with the Frankfurt School’s concept of the ‘culture industry’, which was employed to describe the products and processes of mass consumer culture. This group of predominantly Jewish intellectuals, who emigrated from Germany to Los Angeles under pressure from anti-intellectual and anti-Semitic attacks, sought to grapple with the failure of proletarian revolutions and the rise of fascism and totalitarianism. The Frankfurt School was deeply pessimistic about the working classes’ power to resist the indoctrination of the capitalist culture industry and expressed despair and contempt for the malleability of mass culture.²⁵⁷ They drew strong linkages between the fascist totalitarianism in Germany and the culture industry in L.A. The Frankfurt School saw commodities produced through the culture industry as uniform, false, formulaic and meaningless; liberal consumer societies exerted control over the population through indoctrinating them with false needs for the ever-growing array of commodities. People

²⁵⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 165.

²⁵⁶ Mark Paterson, *Consumption and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge 2006), 18.

²⁵⁷ Nava, “Consumerism Reconsidered,” 158.

became manipulated through the media and advertising to believe that possessions would enhance their identities and consumption becomes a form of false freedom. This process of consumption was said to give feelings of pleasure or distraction which temporarily alleviate one's sense of isolation, suffering, and alienation, which would otherwise inspire a critical spirit. Such critiques were not limited to those who worked within a Marxist framework. Liberal economists such as J.K. Galbraith also argued that modern affluent societies promoted false needs in order to promote production, resulting in the evaluation of wealth in terms of material goods.²⁵⁸ While this historiographical analysis has traced assumptions about consumption from the left, academics across the political spectrum have understood the consumer in terms of manipulation, mindlessness and brainwashing.²⁵⁹

At this point it is noteworthy to consider the gendered dynamics of consumption. As pointed out by Rosemary Scott in 1976, women in Britain and America decided 75-90% of consumer sales.²⁶⁰ Therefore, the story of consumers is largely the story of women. While the (male) producer is often theorized as a dignified source of solidarity around which to organize politically, the (female) consumer is constructed as impulsive, naive, and lacking agency. Mica Nava suggests that the denigrated position of the consumer within much of the scholarship throughout the twentieth century must be “interpreted as part of a wider misogynistic view of women's reason and capabilities” and that the “ridiculing of women shoppers may be a way of negotiating the anxiety aroused by their economic power in this sphere.”²⁶¹

While scholars such as Ellen Willis and Hans Magnus Enzensberger offered early critiques about the elitism and sexism inherent in the Frankfurt School's approach to

²⁵⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969).

²⁵⁹ Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

²⁶⁰ Rosemary Scott, *The Female Consumer* (New York: Wiley, 1976), x.

²⁶¹ Nava, “Consumerism Reconsidered,” 162.

consumption,²⁶² it was not until the late 1970s, with the emergence of cultural studies, that renewed academic interest in the consumer and consumption really took off.²⁶³ However, as pointed out by Lawrence Glickman, renewed interest in the consumer did not necessarily mean re-evaluation of the presumed negative relationship between politics and consumption.²⁶⁴ The scholarship of Stuart Ewen in particular reflected the view that consumption itself was not a political arena, but a sphere that distracted from political issues.²⁶⁵ Much of this scholarship did not necessarily approach consumption as inherently good or bad, but rather, as something that people do every day which should be examined. While the scholarship produced according to the new cultural studies agenda was broadly political in terms of race, class and gender, at first, it generally opted to investigate consumption in relation to popular culture or commercial leisure rather than linking consumer society to the state, social movements, electoral politics or ideological engagement.²⁶⁶ However, scholars pursuing the research agenda of cultural studies contributed to a political understanding of consumption through sharpening academic understandings of everyday life, which offered an alternative framework for understanding consumption outside of the structure versus agency debate. Henri Lefebvre, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau are some of the pioneering scholars who aimed to show that there was nothing natural or inevitable about everyday life, but rather, that it is comprised of a complex process

²⁶² Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a theory of the media" *New Left Review* Vol. 64 (1970); Ellen Willis, "Consumerism and Women" *Tanner* (1970).

²⁶³ Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, *Resistance through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1976); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979); Davis Morley, *The "Nationwide" Audience* (London: BFI, 1980); Frank Mort, "Boy's Own? Masculinity, style and popular culture" in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* eds. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988); Angela McRobbie, "Second-hand Dresses and the Role of the Ragmarket" in *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses* ed. A. McRobbie, (London: Macmillan, 1989).

²⁶⁴ Glickman, "Consumer Activism," 402.

²⁶⁵ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

²⁶⁶ Glickman, "Consumer Activism," 402.

rooted in a vast number of conscious and unconscious actions and decisions. This approach led to a reconsideration of consumption, not as simply an unreflexive routine activity, but rather a process revealing “very complex dialogues and transactions to do with identity, status, aspirations, cultural capital, and position within a social group.”²⁶⁷

Cultural studies generated interest in consumption which eventually merged with the aforementioned ways of understanding everyday life in order to develop the concept of consumer politics. Academics on the left were inspired to explore consumption as a site of political struggle outside the workplace or state parliaments. There has been an explosion of scholarship across disciplines which takes political consumerism as its object of study. Scholarship about political consumerism has explored boycotts, buycotts, label campaigns and other strategies employed with the aim of impacting environmental policy, labour rights, human rights, the national economy, and sustainable development. Those who study or engage with consumer politics erase divisions between the political and economic spheres in order to illustrate the interconnectedness between private and public acts, which have political consequences. Consumer politics requires “the practice of judgment, autonomy, and solidarity,” which are popularly accepted as three main aspects of citizenship.²⁶⁸

Michele Micheletti proposes that there are three reasons to explain women’s unique interest in political consumerism. Firstly, women are the gender which, both historically and into the present, are assumed to be responsible for shopping for the family, often daily. The responsibility of nourishing and clothing a family gives them unique insight and concern about the quality of goods they are bringing home. Secondly, women generally show more concern

²⁶⁷ Paterson, *Consumption and Everyday Life*, 17.

²⁶⁸ Michele Micheletti, *Political virtue and shopping: Individuals, Consumerism and Collective action*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), 17.

about pesticides or potentially dangerous chemicals in the products they purchase, which Micheletti calls “risk perception”. Thirdly, since women have historically been excluded from institutions of the public sphere, their issues are often seen as nonpolitical, thus forcing women to create alternative sites to express their political demands and interests.²⁶⁹ These generalizations are not intended to be taken as inherent qualities of women, but rather as common concerns and aspirations which frequently arise from women’s position within the power structures of family and society.

Lawrence Glickman significantly contributed to this emerging field of consumer politics by developing terminology to clarify the disparate scholarship that aimed to understand the intersections between consumption and politics. He broke the broad category of consumer politics into three subsets: *consumer activism*, *consumer movement*, and *consumer regimes*.

Consumer activism refers to bottom-up processes by non-state actors who most frequently express their various interests through direct action such as boycotts or buycotts. Its aim is to organize the buying power of consumers to push for social or political change about a specific issue. *Consumer movement* refers to efforts to advance and protect the ‘consumer interest’ through advocacy and lobbying and is specifically focused on improving the standards, quality and price of consumer goods. *Consumer regime* refers to the often-overlooked state politics of consumption.²⁷⁰ While consumer activism and consumer regimes have long histories, the consumer movement only began in the mid-twentieth century when self-ascribed consumer organizations, which saw their job as representing consumers, emerged and established consumers as an interest group within a pluralistic society which made demands on the state.

²⁶⁹ Micheletti, *Political virtue and shopping*, 17-18.

²⁷⁰ Glickman, “Consumer Activism”, 400.

Several of the housewife organizations mentioned in the previous chapter, such as the Housewives' Consumer Association (HCA), the Central Action Committee against the High Cost of Living (CACHCL), and the Congress of Women's Auxiliaries (CWA), were a part of the consumer movement because they organized on behalf of the consumer and sought to protect the consumer through influencing economic policy and legislation. The consumer movement mobilizes on behalf of the interests of consumers, fighting for quality commodities at reasonable prices. Consumer activists, on the other hand, mobilize to support an ideological campaign which impacts issues such as the national interest, workers' rights, slave labour, or environmental protections.²⁷¹ Sometimes consumer activism and the consumer movement can be at odds with each other, if for example, consumer activists manage to stop a producer from using exploitative labour practices, but this results in a substantial increase in price for the consumer. Other times, the distinctions between these two types of consumer organizations can prove more fluid, such as the American-based National Consumer League (NCL) which began in 1899 as a consumer activist league with the aim of improving labour conditions for workers, but by the late 1960s, shifted focus to adopt elements of the consumer movement as they increasingly fought for consumer protection. I argue that the Irish Housewives Association also blended both the consumer movement and consumer activism because they claimed to organize on behalf of both the consumer and the nation.

