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**MOTHER IRELAND:
WOMEN, THE STATE AND
THE ABORTION REFERENDUM
IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

A Senior Thesis submitted to the
Anthropology Department in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Honors in Anthropology

Jennifer K. DeWan
Oberlin College 1997

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I. INTRODUCTION

An Anthropology of Ireland¹

The women who were singers in the West
lived on an unforgiving coast.

I want to ask was there ever one
moment when all of it relented,
when rain and ocean and their own
sense of home were revealed to them
as one and the same?

After which
every day was still shaped by weather,
but every night their mouths filled with
Atlantic storms and clouded-over stars
and exhausted birds.

And only when the danger
was plain in the music could you know
their true measure of rejoicing in

finding a voice where they found a vision.

Eavan Boland, *The Singers*

The West of Ireland, a stark, rocky coast filled with thousands of small inlets and coastal islands constantly ravaged by rough wind and waves, has become the last bastion of 'traditional' Irish culture in Ireland. It is the land far beyond the Dublin Pale, a small area encircling Dublin that was colonized most heavily by the English from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Anthropologists studying Ireland have focused almost exclusively on Western Irish culture, where, in areas known as the *Gaeltacht*, people still speak fluent Irish and live in isolated rural settings. Anthropologists have primarily focused on rural Irish society of the 20th century, especially on the rural Irish male and his dying role in Irish society (Arensberg 1937, Arensberg and Kimball 1940, Cresswell 1969, Messenger 1969, Brody 1973, Scheper-Hughes 1979). It seems anthropology has been slow to notice and acknowledge the changes that have occurred in

¹ "Ireland" refers to the Republic of Ireland, unless otherwise stated.

Irish society since the establishment of the Free State in 1922 and the Republic in 1948.

These anthropologists have focused on the demoralization, what Cresswell and Scheper-Hughes have labeled the anomie, of the rural Irish and their culture due to the dramatic change from a rural agrarian economy to an advanced industrialized economy in the last 30 years (Cresswell 1969, Scheper-Hughes 1979). The farmers of Ireland, especially in the West of Ireland were among the last in Western Europe to experience the impact of the capitalist world market and the processes of urbanization (Scheper-Hughes 1979: 42). Anthropologists have generally regarded the switch from rural to urban society as the death of Irish culture. Many Irish nationalists have viewed these changes in a similar way, identifying rural Irish culture with a specific Irish identity. According to Cornelius Lucey, Bishop of Cork in 1953 "the rural population is vanishing and with it is vanishing the Irish race itself....Rural Ireland is stricken and dying and the will to marry on the land is almost gone" (quoted in Scheper-Hughes 1979: 34). Rural Irish society is viewed by many (both Irish and non-Irish) as the essential definition of Irishness and Irish culture. Therefore, the transition from a rural way of life represents a loss of Irish identity and culture. Yet, this understanding of the substance of Irish culture excludes the continuing existence of the small rural population who continue to make their living off the land. It also excludes both the historical and contemporary urban experiences of Irish men and women, and denies the dynamic quality of Irish culture itself.

Anthropologists have done nothing to dispel this view of the death of Irish culture, focusing their studies solely on a dying rural Ireland and ignoring urban Irish culture completely. In fact, famous studies such as Arensberg's The Irish Countryman (1937) and Arensberg and Kimball's Family and

Community in Ireland (1940) portray a country completely devoid of all but farms. They paint such a portrait of the rural Irish family and its culture that one is tempted to accuse Arensberg and Kimball of abject romanticism. These studies are unabashedly focused on the 'traditional' Irish family with its male patriarch and his connection to the land, an approach that brings to mind romanticized films like Jim Sheridan's *The Field* (1990). Arensberg and Kimball's portrayal of family life has not only colored the official anthropological view of Irish culture, but has even managed to dominate the Irish government's, and many Irish people's, conception of traditional family life and gender roles, and the importance of the farm economy in maintaining a traditional Irish way of life.

Perhaps not surprisingly in this environment, there has been little or no study of the effects of the dramatically high emigration rates of women from rural to urban Ireland, Britain, the United States, and Australia over the past 50 years (O'Sullivan 1995, Pyle 1990: 55-57). Nor has there been a study of the dramatic change in women's roles, activities, and self-concept through the processes of modernization. Instead, anthropological texts have focused on women's role as mother within the family, thus helping to maintain the conception that women do not play a role in Irish society outside of the family and limiting women's agency by doing so. The mother is understood in relation to her deep connection to and affection for her sons, whom she traditionally dotes on and spoils with her overwhelming, and often domineering, maternal love. Irish society, according to this understanding, is marked by the:

Strong preferential love of the rural mother for her sons. She is a magnetic center of the family and her cohesive power is affection. This love, which leads her 'to slave' for her sons and to demand that her daughters do likewise, cushions the sons' hard lot. It mollifies the constant rub of his subordination to his father. (Messenger 1969: 75)

Reiterating the importance of motherhood in anthropological conceptions of rural Irish life, Nancy Scheper-Hughes in a 1979 study of schizophrenia in rural County Kerry emphasized a *lack* of maternal attention and affection as a fundamental reason for young men's low self-esteem, high rate of celibacy, and tendency towards mental illness. According to Scheper-Hughes, the lack of this overwhelming maternal affection was both responsible for and the result of the destabilization of rural patriarchal familism in Ireland with the decline of rural life (Scheper-Hughes 1979).