Organizing consumption for the purpose of bolstering the nation is a specific type of consumer activism referred to as economic nationalism or consumer nationalism. Consumer nationalism has been defined as "a subtype of political consumerism that involves consumer choices driven by nationalist beliefs: it can serve as a means of expressing one's national

²⁷¹ Glickman, "Consumer Activism", 407.

belonging, of rejecting foreign nations and so on. As such, consumer nationalism can be examined alongside other subtypes of political consumerism.²⁷² Eleftheria Lekakis, an influential scholar in the field of political consumerism, has sought to distinguish between the terms economic nationalism and consumer nationalism. She defines economic nationalism as the tactics and strategies initiated by cultural and economic elites, while consumer nationalism referred to bottom-up processes enacted by everyday citizens.²⁷³ I find this distinction useful and shall use the term consumer nationalism to refer to the activities of the IHA, but it is worth noting that the majority of scholars within the field instead use economic nationalism and consumer nationalism interchangeably. Thus, when citing other scholars, they will frequently use the term economic nationalism for activities which would be called consumer nationalism according to Lekakis' distinction.

Historians have been crucial in pointing out that consumer nationalism is not a new phenomenon, but rather one which has roots extending back to the inception of nation-states. Dana Frank's 1999 publication, *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism*, was a germinal monograph which established the intimate relationship between patterns of economic consumption and the inception of modern nation-states. For Frank, "a Buy American campaign gave birth to the United States of America."²⁷⁴ Frank explains that American colonists (such as at the Boston Tea Party) boycotted British products to undercut the British Crown's authority; this campaign led to the economic independence of the colonies from Great Britain two years before political independence was granted through the Declaration of Independence. Liah Greenfield

²⁷² Enric Castelló and Sabina Mihelj, "Selling and Consuming the Nation: Understanding Consumer Nationalism" *Journal of Consumer Culture* 18, no. 4 (2018): 565.

²⁷³ Eleftheria Lekakis, "Buying into the Nation: The Politics of Consumption and Nationalism" in *The SAGE Handbook of Consumer Culture* eds. Olga Kravets, Pauline Maclaran, Steven Miles & Alladi Venkatesh (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018), 4.

²⁷⁴ Dana Frank, *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press 1999), 4.

reinforces the argument made by Frank through her 2001 book *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth*, which argues that economic nationalism within nineteenth-century Britain was the driving force in shaping Britain as a modern capitalist nation. Both Frank and Greenfield demonstrate that economic nationalism emerged as a refraction of national consciousness within the economically active strata of the population.²⁷⁵ They further highlight that economic nationalism “manifests as early as the construction of modern states, if not earlier,” and thus “making consumers” becomes an integral part of “making the nation.”²⁷⁶

As suggested in the previous chapter, the IHA set themselves apart from other contemporary housewives’ associations because they organized on behalf of the nation as well as on behalf of the consumer. I argued their effective use of nationalistic rhetoric and ideologies shielded them against the anti-communist attacks which destroyed comparable housewives’ movements. The National Housewives’ League of America (NHL), formed by African American women during the Great Depression, was the only other housewives’ association examined here which organized itself predominantly around the principles of consumer nationalism rather than exclusively consumer protection. Both the NHL and IHA attempted to build co-operative movements in order to improve conditions for producers and consumers within their respective nations. Furthermore, both associations designed “Buy National” campaigns in an attempt to keep money within their communities and strengthen their national economies. Darlene Hine, historian of black women’s activism in the United States, argues that the economic program of the National Housewives’ League was a logical outgrowth of the national black women’s club

²⁷⁵ Liah Greenfeld, *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001).

²⁷⁶ Lekakis, “Buying into the Nation,” 4. The creation of ‘the consumer’ extends further into the 18th century with the trade of colonial luxury goods.

movement that flourished in the opening decades of the twentieth century.²⁷⁷ Hine explains that, essentially, “the Housewives’ League combined communal womanist consciousness and economic nationalism to help black families and black businesses survive the depression.”²⁷⁸ The NHL put into practice the ideologies of racial solidarity and self-help espoused by black nationalist leaders such as Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, and W.E.B. Du Bois in order to promote direct spending as a tactic to stabilize the economic position of their community.²⁷⁹

Ireland’s historical experience of colonial exploitation meant that Irish industry was significantly underdeveloped compared with that of other Western nations. They exported many raw materials and agricultural products to Britain and in return, 78% of all Irish imports came from Britain by 1930.²⁸⁰ The subsequent Anglo-Irish trade wars in 1932-1938 further weakened the Irish economy and the tariffs imposed hurt Irish industry. Unemployment and emigration continued to colour Irish life throughout the twentieth century. While there are obviously innumerable differences between the Irish experience and the economic position of African Americans throughout the twentieth century, both shared an experience of economic vulnerability which encouraged their respective housewife organizations to not only organize on behalf of the consumer, but on behalf of the nation as a whole. Furthermore, both organizations found nationalism to be an effective tool in avoiding male antagonism which often arose when large numbers of women organized themselves politically. While the NHL and IHA both did substantial work to raise the status of women within their communities, they did so while emphasizing national solidarity.

²⁷⁷ Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1994), 131.

²⁷⁸ Hine, *Hine Sight*, 139.

²⁷⁹ Hine, *Hine Sight*, 132-133.

²⁸⁰ Gerardine Meaney, Mary O’Dowd and Bernadette Whelan, *Reading the Irish Woman: Studies in Cultural Encounter and Exchange, 1917-1960*, (Liverpool: University Press, 2013).

The Producer-Consumer Market

Consumer protection for Irish citizens was a primary guiding objective of the IHA since its inception; however, the methods employed to achieve this aim were multiple and varied throughout time. Furthermore, the consumer's interest was always balanced with consideration for the producer and the entirety of the national economy. The Association's First Annual Report, published in 1943, demanded answers as to why "producers get so poorly paid for goods which are so dear for the consumer to buy?" and it suggested that a properly run Government Marketing Board, buying direct from the producer, would mean better compensation for producers and cheaper prices for the consumer.²⁸¹ The IHA studied past marketing boards such as the Pigs and Bacon Marketing Boards and the Cork District Milk Boards and suggested that their shortcomings lay in the lack of initiative regarding the rationalization of distribution. The IHA were "disappointed to find these boards were mostly concerned with the interests of the middlemen and distributors rather than the producer and the consumer."²⁸² They suggested that the aims of a Government Marketing Board should be to guarantee a fair price to producers and develop "a planned rational system of distribution that will remove the responsibility and expense of marketing from the producers, while cutting down the costs of distribution to the home consumer through cutting down redundant middlemen and their profits."²⁸³

The Government remained hesitant to receive any deputation from the IHA and were generally hostile to their unwanted suggestions, but the IHA did not abandon their dream for a national economy which served both producers and consumers. The IHA felt that economic

²⁸¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-1, 1st Annual Report, June 1943.

²⁸² Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 17.

²⁸³ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-1, 1st Annual Report, June 1943.

restructuring could stem the tide of emigration, which they believed greatly damaged Irish national life and uprooted men and women from their families and culture. The Irish Housewives Association justified their intervention into economic planning by once again conflating national governance with housekeeping, explaining that, “as Ireland is far from being overpopulated, emigration is a sign that our house is not in order.”²⁸⁴ They further elaborated:

The basis of the Irish economy must be examined with the idea that the country is facing a grave crisis and a state of national emergency. It must be reorganized and planned with a view to satisfying the essential needs of the majority of people first: basic needs of food, clothing and housing, public health, child welfare and social services. Even on the present national income we could satisfy these basic needs better if we cut the national cake more equitably.²⁸⁵

One of their many suggestions to alleviate these problems was to organize the sale of essential foodstuffs and gas through municipal cooperative schemes rather than leaving it to private enterprises geared towards generating profits.