While this view of the Irish rural woman is obviously not complete, it does suggest the strength of traditional values in the construction and maintenance of women's familial role in Irish society. The literature reflects the dominant view of mother within the family, and the importance of that role in the maintenance of Irish culture. Also, despite the obviously romantic lilt of much of the anthropological literature concerning Ireland, it does give an accurate overall picture of the dramatic change from rural to urban environments and the effect of this change on the rural communities in the West. These rural communities have played an integral part in the construction of an Irish national identity, one that is primarily conservative and tremendously religious, and have helped shape the ideologies that exist in Ireland today.

The lack of anthropological research concerning women and the processes of change that have affected women's status is a telling sign of the powerful nature of dominant ideologies. In this paper, I confront some of these ideologies and consider how they have served to construct women's identity, as well as the impact of those ideologies on women's changing role in a primarily conservative culture. I focus specifically on how changes in women's roles have culminated in the debates over abortion that began with the introduction

of an abortion referendum in 1983. Because the anthropological literature that I examined above is not particularly helpful when focusing on women in the past 20 years, I have relied on a variety of sources that should be discussed, both for the value of their contribution to my research and for their limitations as anthropological and historical sources.

The book that first influenced my decision to focus on women in modern Ireland was a creative study of Irish women entitled *Whoredom in Kimmage: Irish Women Coming of Age* by Rosemary Mahoney (1993). The book is based on a year-long study of Irish women both in a rural village in County Clare near the Burren, a geological remnant of the last Ice Age and popular tourist attraction, and in Dublin, the most cosmopolitan and European of the Irish cities. Mahoney is clearly telling a story of her personal experiences living and talking with Irish women, and the work doesn't present systematic historical or anthropological research, yet it captures the essence of modern Irish women struggling for a new identity and for a place in Irish society. It includes interviews with a variety of women, such as abortion activist Ruth Riddick and female poet Eavan Boland, who have been involved in building a new space for women's actions and identities in Ireland (Mahoney 1993). The attitudes about women and attitudes held by women concerning their role in Irish society as they were portrayed by Mahoney initiated an intensive examination into women's role in Irish history and modern reflections of historical gender constructions in Ireland.

I conducted all of my research at Oberlin College in the US and therefore had somewhat limited access to Irish publications and historical sources. However, the issues surrounding women's role in Ireland are just beginning to receive attention from a variety of academic fields, primarily women's studies, and this provided the core of my research. One of my major

sources was *Women in Ireland: Voices of Change* by Jenny Beale, a 1987 American study of the changing role of women in the 20th century based on interviews with Irish women of various ages, marital status and occupations. Beale's work provides a broad base of information concerning Irish society and a careful analysis of changing patterns and attitudes as a result of industrialization and urbanization (Beale 1987). The major limitation of Beale's work is that it was written prior to events of recent years which have been particularly important in the changing status of women in Ireland. Attitudes towards women in Ireland have changed dramatically in recent years and have resulted in similarly dramatic changes in Irish legislation, especially surrounding issues of fertility control, that are not discussed in Beale's work.

However, Beale's interviews with Irish women provide a unique glimpse into the views of women concerning changes in Ireland, especially how those changes have affected their lives and the lives of their children (Beale 1987). A major concern in my research has been to seek out women's voices in Ireland, the expressions through language, and sometimes through silence, of women's thoughts and ideas about their lives, their identities and their oppression. Women's voices have frequently been silenced throughout Irish history. Shirley Ardener has pointed out that women are rarely invisible, but their voices are often 'muted' (Ardener 1986). Mahoney frequently points out that women she interacted with, particularly older women, speak rarely and then mainly in a whispering tone (Mahoney 1993). Much of women's poetry in recent years illustrates this view of silent or whispering women, women who never speak to their husbands, never speak of themselves. In one poem by Máighréad Medbh, the effect of this silence is shattering:

I am Ireland / and I'm silenced
I cannot tell my abortions / my divorces / my years of slavery /
my fights for freedom

it's got to the stage I can hardly remember what I had to tell /
and when I do / I speak in whispers
(from *Easter 1991*, Medbh 1993: 59).

I have attempted in the writing of this paper to grasp a sense of what women are saying in modern Ireland, because I believe a concentration on Irish women's voices reveals a great deal about the underlying ideological constructs that affect women's self-concept and the societal attitudes towards women that cannot be found in books. I believe it is through listening to the 'muted' voices that the specific histories of Irish women can best be understood. In many sections of this paper, I include excerpts from poetry written by Irish women writers in the past 20 years, references from Irish feminists and historians past and present, and quotes that reflect conceptions of Irish life. In many cases, I have also retained Irish spellings when referring to specific terms because of the connection between the Irish language and a distinctly nationalist sense of Irish identity that many women and men possess. All reveal a fundamental connection between language and ideology, between expressions of women's voices and expressions of women's identity that lie at the heart of any discussion of Irish women in modern Ireland.

Because I want to focus on women's voices in Ireland and the ways in which women have responded both to their subordinate status in the Irish state and to changes that affect their status, I have drawn on a variety of works by Irish women, particularly by Irish feminists including Ailbhe Smyth, Carol Coulter, Ursula Barry, and Pauline Jackson. These works have been especially useful in explaining issues of women's oppression and the importance of the abortion issue in Irish debates. They have also been useful in pinpointing areas of women's resistance to their oppression, especially concerning the control of reproduction by the state. Each author takes her own particular stand on women's issues. Some are more radical than others.

Ursula Barry and Pauline Jackson have focused on abortion in Ireland and the struggles over rights that have ensued in the past two decades (Barry 1988a, 1988b, 1992; Jackson 1986, 1987, 1993). Coulter has concentrated on women's resistance to oppression within and outside of the women's movement in Ireland, especially focusing on women's role in the nationalist movement despite the narrow nationalist construction of women's identity in the early Irish state (Coulter 1994, 1994). Ailbhe Smyth has contributed a wide variety of literature ranging from poetry to women's studies to radical deconstruction of patriarchal oppression, providing a broad span of information, analysis, and creative energy (Smyth 1991, 1992, 1993).

However, there is a limit to which distinctly feminist analyses can be useful in an anthropological study. These works provide one perspective on women's voices and they tend to shut out opposing voices. Therefore, ironically, conservative women's voices, women who identify themselves as mothers and housewives, and women involved in the pro-life campaign are silenced by feminist discourse just as feminists were silenced in the past. One helpful remedy in understanding women's diverse experiences was Faye Ginsburg's *Contested Voices*, a 1989 anthropological study of the abortion debate surrounding a clinic in Fargo, North Dakota. Ginsburg examines the various angles of the debate and the ideologies that influence men and women to become active on the abortion issue, either as pro-life or pro-choice activists. The debates surrounding the abortion issue, and individual women's reactions to abortion are the primary focus of Ginsburg's study. She provides a great deal of information on the abortion debates and suggests ways to approach the fundamental problem of women's relationship to motherhood that lies at the heart of the abortion issue (Ginsburg 1989).

I have also drawn from a wide variety of general studies on the history of Ireland with an emphasis on sources that cover elements of Irish society that have been critical in the construction of women's identity, including colonialism, nationalism, and the role of the Catholic Church. *A Short History of Ireland* by John Ranelagh provided a solid grounding in the basics of Irish history (Ranelagh 1994). Other sources that aided me include texts on the history of nationalism in Ireland (Hutchinson 1987, Boyce 1995) and analyses of the unique role of the Catholic Church in Ireland, including a recent anthropological study *Occasions of Faith* by Lawrence J. Taylor and a political study of nationalism and religion by John Fulton entitled *The Tragedy of Belief: Division, Politics and Religion in Ireland* (Taylor 1995, Fulton 1991). These have given me a general understanding of Irish history and the factors that have come into play in recent years regarding women's role in Irish society. It becomes clear even from these texts that women have not generally been included in Irish history, except for the occasional outstanding example of heroic womanhood, despite the fact that women played a fundamental role in the establishment of the Irish Republic. By seeing the gaps where women don't exist in Irish history, the powerful ideologies that have aided in the oppression of Irish women can be better understood and perhaps new research can begin to fill in where older Irish histories have failed. An extensive amount of reading and research has gone into this project and I believe that by incorporating a broad range of sources, I have at least partially compensated for the lack of previous ethnographic work in this area by providing a wide scope of information and analysis on women's roles in contemporary Irish society that can become the core of a new era of anthropological research in Ireland.

The New Irish Question

Which brings me in passing to the
question of Irish women's place
within but without culture
and identity

Ailbhe Smyth, *The Floozie in the Jacuzzi*

It was written in an early Christian manuscript, *The Book of Druim Schnechta*, that a woman, Banba, originally settled Ireland long before the time of Noah. According to later legends compiled during the eleventh century into the *Lebor Gabála Erenn*, The Book of Invasions, Ireland was invaded and settled five subsequent times throughout its history. It is interesting to note that the first invader listed in the *Lebor Gabála* was also a woman, a granddaughter of Noah named Cessair, who arrived in Ireland forty days before the Flood and survived by climbing to the highest peak in Ireland. Cessair was said to have borne the Irish race when she arrived with fifty men and three other women, only to be conquered by the later invaders of Ireland, including the Clánna Míl, who are said to be the ancestors of the Irish (Rees 1961: 114-115). Images of women in various roles fill the legends of Irish religion and mythology. "Irish folklore is a dense tapestry of faerie figures, legends and spells which encoded political and religious records of reverence for the female" (Mullin 1991: 41). Woman as queen, mother goddess, sovereign deity, wife, daughter, as well as the overpowering image of the Virgin Mary have helped to shape both the Irish identity and specifically the identity of women in Ireland.