By 1945 the IHA were still exasperated about “uncontrolled profits, superfluous middlemen, high costs of distribution of goods,” and identified the traders’ ring in Dublin markets as a mechanism which “keeps down the price to the producer and puts it up for the consumer,”²⁸⁶ by prioritizing the profits of the middlemen. In light of Government inaction, they proposed that some type of co-operative market between producers and consumers was the best option for alleviating the worst excesses of an economic system which often left both producers and consumers feeling duped. In 1946 the Trades Union Council (TUC) called a public meeting which the IHA attended and used as a platform to speak on the need to control prices. Here, it

²⁸⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-3-4, Memorandum on Population Problems, June 1948.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-1, 3rd Annual Report, June 1945.

was decided to form a Lower Prices Council (LPC) with the objective to “press unremittingly for fair prices for producer and consumer.”²⁸⁷ The LPC was formed by constituent members from The Irish Housewives Association; The Irish Conference of Professional and Service Associations; Irish Labour Party Clann na Poblacht; Dublin Trades Union Council; Women’s Social and Progressive League; and The Joint Committee of Women’s Societies and Social Workers. Hilda Tweedy was elected honorary secretary of the executive co-ordinating committee in recognition of the IHA’s work for price control.²⁸⁸ Members were divided into three sub-committees to investigate the costs of food, clothing and housing, and to deal with the complaints of consumers.

The LPC greatly benefited from existing IHA branches across the country, which helped initiate other LPC branches, thus expanding the LPC beyond the confines of Dublin and to the national level. The IHA was thrilled to have the support of the LPC, but also continued their own investigations, sharing their information with the LPC as they went. All branches of the IHA and LPC sent out questionnaires on prices, which generated much valuable data about pricing systems across the country. The investigations of the LPC found that prices of goods were increased 50% - 250% between market price and customer price.²⁸⁹ Hilda Tweedy recalls one instance when a Dublin housewife bought a cabbage, inside which was a note saying, ‘I got two pence for this cabbage. What did you pay for it?’ The answer was ten pence.²⁹⁰ In 1949, the Irish Housewives’ Association and Lower Prices Council held a public meeting on O’Connell St. followed by a meeting with the Dublin Corporation, in order to argue the need for a co-operative

²⁸⁷ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 99.

²⁸⁸ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 99.

²⁸⁹ The IHA defined ‘market price’ as the amount paid to the producer. NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-1, 5th Annual Report, June 1947.

²⁹⁰ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 100.

producer-consumer market. The IHA were impressed with the “presence of numbers of well informed women at such a meeting,” which “in itself stressed the consumers interests, so often forgotten by councilors and traders alike, when ‘larger’ interests are at stake.”²⁹¹ They suggested that the impact of a producer-consumer market would be two-fold for the national economy: it would firstly establish fair prices for producers and consumers, and secondly, increase supplies by encouraging the small producer to dispose of his goods easily. The IHA delegates to the LPC further maintained that the existence of such markets would bring down prices generally. Their petitions were successful, and in January 1949, the IHA and LPC accomplished “the most spectacular achievement” of opening a Producer-Consumer Market on Francis St.²⁹²

The IHA’s work with the LPC for a Producer-Consumer Market represents the high point in their pursuit of a vision for the Irish economy which differed drastically from that pursued by Government officials. It embodied their slogan ‘For the Community, Not for Profit’.²⁹³ While the Government removed price controls and looked to create a more competitive market, the IHA strove for increased consumer protection and mechanisms to ensure stable prices. In a short article in the IHA’s magazine *The Irish Housewife*, one member asserted that:

No Government or political party which is committed to the maintenance of private enterprise in production and trading as the basis of national economy is capable of enforcing effective price control in the interests of the mass of the consumers. The motive force of private enterprise is profit... A government whose first concern is the living standard of its people must be prepared for national planning, national ownership and co-operative trading... Party politics, however, and particularly in Ireland, have become fantastically separated from the conception of politics as the efficient management of the affairs of the community... But there is, I suggest, an effective method of achieving the practical reforms with which the Housewives’ Association is concerned. That is the building up of a co-operative movement...From small beginnings, a co-operative

²⁹¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Paper, 98-17-1-2-1, 8th Annual Report, June 1950.

²⁹² NA, Hilda Tweedy Paper, 98-17-1-2-1, 7th Annual Report, June 1949.

²⁹³ Evans “The IHA and the Introduction of Rationing in Ireland”, 95.

movement could build a working model of genuine democracy and it could set in motion large-scale economic reforms of which Ireland is urgently in need.²⁹⁴

The above quotation indicates that, for the IHA, the Producer-Consumer Market did not simply represent a new way to shop, it more significantly represented a new way to live and thus offered an alternate path forward for Irish national life. As one historian of co-operative movements puts it, “consumers’ co-operation serves a practical purpose -- providing decent products at fair prices -- but it also holds transformative promise.”²⁹⁵ By claiming that a co-operative movement “could build a working model of genuine democracy,” the IHA suggests that Ireland was not working as a functional democracy from the point of view of the housewife consumer. The IHA’s vision for a national economy premised on the principles of co-operative movements indicates a perceived connection between everyday life, consumption and national identity, and an understanding that national power is rooted in “the positive relationship between nationalism, democracy and economic development.”²⁹⁶ The IHA sought to make the Irish democratic system relevant to Housewives through economic restructuring. As argued by Dana Frank, efforts to define the guiding principles of the “economic nation” are “ultimately a story about democracy,” wherein “people of all sorts have tried to exercise democratic control over their nation and their economic lives.”²⁹⁷ The extent to which the LPC sought to restructure the economic life of the nation is exemplified by their establishment of a “Women’s Parliament” which was held in 1947.

The “Women’s Parliament” was formed by the Irish Housewives’ Association, Women’s Social and Progressive League, The Joint Committee of Women’s Societies and Social Workers,

²⁹⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife* (1948) article by Winifred Trench.

²⁹⁵ Joshua Carreiro, “Our Economic Way Out: Black American Consumers’ Co-operation in the First Half of the Twentieth Century” in *Shopping for Change: Consumer Activism and the Possibilities of Purchasing Power*, ed. Louis Hyman and Joseph Tohill (Ithaca: ILP Press, 2017): 108.

²⁹⁶ Takeshi Nakano, “Theorising Economic Nationalism” *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 3 (2004): 221.

²⁹⁷ Frank, *Buy American*, xii.

and several other women's organizations not affiliated with the LPC. These various organizations were comprised of primarily middle class and politically informed women who fought for women's rights from a variety of different angles. Most of the women who ran for political office throughout the mid-twentieth century in Ireland had some type of affiliation with one of these associations. The goal of this mock parliament was to demonstrate that when women were given a place in national housekeeping, a genuine model of democracy would emerge which placed the cost of living at the heart of political decision making. Tweedy recalls that "women from all over the state competed to act as Ministers," and nine resolutions were passed at the enthusiastic first sitting which addressed the setting up of municipal restaurants to serve simple meals at reasonable prices, the provision of hot school meals to all school children, and the establishment of Government run co-operative marketing boards.²⁹⁸ While the 'Women's Parliament' lacked the authority to pass their resolutions into law, they would attempt to utilize their position within civil society to actualize their vision for the Irish economy. The Producer-Consumer (PC) Market was a concrete, albeit unsuccessful, step toward the fulfillment of the economic principles of nationhood valued by the IHA.

The IHA delegates to the LPC researched other successful producer consumer markets from Great Britain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States, in order to better equip their PC Market for success. The model for co-operative markets came from England, when in 1844 an unsuccessful strike by Rochdale Mills workers caused the employees to turn to consumer activism instead. The co-operative market they established was democratically controlled and not profit driven; any surplus capital was reinvested as collectively decided or returned to the member-owners in proportion to their purchases. Thus, they offered an alternative to capitalist

²⁹⁸ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 101; NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-5-1, misc. papers.

organization of consumption.²⁹⁹ After extensive research into the requirements for a successful co-operative market, the IHA concluded that the method of organizing the market was fairly simple, but a successful undertaking called for a fairly large initial membership and absolute loyalty to the store after it is opened, meaning it would need to be within walking distance for a great many customers.³⁰⁰ The IHA were in touch with producers who were dissatisfied with their profits on produce and the Association felt encouraged by the number of producers who responded about supplying the PC Market. The LPC set up a non-profit company to run the PC Market, with representatives from several organizations, including the Irish agricultural community, the Dublin Wholesale Market, and the Irish Housewives' Association representing consumers. Hilda Tweedy served as the chairman. The IHA branches in Dun Laoghaire, Cork and New Ross were enthusiastic about setting up their own PC Market but were continually foiled by the difficulty of finding a suitable and affordable location.

The premises for the PC Market in Dublin were rented at £500 per annum and running expenses of the market, staff, etc, came to £100 per week. The market primarily sold fruits and vegetables, with the majority of produce being sold at roughly ten percent more than the wholesale prices, while any luxury items carried were sold at a slightly higher profit in an attempt to keep down prices of essentials. Tweedy recalls that the establishment of the PC Market "provoked an outburst of protest from various vested interests," including the Retail Grocers, Dairies and Allied Trades Association (RGDATA), some wholesale markets and retailers, and the traders in Francis Street.³⁰¹ When, in 1949, the price of oranges increased rapidly after the removal of price controls, the IHA wrote to the press, pointing out that prices in

²⁹⁹ Carreiro, "Our Economic Way Out", 97.

³⁰⁰ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife* 1949 article by Margaret Digby.

³⁰¹ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 102.

the PC Market remained steady; this letter to the press “drew bitter comments from retailers”, however, orange prices steadied to the old figure.³⁰² However, the price of other consumer goods which the PC Market did not sell, such as bacon, continued to rise rapidly. The IHA Annual Report noted an instance of the PC Market’s stabilizing effects, which occurred in May 1950 regarding potatoes. When potato prices rose to 3s. 10d. per stone, the PC Market, by bulk buying, was able to sell at 2s. 3d. per stone, and the resulting increase in potato sales led to a further reduction to 2s. per stone.³⁰³ This had the desired effect of lowering potato prices generally and proved the “effectiveness of the PC Market as a means of preventing unwarrantable profiteering.”³⁰⁴

In response to complaints by some housewives that the price of some fruits and vegetables were not appreciably cheaper than in the shops, the IHA reminded them that the goal of the PC Market was not to undersell the honest trader, but to set fair prices in order to prevent profiteering and stabilize the national economy.³⁰⁵ They explained: “We go back to the pig, so to speak, and see if the farmer is doing well off its back. We don’t forget that the distribution chain, which ends with us consumers, has a beginning, and that after all the producer is an important being. Our aim, therefore, to keep prices down is coupled with a desire to give the producer a fair deal, and bound up with an investigation of all the facts.”³⁰⁶ The IHA believed the PC Market had a steadyng effect on the prices of fruits and vegetables generally, and on several occasions brought the price of produce down quite substantially. The PC Market was well established by

³⁰² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 8th Annual Report, 1950.

³⁰³ This notation is in the ‘old money’ system of pounds, shillings and pence notation: ‘s’ stands for shillings and ‘d’ for penny.

³⁰⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 8th Annual Report, 1950.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*, 1946, “What’s the Use” by Andree Skeffington.

1950, and housewives came by foot, bus and car from all over Dublin to avail of the lower prices.³⁰⁷

The IHA called on every housewife who could, to support the market, even if prices dipped in their districts. They reminded housewives: “The ultimate success of the market depends on you. If the market should fail through lack of support in the plentiful season, prices will be as high as ever when scarcity comes.”³⁰⁸ However, near the end of 1954, the PC Market noticed a considerable drop in turnover within the previous six months. The IHA felt that a primary cause behind this drop in sales was the recent rise in bus fares, which discouraged a number of their regular housewives who travelled to the market from outside the district, especially since there was little surrounding trade to incentivize shoppers on convenience alone.³⁰⁹ At the same time slum clearance in the area meant that many tenants were forced out, and the population of the surrounding area had dropped noticeably. Furthermore, the Market was having some difficulty with suppliers, many of whom preferred to gamble on prices in the wholesale market. This was combined with the inability of some customers to pay with cash, added strain to the Market which operated on low margins and always paid cash to its suppliers.³¹⁰ The Market struggled on until closing in April, 1955, much to the IHA’s dismay.

The Association expressed regret and disapproval that the Government, neither locally nor nationally, had an interest in setting up and operating such markets. The IHA believed that “if extended to the built-up areas, producer-consumer markets would provide a curb on fruit and vegetable prices, which are often very high where one or two shops hold a monopoly.”³¹¹ They

³⁰⁷ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 102.

³⁰⁸ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 7th Annual Report, 1949.

³⁰⁹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 14th Annual Report, 1955-56.

³¹⁰ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 103.

³¹¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 14th Annual Report, 1955-56.

pledged support for any future co-operative wholesale societies “provided they do not engage in restrictive practices and should not be used to coerce small grocers out of business.”³¹² The IHA continued for a number of years to try and procure a more suitable location for a Producer-Consumer Market, but never had the capital to get it off the ground as they had no source of income beyond the very limited membership fee and proceeds from the sale of their annual magazine. However, by organizing as consumers, the IHA “not only demonstrated a keen understanding of their place in the local and national economic structure, but also shattered the notion that, because homemakers consumed rather than produced, they would automatically be more passive than their wage-earning husbands.”³¹³

Buy Irish

The slogan “Buy Quality Irish” embodies the IHA’s allegiance to both consumer protection and national solidarity. However, it was some time until the IHA’s combination of consumer protection and consumer nationalism was popularly accepted; often, it was assumed that these interests were at odds with each other. “Buy National” campaigns have a rich and diverse history and similar slogans have often been used toward varying ends. As mentioned previously, one of the earliest “Buy National” campaigns was the “Buy American” campaign by early colonists which took the form of rejecting British imports. The language used at the time was that of ‘nonimportation’, ‘nonconsumption’ or ‘nonintercourse’. Thus, we see that nationally informed boycotts -- the refusal to purchase goods from a particular country -- are often intimately linked with national boycotts -- the promotion of buying products produced by one’s own country.

³¹² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 15th Annual Report, 1956-57.

³¹³ Aisling Farrell “Putting the Capital H in Housewife” in *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association*, 127.

Eleftheria Lekakis has examined consumer nationalism in Greece in both the negative form of “Boycott Germany” and the positive form of “Buy Greek”. Lekakis’ study of Greek consumer nationalism under EU imposed austerity argues that this form of ethnocentric consumption is premised on economies of discrimination.³¹⁴ Within the Greek context, Lekakis shows that “Buy National” campaigns lend themselves to a fascist pro-national and anti-immigration agenda.³¹⁵ However, in a distinctive historical context, and one led by women, the Irish Housewives’ Association utilized their “Buy National” campaign for dramatically different goals than those uncovered by Lekakis. As the following discussion will demonstrate, the IHA’s “Buy Irish” campaign was designed to strengthen the national economy, improve the quality of goods being produced for export as well as domestic consumption, and later, to facilitate entry into the EEC. Thus, we see the substantial variance between “Buy National” campaigns according to historical context, indicating that the intentions of consumer nationalist movements cannot be presumed in advance. While other “Buy National” campaigns may stem from the desire to become more economically insular, the IHA saw “Buy Irish” as a means to strengthen the Irish economy in order to improve prospects of trade and European integration. Consumer nationalism for the IHA had an external component aimed at the international community and an internal component aimed at the national citizenry.