With such powerful and dominant images as role models, one wonders why the situation of women in Ireland today is such a prominent political issue. Women in Ireland are on the precipice of a tremendous amount of change. The dominant vision of Ireland as a good Catholic society where people, especially women, are devoted to family life has begun to erode and a more progressive,

secular view of Ireland is developing. In the past century, Ireland has challenged centuries of British colonization and managed to build a Republic, and in the past thirty years has become an industrialized and fully-participating member of the European Community. The Republic has slowly managed to shed its rural identity, dominated by traditional values and attitudes, and begun to adopt an urban industrial culture similar to the rest of Europe and the United States (Beale 1987: 3). Yet, women in Ireland have been relegated, by law and by social behavior, to a position in the Irish state that makes it difficult for them to participate fully in Ireland's future.

With the emergence of nationalism and the establishment of the Irish nation-state in the 1920s, the family became the primary legal unit of Irish society, enshrined and protected by the Irish Constitution. In every nationalist struggle, there comes a moment when the society must be rebuilt, the cultural identity re-constituted, and specific identities redefined in order to separate the new nation from the previous one (Coulter 1993). In Ireland, women became identified solely in terms of the family, defined as wives and mothers. Women became symbolic representatives of the country, Mother Ireland, whom so many had struggled to liberate from colonial oppression. The development of a specific cultural identity for women after the emergence of the nationalist Republic resulted in a reduction of women's rights, especially women's control over their own sexuality and fertility.

In the past few decades, Irish women have mobilized to fight their subordination and modify their specified social roles, especially their defined roles as mothers and rearers of children that does not account for the diversity and breadth of women's experiences in Irish society. At the start of the women's movement in the 1970s, women in Ireland compared unfavorably in many ways to women in the rest of Europe, and especially to women in

Northern Ireland. Contraception was illegal, divorce was banned in the Constitution, and abortion was a criminal act. Women were defined in the Constitution as mothers and were therefore discouraged from entering the workplace (Beale 1987: 3) In recent decades, the women's movement, by bringing issues concerning sexual morality and the family to the public's attention, has been responsible for many of the overall social changes that have occurred in Ireland. Yet even prior to this, there is a clear pattern of women influencing social change and contributing to Irish society in a variety of different ways throughout Irish history. Women played significant roles in the nationalist movements throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and continued to be important social actors in the development of the Irish state and the subsequent industrialization. There is clearly a "hidden tradition" of women resisting and contributing, of women expressing their voices and making their own choices in Irish history. This is an attempt to emphasize those voices and discuss their impact on the modern Irish state.

The processes of industrialization have resulted in the gradual secularization of Irish society and the decline of adherence to the Catholic hierarchy on issues of morality. The changing status of women in the past few decades has become the focal point for a powerful controversy between traditional values and progressive change. This controversy resulted in the 1983 campaign for an amendment to the Irish Constitution that would make abortion unconstitutional by protecting the right to life of the fetus over the right to life of the pregnant women. The issues surrounding the campaign, the challenge to the women's movement it represented, and the fact that the referendum passed in 1983 reflect the instability of Irish society in recent years. It also reflects the continuing power of nationalist and Catholic

constructions of gender ideologies and their effect on attitudes towards women in Ireland.

In this paper, I examine the relationship between women and the Irish state, particularly how the nationalist state has defined and controlled women through their reproductive capabilities. I outline the factors that have contributed to the construction of women's identity and how women have resisted the limitations of this construction in a variety of ways. The issue of abortion is an excellent point on which to base the discussion of women in Ireland because of its extraordinary impact on Irish society. To outline the methodology of this examination, this thesis is theoretically grounded in feminist anthropology, in which the category 'woman' is defined as culturally constructed rather than biologically based. I focus on general theories concerning women in states with an emphasis on the state control of women's reproductive capabilities. The argument functions from the understanding that women are social actors and express various types of power within society, particularly that areas of women's resistance to state control of their reproduction are dynamic expressions of women's voices. I apply these theories to the women in Ireland as an anthropological case study and in the process examine the usefulness of relying on general theories in illuminating specific cases of anthropological research.

II. A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Women and the State

The protection of the woman is as much
a factor of her power as her vulnerability.

Mary Madec, *The Irish Travelling Woman*

The subordination of women in the Irish State, and the roles that women have played, as wife and mother, as well as the roles outside of this state-defined identity can perhaps be better understood in light of developing general theories regarding women within the hierarchies of the industrialized (or industrializing) state. Recently, the study of the subordination of women in hierarchical industrial societies has received much attention by feminist anthropologists, who have been greatly influenced by Engels' interpretation of the "world historical defeat of the female sex"² that came about with the emergence of the capitalist state- "the centralizing and institutionalizing of power in the context of extreme economic and social stratification" (Silverblatt 1991: 141). According to Engels, processes including the creation of commodities, the restriction of people's individual rights to use resources, the transformation of goods and resources into private property and the founding of institutions to support the changing social and economic relations resulted in the universal subordination of women in capitalist societies (Gailey 1987: 52).