The first indication of a “Buy Irish” movement appears in 1949 when the IHA’s 7th Annual Report explained that the Minister for Industry and Commerce had formed a new Council to advertise Irish goods and promote Irish industry. Mrs. Andrée Skeffington was

³¹⁴ Eleftheria Lekakis, “Economic Nationalism and the Cultural Politics of Consumption in Austerity Contexts: The rise of ethnocentric consumption in Greece” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 17, no. 2 (2017); Eleftheria Lekakis “Banal Nationalism and Consumer Activism: The Case of #BoycottGermany” in *Everyday Nationhood: Theorising Culture, Identity and Belonging After Banal Nationalism*, eds. Skey, Michael and Marco Antonsich (London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

³¹⁵ Lekakis, “Economic Nationalism”, 297.

invited to represent the IHA on this Council and was “glad of this opportunity to watch consumers’ interests which are often forgotten where exports are concerned.”³¹⁶ Thus we see that this first “Buy Irish” movement was not directed at domestic citizens, but rather towards international buyers of Irish goods. However, the IHA believed that the “Buy Irish” committee would not only improve Ireland’s trade relations, but also that it was the “workers’ best insurance against unemployment and emigration ... that in fostering the sale of Irish goods they would be helping themselves as well as doing a service to their fellow-Irishmen and women, and to the Irish nation.”³¹⁷ The “Buy Irish” committee had lofty aims and believed that they could secure the employment of 45 000 more workers with the development of new industries.³¹⁸

The IHA felt confident that their inclusion in this newly formed “Buy Irish” committee signified official recognition of their role as the representative for the consumer. However, the following year Andrée Skeffington reported that “it has been an uphill fight to get the consumers’ interests recognised in a practical way, the mere mention of desirable improvements in the quality of Irish goods and the possibility of lowering their prices, meeting with storms of protest.”³¹⁹ The IHA’s attempts to cooperate with manufacturing and trade organizations were significantly hampered by “the systematic non-co-operation of the Federation of Irish Manufacturers.”³²⁰ The IHA believed that nothing would be achieved by this “Buy Irish” council as long as the excellent commodities produced in Ireland were expected to “shield the shoddy or exorbitant products.”³²¹ They did not simply want to throw their support behind any product

³¹⁶ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 7th Annual Report, 1949.

³¹⁷ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-5-2-2, misc. papers.

³¹⁸ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-3-1, Minutes from General Meeting 22nd March 1950.

³¹⁹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 8th Annual Report, 1950.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

made in Ireland, but only those of a quality and price that they could conscientiously support. This provoked frustration amongst manufacturers who were not interested in feedback from housewives regarding the quality or price of goods being produced. The lack of cooperation between competing interest groups in the early “Buy Irish” council demonstrates the potential tensions which arise from trying to marry consumer nationalism with consumer protection.

In 1950, the IHA expressed disapproval with the extreme overcharging of goods for tourists, which they perceived as exploitative and likely to tarnish the reputation of Irish goods. They took their grievances to the government only to be told that nothing could be done about the matter. The IHA replied that “the Minister [for Industry and Commerce] had powers to prosecute a firm for flagrant overcharging, even if the victims were not Irish,” and pointed out “that this exploitation of foreigners was in direct contradiction with the spirit of the Buy Irish campaign which the Minister was sponsoring.” Their protest “was met with no satisfactory response,” and the IHA stated that they “strongly deplore the official legislation of, or indifference to, profiteering at the expense of people from other countries.”³²² Therefore, we see that “Buy National” campaigns are not inevitably linked to the economies of discrimination and anti-foreigner sentiments identified by Lekakis in her study of “Buy Greek”. The direction of ethnocentric consumer campaigns is not predetermined towards xenophobic ends, but rather, can be used to shape the national economy to be better situated for the tourist industry or international trade and cooperation.

The IHA’s vision for “Buy Irish” indicates that they were less concerned with nationally informed exclusionary buying practices than they were with improving the quality of commodities produced in Ireland. This, they hoped, would have the effect of protecting the

³²² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 8th Annual Report, 1950.

consumer and improving the reputation of Irish goods internationally and domestically, thus increasing the consumption of Irish goods which would strengthen the national economy. However, by 1951, the IHA reported that “[W]e were not called to one single meeting of this [“Buy Irish”] committee during the year. It must therefore be presumed dead.”³²³ They felt regretful and resentful that some manufacturers and traders were unwilling to hear the consumers’ contribution to this campaign. However, the spirit of “Buy Irish” remained alive and well within the Irish Housewives’ Association. In 1955 the Cork Branch “urged the purchase of locally manufactured goods to help increase employment,”³²⁴ and in 1958, when Drogheda was hit hard by unemployment which forced many to emigrate, they urged women to strengthen the textile industry by only purchasing Irish fabrics.³²⁵ With support from the IHA, an official movement to “Buy Irish” would be renewed in 1965 with increased focus on the quality of Irish commodities.

Alternative Paths for Consumer Nationalism

After the first “Buy Irish” campaign fizzled in 1951, the IHA continued to pursue alternative paths to encourage the consumption of quality Irish goods. One primary manner in which the IHA promoted quality Irish commodities was through the advertisements in their annual magazine, *The Irish Housewife*. The IHA began publishing *The Irish Housewife* in 1946 and continued until 1967. The magazine was initiated by Andrée Sheehy Skeffington and the editorial board procured articles from an impressive list of authors including politicians, doctors, lawyers, teachers, authors, and journalists. This was made all the more impressive as these

³²³ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 9th Annual Report, 1951.

³²⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 15th Annual Report, 1956-57.

³²⁵ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 17th Annual Report, 1958-59.

authors submitted their contributions without financial compensation. *The Irish Housewife* addressed a diverse range of topics and is a truly under-utilized source by historians. Sonja Tiernan is the sole scholar to this point who makes significant use of this magazine as a primary source for her essay in Alan Hayes' *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association: Links in the Chain*. Here, Tiernan explains that *The Irish Housewife* is an “important archive of feminist thought during this time period and a source which has yet to be fully utilised by researchers.”³²⁶ While Tiernan draws on the IHA magazine to better grasp feminist thought within the era, I will be focusing on the magazine’s use of advertisements to explore the IHA’s pursuit of consumer nationalism.

Through an innovative arrangement, *The Irish Housewife* did not cost anything for the IHA to publish. The IHA worked with an advertising agency who agreed to print copies of the magazine in return for the advertising revenue, while the IHA were able to retain the profits from the magazine’s sales. This, however, did not mean that the IHA relinquished any control over who and what was advertised in their magazine, rather, the contrary is true. Hilda Tweedy reflected that “[w]e always kept control of the advertising and on occasions refused advertisements from firms who did not comply with the IHA standards for goods and services.”³²⁷ The inside cover of *The Irish Housewife* declared their official endorsement of any company advertised in their pages by stating: “We believe their trading standards to be high, and we ask our readers to support them.”³²⁸ The IHA used *The Irish Housewife* as a medium to promote quality Irish goods to readers. A sample survey of their 1948 edition of the magazine

³²⁶ Sonja Tiernan, “Undercover of The Irish Housewife: A Women’s Magazine for a New Age” in *Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association* ed, Alan Hayes, 107.

³²⁷ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 89.

³²⁸ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*.

shows that at least 80% of the companies advertised in their pages were Irish owned.³²⁹ The percent of Irish-owned business advertised by the IHA remained largely consistent throughout its publication. By encouraging housewives to “Buy Quality Irish” through their magazine advertisements, the IHA demonstrated a belief that routine consumption practices are “important modalities for the production of national sensibilities.”³³⁰

The magazine always sold well in shops and many companies sought to achieve or maintain the IHA endorsement. However, in 1967, the magazine ceased publication. It was no longer viable for the advertising agency to print the magazine as the revenue did not match the ever-growing costs associated with printing. The IHA reported that they were forced to “face the fact” that radio and television “had superseded all other forms of advertising.”³³¹ Tweedy recalled that the loss of *The Irish Housewife* was keenly felt by the Association as it had provided an essential source of income and was an effective medium of recruitment for the Association.³³² It was a magazine which promoted the Irish housewife’s objectives, visions, thoughts, and hopes, even down to its advertisements. However, the editorial board did not dissolve and continued to look for alternative ways to publish their magazine, trying unsuccessfully to initiate a new magazine in conjunction with another Irish women’s organization.

In 1972, the editorial board managed to begin publication of a new magazine entitled *Housewives’ Voice*, which was printed three times yearly under a similar printing arrangement to *The Irish Housewife*; however, this time it was distributed free of charge and thus did not

³²⁹ However, this number could be as high as 86% as I was unable to identify the country of ownership for 6% of the advertisements. 10% were British owned and 4% were American owned. NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-2-3, *The Irish Housewife*, 1948.

³³⁰ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood”, 554.

³³¹ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 89.

³³² Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 89.

generate any revenue for the IHA. The *Housewives' Voice* maintained a steadfast commitment to quality Irish commodities, this time even displaying the slogan “Buy Quality Irish” on the front cover. Furthermore, the *Housewives' Voice* was distributed to consumer organizations and women's organizations from member countries of the European Economic Community, meaning the call to “Buy Quality Irish” was “reaching a larger audience than ever before.”³³³ However, the *Housewives' Voice* ceased publication in 1980 as, once again, “the soaring costs of production and the difficulties of competing for advertising against the daily press, radio and television had proved too much.”³³⁴ The IHA lacked any disposable income to prop the magazine up and insufficient funding was a commonly recurring impediment which inhibited a variety of IHA campaigns and actions.