Eleanor Leacock, in the introduction to the 1972 edition of Engels' The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State (1884), initially approached the study of gender hierarchies through a feminist consideration of Engels' argument concerning the relationship between women's subordination and the

² According to Engels, "the overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children" (Engels [1884] 1972: 120).

formation of the modern capitalist state. According to both Engels and Leacock, the development of private ownership of the means of production, economic specialization and the growth of exchange dictated the emergence of the family as the state's main property-holding and goods-consuming unit. Production became separated from the household and the gendered division of labor led to an actual separation of men's and women's work as well as a separation of the public and private spheres. These economic processes led to the diminution of women's activities to the developing private sphere, considered the domain of women and children, bringing a devaluation of women's role in society and eventually women's debasement or 'defeat' (Leacock 1972).

Anthropologist Christine Gailey, in her essay *Evolutionary Perspectives on Gender Hierarchy*, is clearly influenced by Marxist-feminist arguments. Gailey attempts to establish a connection between the erosion of kinship autonomy and the formation of the state and its effect on the subordination of women in state societies (Gailey 1987). Gailey's model builds upon the Leacock-Engels argument, writing that with the emergence of a civil sphere, the state begins to define people by biological sex rather than by kin group, which leads to a state-produced and enhanced stereotype of women as childbearers. "Once defined in terms of their sexual potential, they [women] lost all control over their own sexuality, fecundity, and labor, a situation unknown for women in the kin communities" (Gailey 1987: 58). Women are reduced to a biological identity that is centered on their role as reproducers, and are therefore subject to state control of their fertility and reproductive potential because of their ability to reproduce the labor force.

It is clear from this and many other feminist theories in anthropology (see Moore 1987, Ortner 1974, Raphael 1975) that issues of reproduction play

an integral part in the discussion of gender hierarchies, especially in relation to an analysis of the state. Reproduction is an essential element in the understanding of the cultural constructions of gender both because of its biological and its social implications. Commonly, gender is defined by anthropologists as a cultural construction resulting from biological differences between the sexes, especially those differences that pertain directly to separate roles in regards to reproduction. Reproduction, and issues surrounding reproduction including contraception, birth, fertility, and abortion therefore exist at the heart of any discussion of the subordination of women.

The definition of reproduction, from a Marxist-feminist stance, must incorporate the complexity of the social issues involved in the biological process. Reproduction therefore includes not only the processes of human biological reproduction and sexuality, but the processes of intergenerational reproduction which include the maintenance and socialization activities that provide cultural continuity, which take place within social structures such as the family (Petchesky 1984: viii). It is important to note that the socializing aspects of reproduction are essential in the construction and maintenance of individual and state identities, as well as the structuring of separate spheres for production and reproduction. The state structures social relationships by defining normative identities within the family and constructing gendered identities in terms of biological sex, transforming women into childbearers and rearers (Ginsburg and Rapp 1991: 314).

As mentioned above, in industrial state societies, women tend to be ideologically separated from the means of production, relegated to a distinct "domestic" sphere (Rapp 1993: 112). In this process, woman's identity is re-defined by the state according to her reproductive capabilities, as well as her reproductive limitations. The evolutionary process described by Marxist-

feminists such as Leacock and Gailey is based upon the idea the women are a major focus of state control because they are both laborers in the productive sphere (through necessity) and the producers of more laborers for the continuation of state production. According to Gailey, the reproductive potential of women has unprecedented political implications within the state because political and ideological domination rests on control over the production of producing communities (Gailey 1987: 60). Control of women's fertility by institutions of the state becomes the ideological support for the maintenance of women's subordination in the state, as well as a mechanism for defining women and maintaining women's state-defined identity (Ferree and Hess 1987: 21).

According to the various theories of women and the state, the activities of the state work to construct ideas about women and women's place in society through the use of legislation and the control of fertility (Homans 1985: 6). The state attempts to regulate women's sexuality and fertility through various policies including legal provisions governing abortion, the use of contraception, marriage and divorce, as well as instituting programs for population control and family planning (Moore 1987: 140). In the process, the state employs its economic, political and legal power to determine the amount of control women have over their own lives. This lack of social control by women themselves, both over their own reproduction and their culturally-defined social roles, generally lowers the status of women within society. Even women's roles within the productive sphere are generally arrayed around women's reproductive functions, thereby determining the conditions through which women participate in all social, political and economic domains (Lewin 1985: 124). The simultaneous demands of work and childcare constrain both women's reproductive and productive choices, essentially because the state

does not provide for women's dual role in society. This serves to create a hierarchical gendered division of labor within state societies where women's work is less valued than men's.

The process through which both gender and reproduction are defined within the state and thereby controlled by the state functions at two levels. The control over reproduction is maintained at an individual level by the power men have over women and within the family in the private domestic sphere as well as at the institutional level through cultural practices and ideology which shape how the institutions of the state are organized (Homans 1985: 2). This creates a paradox for the understanding and analysis of reproduction: it becomes both a private and public matter simply through the separation of the private and public spheres. Biological reproduction is viewed by both society and the individual as being a 'women's issue', yet it is essential to the maintenance of production that the social aspects of reproduction are controlled by the state.

It is clear that issues of reproduction are fundamental in understanding the construction and maintenance of gender hierarchies within the state. Women's subordination and the sexual division of labor that serves to oppress women in industrial states can be justifiably linked to the construction of a female identity based on cultural conceptions of reproductive biology. Marxist-feminist theories of women and the state, by continuously expanding upon previous theories of state-formation, have been instrumental in providing a framework for the study of the formation and maintenance of hierarchies in relation to the separation of production and reproduction, as well as the analysis of the various complex economic, political, and social processes that result from the evolution of the industrial state. Yet, general theories such as those put forth regarding 'women and the state' can be detrimental to

understanding the breadth of women's experiences within an industrial state. As many other grand theories have come under attack in recent years, so too do these theories need to be re-examined in light of continuing theoretical discussions concerning categories and meanings that are not addressed in a generalized theory of 'women and the state'.

Irene Silverblatt, in several critical essays, has attempted to restructure the general theory of women and state by questioning the validity of the categories as analytical tools (Silverblatt 1988, 1991). "Feminist anthropology is disputing the foundation of evolutionary laws and functionalist typologies as well as totalizing categories- like the 'state', 'status' and at times 'women'- that constitute anthropology's common sense" (Silverblatt 1988: 429). Silverblatt argues that using categories such as these essentializes the experiences of individuals within a society by misinterpreting gender systems and state systems as concrete, consistent categories. Perhaps one of Silverblatt's most important contributions to the theoretical literature on women and the state is her insistence on regarding women as active social beings with certain levels of control and the ability to make decisions, including the decision to resist their subordination and the social control of the state.

Silverblatt's main criticism of the Marxist-feminist interpretation of the processes of state formation and the subordination of women is its focus on evolutionary theories. According to Silverblatt, the limitations of an evolutionary focus are that the "narratives suggest that women (and men) cannot create, challenge or even yield to their social circumstances of living" (Silverblatt 1988: 437). This diminishes the power and significance of women's activities within society, especially women's various struggles of resistance against their oppression. Her suggestion for the future of gender analysis within state structures lies in a better understanding of the relationship

between individuals and state institutions in the process of state formation and in the construction and maintenance of social identities. By switching the focus from the generalized process of state formation to the specific histories in which gender configurations are produced, the varying activities and experiences of women and men within the state can be better understood and analyzed (Silverblatt 1991: 150).

Women and Resistance: An Anthropological Perspective

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet,
or rather consequently, this resistance is never in
a position of exteriority in relation to power.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

Understanding that women are social actors has helped feminist anthropologists to better interpret the complex relationship between the gender ideologies of a state society and the particular actions and behaviors of individuals within the ideological structure of the state. It has become clear that "ideology is not a blueprint which men and women slavishly follow" (Lewin 1985: 127). However, anthropologists cannot focus solely on the actions of individuals and ignore the relevance of ideology. By focusing exclusively on women's activities and discounting the main structures of cultural ideology, anthropologists fail to acknowledge the duality and complex interactions between behavior and ideology that exist in culture. Clearly the existence of a specific ideological assertion within a culture does not solely determine individual experience, yet ideological assumptions still serve to establish and maintain the various systems through which power is expressed (Atkinson 1982: 247-8). Therefore, it is imperative that anthropologists look at the way

in which gender configurations are "writ large" in the cultural ideology as well as how gender is experienced and expressed by individual women and men, especially how cultural attitudes about women are reflected in the various expressions of power within society.

Despite the general trend of women's subordination cross-culturally, women viewed as social actors do have power in society and express that power in various ways depending on the diversity of women's experience within a particular society. Gender systems vary depending on other hierarchical power structures that exist within society as well as on individual experiences. According to Silverblatt, "the gender configurations that contoured the meanings and possibilities of...women's lives entailed a complex dynamic of contending gender systems spawned in conjunction with the broader crisis of social relations that formed each state's specific legacy" (Silverblatt 1988: 440). A variety of factors including race, class, ethnicity, religion and sexual preference shape the experiences of individual women and their various expressions of power and affect women's subordination within a culture. Gender systems are not consistent or uniform, but intricate configurations within a broad spectrum of social relations and power (Silverblatt 1991: 152). This affects how women interact with institutions of power in the state, as well as how anthropologists interpret those interactions. "Just as we know that women's status is not a unitary phenomenon across cultures, we need to be reminded that the intellectual picture is equally complex" (Atkinson 1982: 248). These are issues that have just begun to be investigated in anthropology.