The IHA also frequently utilized international bodies as a mechanism to apply pressure on the Irish Government to introduce legislation which would improve the quality of Irish goods. In 1957, for example, the IHA sent their Chairman Maureen Curran to a Consumer Protection Conference in Paris. This conference was hosted by the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation. While in Paris Curran realized that Ireland was “behind most European countries in Consumer Protection - probably owing to our late arrival in the industrial field.”³³⁵ At this conference she also received a great number of complaints about Irish goods, which she diligently noted and brought back home with her to discuss with the Federation of Irish Industries. She believed communicating the constructive criticism she received would “help to give greater confidence in Irish goods.”³³⁶ Furthermore, this conference highlighted the need for

³³³ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-4, 32nd Annual Report, 1973-73.

³³⁴ Tweedy, *A Link in the Chain*, 91.

³³⁵ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 16th Annual Report, 1957-58.

³³⁶ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 16th Annual Report, 1957-58.

international cooperation between European markets and stressed the important role of consumer organizations in developing standardized testing, labelling and grading methods.³³⁷ This inspired the Irish Housewives' Association to continue their pursuit of quality Irish-made goods through the establishment of a Women's Advisory Committee to the Institute for Industrial Research and Standards in 1958.

The Women's Advisory Committee was composed predominantly of representatives from the Irish Housewives' Association, but also had a large number of representatives from the Irish Countrywomen's Association, and a small number of Home Economics teachers. They felt confident that the "committee will be instrumental in achieving better standards for Irish goods."³³⁸ However, Tweedy recorded her regret that more manufacturers had not applied for licenses to use the standards mark which the Institute issued. She believed that "most consumers are inclined to buy goods with a foreign standards mark rather than Irish ones with no guarantee of standards,"³³⁹ illustrating once again the potential tensions between consumer protection and consumer nationalism. The Women's Advisory Committee met on a monthly basis and reviewed possible improvements to a wide variety of Irish commodities, including: wall paper, thread, kitchen sinks, non-flammable nightwear for children, ironing tables, children's toys, frozen fish fillets, footwear, aerosols, auto jacks, underwater swimming equipment, school uniforms, mattresses, rubber hot-water bottles, folding playpens and baby prams, to mention only a few.³⁴⁰ The Women's Advisory Council would test the quality of these diverse Irish-made commodities and then publish reviews which included strategies for quality improvement, standardization and

³³⁷ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-6-3-2, misc. papers.

³³⁸ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 22nd Annual Report, 1963-64.

³³⁹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-2, 17th Annual Report, 1958-59.

³⁴⁰ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 22nd Annual Report, 1963-64; 23rd Annual Report, 1964-65, 24th Annual Report 1965-66.

informative labelling practices. The Women’s Advisory Committee spearheaded cooperation efforts with the British Standards Institute as there were many common areas of concern and the two associations shared copies of their respective consumer reports.³⁴¹ The Committee explored ways to improve consumer education across Ireland through the relatively new medium of television. They met frequently with television show producers to create a series on Irish consumer products and suggested ways to make these shows more interesting to viewers.³⁴²

In 1965, the Women’s Advisory Committee were pleased to announce that after several years of sending proposals to the Minister for Industry and Commerce for the informative labelling of foodstuffs, the Minister finally agreed to meet with them and discuss the introduction of legislation on the matter. The Committee recommended that the “weight, contents, maker’s name and country of origin should be clearly marked” on food packaging, and further suggested that safety labelling be included on electrical goods and care labelling for clothes.³⁴³ The work of the IHA and Women’s Advisory Committee in this field should not be overlooked because consistent standardization across space and time are crucial features in the development of nationhood. “Nations are not natural or enduring givens” but rather are “historically contingent social constructs” which are produced and maintained through “various standardizing, universalizing, bureaucratizing and culturally indoctrinating processes.”³⁴⁴ These create the material conditions for common structures of everyday life which underpin the nation as an imagined community. While these efforts are more often within the purview of the state, within this period of Irish history they were spearheaded by women citizens.

³⁴¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 23rd Annual Report, 1964-65.

³⁴² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 24th Annual Report 1965-66.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Fox and Miller-Idriss “Everyday Nationhood”, 549.

In June 1966, IHA chairman Mrs. Maude Rooney and vice-chairman Mrs. Doreen Johnston attended a conference held by the International Organisation of Consumer Unions (IOCU) held in Israel. The IHA representatives felt that Ireland remained significantly behind other nations in terms of consumer protection. At the Central Committee meeting in September 1966 the IHA reflected on recommendations from the conference and discussed the need for a Consumers Association of Ireland to bring men and women together in order to exclusively pursue this aspect of work which the IHA had devoted itself for 25 years.³⁴⁵ Thus, the IHA held a public meeting in the Metropolitan Hall on 28th October 1966 where the Consumers Association of Ireland (CAI) was established and a council was elected. IHA representatives accounted for almost 70% of the elected council and Mrs. Rooney was chosen as chairman of the CAI. The aims of the CAI included improving consumer knowledge of available goods and services, the promotion of better service, proper packaging and handling of goods, the implementation of standards for labelling and advertising, and promotion of better value for money.

The IHA reported being “very pleased with the setting-up of the CAI,” which left them with “more time and resources to carry out the rest of [their] work.”³⁴⁶ However, they assured members of the association and the public that the IHA would continue to address specific consumer complaints and advise consumers on how to address them. Over the coming decade, the IHA would devote a significant portion of their resources to more explicitly feminist work, with the Commission on the Status of Women becoming a project of preeminent concern. They were thus transferring responsibility for the pursuit for structural change in consumer affairs to the CAI, which remained closely associated with the IHA through membership and

³⁴⁵ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 25th Annual Report, 1966-67.

³⁴⁶ Tweedy, *Links in the Chain*, 110.

agenda. However, the IHA continued to combat dramatically rising food prices through direct action, often in the form of boycotts. The IHA were especially active in this regard during the mid 1970s when during an international recession the cost of living dramatically increased, with consumer prices rising 17% in 1974 alone.³⁴⁷

Buy Quality Irish

Acceptance by Government officials of the need for informative labelling, including country of origin markers, suggested that the time was ripe to revitalise the campaign to “Buy Irish”. Throughout their campaign in the 1950s, the IHA found that encouraging shoppers to “Buy Irish” was difficult when the country of origin was not readily apparent. Even after the Women’s Advisory Committee’s demand for informative labelling practices was adopted, housewives still experienced difficulties when attempting to buy Irish-made products. In 1972, for example, “several women reported buying goods – shirts in this case – which were stamped ‘Made in Ireland’ on the package and ‘Made in Britain on the garment itself.’”³⁴⁸ The IHA received complaints from well over a hundred women who reported that “when they went to buy the Irish goods they required, the shops didn’t have them in stock.”³⁴⁹ In 1965 the IHA was pleased to announce the formation of the “Buy National Irish Committee” by the National Development Association to which the Housewives were invited to send representatives. This time around, the IHA felt satisfied that the committee intended “to encourage the improvement in quality and also the availability of Irish Made Goods.”³⁵⁰ Through their emphasis on creating

³⁴⁷ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic: Ireland in the 1970s* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2012), 470.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 490.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 490.

³⁵⁰ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 23rd Annual Report, 1964-65.

pride in the quality of Irish commodities, the IHA grasped that consumers do not just buy national products, in the process they “constitute national sensibilities, embody national pride, negotiate national meanings, thus making nationhood a salient feature of their everyday lives.”³⁵¹ By retaining a focus on the production of quality goods for export, the IHA further indicated that they did not see consumer nationalism as a means of economic insulation, but rather as an avenue for strengthening connections between the local the national and the global.