The use of resistance as an analytical category has become extremely prevalent in the anthropological literature over recent years in order to discuss how individuals in a wide variety of contexts react to, confront, resist, and

adapt to the myriad forces that affect their daily lives (Silverblatt 1995: 639). Understanding the relationships of power that are present in society has included a need to examine closely reactions to domination within society and to consider how those reactions are expressed and carried out by individuals. Feminist anthropology has played a key role in formulating a study of the varying forms of resistance due to the fundamental relationship between issues of gender hierarchy and the expression of resistance in various cultures. Anthropologists such as Lila Abu-Lughod, in her study of Bedouin women, have offered stimulating accounts of a variety of women's resistance to social control and domination, defining resistance as a useful category of analysis for the study of systems of power within culture (Abu-Lughod 1986, 1990).

Studies of women's resistance allows us to view women as social actors, focusing on the diversity of experience that can divide women as well as unite them. Anthropological studies of women's resistance have focused on women's relationships to various systems of power within society, including the legal and administrative systems, various opportunities for women to participate in public politics, women's individual and collective responses to events, and their strategies for adapting to a changing environment.³ Studies of resistance are essential in understanding systems of power and domination, and give anthropologists a clearer picture of individual behavior. Yet, as Sherry Ortner points out, anthropologists must recognize that "resistors are doing more than simply opposing domination, more than simply producing a virtually mechanical *re-action*" (Ortner 1995: 176). Resistance is an expression of power in its own right, separate and distinct from other expressions of power, yet undeniably linked to them as well. It is important to note that using the concept of resistance for analysis does not imply that strategies or experiences

³ For example Giles 1992, Reed-Danahay 1993, Ortner 1995, Gailey 1996

of resistance do not change over time. The category of 'resistance', like 'woman', is not a static entity unaffected by a changing world. Women's resistance to their subordinated status must be analyzed in conjunction with the dynamic qualities of structures of domination and patriarchy in society (Few 1995: 631).

Women express their power in society in a variety of ways and often flourish under the various manifestations of power that are received through state-constructed identities. Ideologies perpetuated in the institutions of the state tend to "exalt certain categories of females who serve state interests and whose destinies are controlled by the state" (Gailey 1987: 58). Depending on factors such as class, women often mobilize or are mobilized for social change using traditional 'feminine' identities and focusing on 'feminine' concerns and networks (Rapp 1993: 114). The state can utilize the role of mother to implement networks of protective control that maintain women's subordination while bringing about social policies that financially or socially assist mothers. Motherhood and the cultural images relating to motherhood are also utilized by women in order to establish control over their own condition and the condition of their families, through which women are identified (Martin 1990). In some instances women use the rhetoric and role of motherhood for the maintenance of the family against the state, perpetuating their domestic role but managing to express their power to force change (Bracewell 1996). Therefore, even within the dominance hierarchies of the state, women make their voices and actions heard, debunking the belief that women are passive receivers of culture rather than active participants.

Arlene MacLeod, in a study of the use of the veil as resistance by Islamic women in Cairo, introduced the concept of "accommodating protest", referring to modern, educated working women, who embraced the veil as a

rejection of Western dress and, by implication, Western culture. Because the veil has become, at least in Western eyes, the ultimate symbol of Islamic women's oppression, it would seem that the voluntary veiling of Islamic women would be a removal of women's power instead of an expression of it. Rather, the middle class women in Cairo who have chosen to don veils are showing their resistance to what they view as the larger evil, Western domination (MacLeod 1992). According to MacLeod, "veiling presents a double face; it both symbolizes women's protest against a situation that threatens valued identity and status, and it signals women's acceptance of a view of women as sexually suspect and naturally bound to the home" (MacLeod 1992: 552). In an anthropological study of the relationship between women's resistance and addiction to heroin in an American city, Friedman and Alicea discovered that "because power circulates through institutions, social positions, and human agents, women perpetuate the forces that dominate them even while they criticize the power structures that shape their lives" (Friedman and Alicea 1995: 433). Factors such as these reflect the complexity of the anthropological study of resistance by showing that women do not always choose to resist in an attempt to counter their present role, nor do women resist in similar patterns within a culture. The interlocking patterns of domination and resistance that are present in every culture function to change women's experiences both intra- and inter-culturally. A study of resistance is therefore incomplete without a coinciding study of power.

The resistance of women to the social control of reproduction is an ideal area to begin analyzing the structures and expressions of women's power in society, especially in connection with female sexuality. The state control of women's reproductive capacities, presumably aimed at ensuring a nation's biological and cultural survival, also serves to assert the rights of the state to

control and define women's domestic role and maintain the security and sanctity of motherhood (Bracewell 1996: 32). Therefore, "examining cultural forms of resistance to conditions of domination helps us to see how tradition becomes a battleground" (Gailey 1996: 169). The ways in which women attempt to control their own fertility and reproduction around, above and beyond the suppression and control of female sexuality by the state demonstrate the activities of women in establishing their own power structures and methods of contributing to society. Increasing struggles within the state by women to gain autonomy over issues like abortion and contraception epitomize the capacity of individual women and women collectively to gain control over aspects of their own fertility and sexuality (Petchesky 1984: vii). Active women's resistance to the reproductive control of the state can create pressure for effective reproductive choices, despite the fact that the greater availability of choices has not necessarily produced dramatic changes in women's economic or political power in many contemporary industrial societies.