Mrs. L. O’Callaghan, Mrs. A. Cassidy and Mrs. E. Hackett were IHA representatives to the Dublin Regional Branch of the “Buy Irish” campaign. The Dublin Branch devised and promoted an essay competition for Dublin schoolchildren with the prompt, “Buying Irish is Everybody’s Business” and essays were accepted in Irish or English. A total of 130 schools participated and over 1000 essays were submitted with six children ultimately being selected to receive awards for their submission. The IHA reported that they were exceedingly impressed with the success of this campaign in bringing “home to the youth of the country the need to ‘Buy Irish’.”³⁵² The following year, the “Buy Irish” committee implemented a cookery competition for secondary school students who were required to use exclusively Irish ingredients. They further established a “Sell Irish” competition amongst grocery stores who presented various “Irish Made” displays. The IHA worked to spread consumer nationalist consciousness from a variety of angles and reported a successful year of “work for the recognition by the public of Quality Irish Goods.”³⁵³

In 1970, the Irish Housewives’ Association promoted “Buy Quality Irish” through a “Good Housekeeping Fortnight Irish Style” campaign. They reported that thousands of Irish

³⁵¹ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood”, 551.

³⁵² NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 24th Annual Report 1965-66.

³⁵³ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 26th Annual Report, 1967-68.

citizens attended the opening night for “Good Housekeeping Irish Style” in Dublin. They triumphantly claimed that the various Irish-made exhibits had certainly “brought home to any Irish person how much of quality we have to offer here in Ireland.”³⁵⁴ “Good Housekeeping Irish Style” events were held annually for the next five years. These activities were not restricted to Dublin and IHA branches across the country hosted “Good Housekeeping Irish Style” events. The Cork branch reported excellent turnout for lectures on budgeting in home economics and the economical buying of Irish meat, which brought several new members into the Association. They reported wide-spread community participation in a “Buy Irish - Buy Cork” presentation where several businessmen provided displays of locally produced commodities. The Cork Branch reported that “this night was such a wonderful success that the managers of these firms decided to put on such a display annually,” and concluded that they believed “we have contributed in some measure to the National Economy.”³⁵⁵

In December 1971, the IHA representatives to the “Buy Irish” committee initiated a special “Buy Quality Irish” campaign. The IHA prepped for the increased consumption associated with Christmas by urging housewives to support this campaign through “insisting on being shown the Irish-made article before deciding to purchase.”³⁵⁶ They went on to explain that they did not ask shoppers to Buy Irish “just because it is Irish,” but because, in many cases “the Irish-made product can and does compare favourably in terms of value for money.” The IHA informed consumers that “money spent on unnecessary imports contributes little or nothing to our prosperity at home. On the other hand, money spent on Irish goods secures the employment of our menfolk and children as well as helping to create new opportunities for our school-

³⁵⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 30th Annual Report, 1970-71.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-3-1, Buy Quality Irish Newsletter.

leavers.”³⁵⁷ They explained that if shopkeepers did not stock the Irish-made version of any particular commodity, “it is unlikely to be because the article is not made in Ireland.” Rather, “the most probable reason is that the retailer has a bigger profit margin on the imported goods. The explanation for this is that the markets open to the country of origin of such goods are vastly bigger than the Irish manufacturer can command, and since productivity costs diminish as the volume of production increases, the Irish manufacturer is at a disadvantage. It should be emphasised that the shopper gets no advantage from this attractive profit margin!”³⁵⁸ They cloaked their call for consumers to “Buy Irish” in the familiar language of maternal feminism and national housekeeping, making connections between women’s caregiving role for children and women’s caregiving role for the national economy. According to the IHA:

[i]ndustrialisation in Ireland is in its infancy, and given the careful nurturing associated with infancy, it can reach a maturity of equal stature with all comers. By asking you to Buy Irish, we are asking you to nurture Irish industry through the last phases of its infancy, while it is being subjected to the forced-growth necessary to prepare it for launching into Europe. Every penny spent on Irish goods is an investment in the future.³⁵⁹

While it is difficult to discern if this maternalist language was strategically employed, the IHA likely felt that such discourse would encourage a broad base of Irish women to see “Buying Irish” not simply as a political campaign, but one that already aligned with their everyday duties. They further encouraged shopkeepers to “stock Irish, [and] sell Irish without waiting to be asked for it,” urging them to “weigh the short term advantages of a larger profit margin against the long

³⁵⁷ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-3-1, Buy Quality Irish Newsletter.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

term advantages of supporting Irish industry and Irish workers, who, after all, will provide the consumer market of the future.”³⁶⁰

It may at first seem contradictory that a “Buy Quality Irish” movement was motivated in large part by a desire to participate in European integration. Various scholars theorized that the European Union signaled the demise of nationalism in Europe in favour of a supranational identity. However, this argument has fallen out of vogue as it has become increasingly clear that nationalism is not leaving the European stage anytime soon. An analysis of the relationship between “Buy Quality Irish” and Irish entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) illustrates that nationalist perspective and internationalist perspective are indeed two sides of the same coin rather than conflicting ideologies. Those who argued in favour of Ireland joining the EEC did not do so because they sought to diminish Ireland’s sovereignty, identity or economic strength, but rather because they thought it would be impossible to maintain these things without integration. Arguments in favour in European integration were not posited as a rejection of Irish nationalism, but instead were proposed as an avenue for strengthening Irish nationhood.

In 1972 Hilda Tweedy was invited to speak on a symposium about Irish entry into the EEC where she and many others argued in favour of integration. She explained that even if Ireland remained outside of the EEC, Ireland remained “geographically related to Europe, and with one stroke of a pen, statesmen of Europe can change our whole way of life. Where is our independence then?” She believed that “we should have more control over our destiny as members of the E.E.C.,” because having a seat at the table would give them a voice in the decision-making process.³⁶¹ Next, she addressed fears about the loss of national identity and

³⁶⁰ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-3-1, Buy Quality Irish Newsletter.

³⁶¹ NA, Hilda Tweedy Paper, 98-17-10-1-1, “The Role of Women in the European Community”, 1972.

stated her belief that this fell under the special purview of women, saying: “The French are no less French, nor the Germans less German, than they were ten years ago. The women of Ireland would not fail in this respect, it is the role of the mother to hand down to her children our national culture and traditions, our way of life is safe in their hands. The cultural interchanges can only enrich the national cultures of member nations, here we can contribute much as well as gain much.”³⁶² Therefore, we see that arguments favouring European integration retained the nation as the primary unit of political, social, economic and cultural concern. Arguments advocating entry into the EEC did not see it as a loss of national power, but rather as a means of bolstering that power, and they saw “Buy Quality Irish” as a means of strengthening Irish industry in order to gain acceptance into the EEC.

Interestingly, the early “Buy Irish” and “Buy Quality Irish” movements, in which the Irish Housewives’ Association were leaders seem to have been largely lost to history. I have uncovered the legacy of this early consumer nationalist movement through the Hilda Tweedy Papers in the National Archives of Ireland as I found little to no information about this movement elsewhere in secondary literature. Most popular accounts of “Buy Quality Irish”, which later became better known as “Guaranteed Irish”, trace its origins to the 1974 campaign of a man named Vivian Murray who was chief executive of the Irish Goods Council.³⁶³ Vivian Murray appears in IHA records as early as 1970 when he was director of the Ireland House where the Dublin Branch hosted their “Good Housekeeping Irish Style” events. They recorded “grateful thanks” to Mr. Murray and his “courteous and efficient staff for their help and

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ “Goods Council chief executive who created Buy Irish scheme” *The Irish Times* March 14th, 2019. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/goods-council-chief-executive-who-created-buy-irish-scheme-1.723115>; Wikipedia Vivian Murray https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vivian_Murray#Irish_Goods_Council; Wikipedia Guaranteed Irish https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guaranteed_Irish.

cooperation at all times.”³⁶⁴ Hence, we see that there was cooperation between the IHA and Vivian Murray on the “Buy Quality Irish” campaign several years before he is actually credited with inventing it. After 1975, reporting on the “Buy Quality Irish” campaign disappears from the IHA annual reports, suggesting that its direction was taken over by the Irish Goods Council where it was later rebranded as Guaranteed Irish, while the IHA undertook significant work for the Council for the Status of Women. At this point they adopted a feminist outlook that more explicitly evoked the language of equality rather than the nationalist maternal feminist discourse that underlay their consumer nationalism work. The Irish Housewives’ foundational role in the “Buy Quality Irish” movement demonstrates their ardent commitment to the projects of consumer nationalism and consumer protection, as well as illustrating the potential difficulties in merging these ideologies. It further illustrates that the nation is not simply “the product of macro-structural forces” but is simultaneously “the practical accomplishment of people engaging in routine activities.”³⁶⁵

The significant role played by the Irish Housewives Association in developing a “Buy Quality Irish” campaign further forces us to rethink the very definition of consumer nationalism. In 2011 Karl Gerth defined consumer nationalism as the effort “to define buying and using (or consumption) as a political statement through the nonconsumption of things from an offending country or countries and the consumption of one's own nationally produced goods and services.”³⁶⁶ This definition can be accurately applied to Dana Frank’s study of the early “Buy American” movement, which rejected British imports, and Eleftheria Lekakis examination of

³⁶⁴ NA, Hilda Tweedy Papers, 98-17-1-2-3, 30th Annual Report, 1970-71.

³⁶⁵ Fox, Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood”, 573.

³⁶⁶ Karl Gerth, “Consumer nationalism” in *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*, ed. Dale Southerton (London: SAGE, 2011), 280.

“Buy Greek”, which also involved boycotting German goods. However, the “Buy Quality Irish” movement did not advocate boycotting goods from any particular country and rather hoped to improve Ireland’s trading relations. While of course promoting the consumption of nationally produced goods suggests the shunning of imported commodities, no individual country was singled out for attack by “Buy Quality Irish”. Enric Castelló and Sabina Mihelj define consumer nationalism more broadly as “a set of discourses and practices that attach national significance to consumer objects (goods, services),” which “have individual consumers at their centre, but also involve commercial actors.”³⁶⁷ This definition is more useful when exploring the activities of the IHA as it makes space for both the explicitly political and mundane everyday aspects to their project of nationhood, and does not presume the explicit rejection of commodities from an offending nation.

Scholars who publish about consumer nationalism have yet to investigate the gendered elements of this pursuit. While scholarship about political consumerism has grappled with the gendered dimensions of these processes, literature about consumer nationalism has not adequately considered the role of women in these campaigns and activities. While consumer nationalism highlights the significance of everyday acts of consumption by individual citizens in the maintenance and imagining of the nation, there has been no explicit investigation of women’s specific interests in this form of political consumerism. This is important because throughout this thesis, I have aimed to show that everyday nationalism, through its shift away from the traditional focus on macro-level state policies and warfare, has unique potential to highlight women’s often overlooked contribution to the nation. The IHA’s vision for a national economy premised on co-operative markets serving both producers and consumers, and their leadership

³⁶⁷ Castelló, Mihelj, "Selling and Consuming the Nation", 563.

role in the “Buy Irish” and later “Buy Quality Irish” movements, illustrate the ongoing contestation over the meaning of nationhood. The success of these economic objectives relied on collective national mobilization at the individual point of consumption and thus, reifies, solidifies and reimagines the constellation of nationhood.

Conclusion

This thesis is shaped by the idea that women's experience with the maintenance of national projects can be usefully analyzed through the theoretical perspective of everyday nationalism. Historical scholarship about nationalism, including studies of Ireland specifically, has shown an overwhelming preoccupation with violent nationalist uprisings, conflicts and crises, involving state institutions such as political parties, constitutions, and militaries. Both nationalist warfare and institutions of state governance have strong patriarchal histories and often remain under male purview. Furthermore, in historical instances when women were in fact active participants in violent conflict and state power, it was often seen as transgressive of traditional gender norms, thereby ensuring that such women were often depicted as exceptional while holding only in a marginal or temporary influence.

The theoretical insights of banal and everyday nationalism were praised particularly for two contributions. Firstly, they challenged the tendency within scholarship about nationalism to focus on moments of intense conflict, often depicted as the extremism of some non-Western “other”³⁶⁸ and provided tools to more critically examine nationalism in the West. Secondly, they shifted the focus away from the inception of nations and corresponding preoccupation with the standardization of language, the French Revolution and industrialization, towards instead the maintenance of the nation and its continued relevance throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This thesis has shown that everyday nationalism offers a third important theoretical innovation; it challenges the marginalization of women within theories and histories of nationalism through illuminating the everyday acts of ordinary people and centering civil society

³⁶⁸ See Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (Toronto: Penguin, 1994), for a clear example of scholarship which “others” the nationalism of non-Western nations.

rather than the state as its level of analysis. By offering an alternative avenue for the study of nationalism beyond a macro level analysis of top-down forces, everyday nationalism can centre the experience of a majority of women in hitherto unforeseen ways.

The first chapter of this thesis explained the historical context in which the Irish Housewives Association arose and considered the shifting possibilities for women in national public life within Ireland. It described the aims of the “Housewives’ Petition” and outlined the Association’s attempts, sometimes successful while other times not, to influence government policy on public health and social welfare. Despite the School Meal Scheme never reaching the full scope hoped for by the IHA, they did successfully increase the number of children receiving its services. The Association threw its full support behind Dr. Noel Browne’s “Mother and Child Scheme” which was designed to offer free medical services for mothers and their children. While this was never successfully implemented, the IHA remained as vocal consultants to future health bills which greatly improved the affordability and availability of health care across Ireland. While the IHA fought unsuccessfully to make the polio vaccination free for children, they believed the Government’s decision to offer it at a reduced rate for lower income groups was a result of the pressure and information they provided. The Irish Housewives Association submitted a ‘Memorandum on Food Hygiene’ and in 1951 many of its recommendations were passed into law. They continued throughout the 1960s to act as representatives on the Food Hygiene Advisory Committee and in the 1970s organized an annual National Food Hygiene Week.

This first chapter contextualized these campaigns within the tradition of maternal feminism but also focused on the unique nationalist twist of IHA rhetoric, such as their frequent use of the term “National Housekeeping”. Especially throughout the first three decades of the

Association's existence, we see them express rather radical policy proposals and frequently articulate these initiatives through appeals to a sense of Irish national identity and duty rather than through the language of working-class rights or women's equality. This chapter concludes by considering the destructive power of communist accusations and compares the Irish Housewives Association's experience with similar left-wing Housewives' movements. It argues that the IHA's emphasis on national identity and frequent use of nationalist rhetoric provided a powerful shield against accusations of communist influence or inappropriate public roles for women, which were particularly rampant throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Chapter two analyzed a variety of campaigns spearheaded by the Irish Housewives Association which embodied the concept of consumer nationalism. The IHA's role in establishing a Producer-Consumer Market and the ideologies motivating their efforts were examined. While the PC Market folded six years after its opening, the IHA also pursued their economic agenda with a short lived "Buy Irish" campaign in the early 1950s. Here I explore the IHA's hopes and aims for the "Buy Irish" movement which included improving the international reputation of Irish goods, strengthening international trade relations, and protecting consumers from poorly made and over-priced products. The IHA felt their contribution to this movement was largely disregarded as manufacturers and traders were generally hostile to their recommendations. The IHA kept the spirit of "Buy Irish" alive with smaller local campaigns and by using their magazine *The Irish Housewife*, and later, *Housewives' Voice*, to promote the sale of quality Irish commodities. They further utilized international organizations and standards in order to improve consumer protection within Ireland through the Women's Advisory Committee. The Women's Advisory Committee created the Consumers' Association of Ireland to bring men and women together to work for consumer protection which the Irish Housewives Association

had devoted itself to for the previous 25 years. The CAI remains an active part of Ireland's political landscape to this day.

Finally, this chapter concludes by reflecting on the revival of the “Buy Irish” movement in 1965. This time, the IHA’s emphasis on quality and affordability garnered success. Furthermore, the “Buy Quality Irish” movement was aimed in part to help secure acceptance to the EEC, thus illustrating that the IHA’s goal of using the movement to strengthen international trade and cooperation remained alive within the campaign. The objectives that the IHA sought to achieve through “Buying Irish” thus forces us to reconsider the possibilities of consumer nationalism which have thus far been assumed to have strong xenophobic and anti-foreigner sentiments. It concluded by intimating that scholars writing about both consumer nationalism and everyday nationalism more broadly, have yet to fully realize the considerable transformational potential of centring gender as a significant analytical focus within their theoretical framework. This thesis further aimed to demonstrate that women were in fact active participants in national public life throughout the mid-twentieth century, despite the best efforts of state legislation and national discourses designed to sideline them. It demonstrates that nationhood in Ireland is not formed solely by macro-level structural forces initiated by state elites, but rather, it is also reimagined and negotiated through the direct actions of citizens throughout their daily life.

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