It is therefore within the specific histories of gender experiences that the complex relationship between the control of reproduction and fertility and the subordinate status of women in the industrial state can best be analyzed and understood. Analysis within a theoretical framework concerning women and the state is useful in understanding broad trends of women's subordination in industrial states, but it is only when encountering the specific case of women's oppression and women's resistance within a particular state that women's power as social actors is understood. These theories of women and their complex relationship to the state can be applied modestly to the case of Ireland in the 20th century. With the partition of the island and the establishment of a nationalist republic in 1922, and the subsequent industrialization beginning in

the 1960s, the Irish state, in a desire to institutionalize nationalist and Catholic ideals, has played a dominant role in the construction and maintenance of women's identities, especially in the regulation of women's lives and fertility. Women in Ireland have had to seek out alternate sources of power in order to express their voices and resist the oppressive social control of the state. The result has been a cultural challenge to women's subordinate role in Irish society.

III. WOMEN AND THE IRISH STATE

The Context: Irish Nationalism

That Ireland that we dreamed of would be...
a land whose countryside would be bright with
cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would
be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the
romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic
youths, the laughter of comely maidens, whose
firesides would be the forums for the wisdom of
serene old age.

Eamon de Valera, 18 March 1943

Both nationalism and colonialism, together with strong Catholic values, have been fundamental concepts in the shaping of contemporary ideology in Ireland. Historically and to this day, Ireland has been a nation torn apart over the pressures of colonization and the ideals of nationalism. The Republic of Ireland is a state built upon nationalist ideals and the rejection of the colonization of the British and of the colonizers themselves. The national 'question' still remains a central preoccupation of nationalists and an integral part of Irish policy in that the nation is seen as only partly liberated from colonial oppression (Fulton 1991: 111). The partition of Ireland into the northern six counties and southern twenty-six counties that resulted from the Treaty of 1921 is a fact of life for all Irish people, north and south of the border. Nationalism in Ireland developed as a direct result of centuries of British colonization and can be understood in connection with the worldwide post-colonial spread of cultural nationalism in the 20th century (Hutchinson 1987, Boyce 1995).

Recently, there has been a tremendous amount of research regarding the nature of nationalism and its relationship to ideologies of the state, especially concerning the maintenance of gender ideologies in post-colonial

environments.⁴ Nationalist movements can be understood as part of a nativistic movement, defined as "a conscious, organized attempt by the members of a society to revive or perpetuate selected elements of its indigenous culture under conditions of acculturation with dominance" (Messenger 1969: 3). The movement is a response to the construction of what political theorist Benedict Anderson defines as a "national narrative", a story made up of myths, images and ideologies, which a group of people creates to conceive of itself as a nation (Anderson 1983). Because the effects of colonialism have often been described in gendered terms where "those who are ruled are feminized and portrayed as 'of inferior race' in relation to the dominant masculinities asserted by the colonizers", it is not surprising that nationalist narratives are commonly situated within a gendered discourse and that gender plays an integral part in expressions of nationalism (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994: 8). Women are viewed by nationalists as playing an important role in the maintenance of nationalist ideals, including as biological reproducers of members of a nation, as active transmitters and producers of national culture through their roles as mother, as symbolic signifiers of national difference, and also as active participants of national struggles (McClintock 1993: 62). Therefore, no analysis of gender hierarchies in the Irish state can be accomplished without seeing the integral role that gendered nationalism has played in Irish culture.

Irish nationalist ideals, emerging as early as the 18th century and based on the construction of a unique Irish identity, became the framework for a powerful movement in the mid- to late 19th century that resulted in the establishment of organizations like the Fenian Brotherhood and the Gaelic

⁴ For example see *Women's Studies International Forum* 1996 volume 19, a special issue concerning nationalism and gender.

League, both dedicated to the "de-Anglicization of Ireland" and intent on preserving and maintaining certain, constructed "Irish" qualities that were considered completely separate from British colonial influence (Ranelagh 1990: 154). Also, the Gaelic Literary Revival, sparked by literary figures such as Lady Augusta Gregory and William Butler Yeats, introduced Irish literature and language, important aspects of contemporary Irish nationalism, into the outside world (Hutchinson 1987). Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Irish nationalists used the concepts of religion, language, literature, art, and sports to construct a specific Irish identity and create an ideological distance between themselves and the colonizer, in order to force Britain out of Ireland and regain their fabled nation. In so doing, they constructed a gendered ideology and discourse that determined the roles of men and women in Irish society. Anything deviating from this constructed norm was considered distinctly un-Irish (Cairns and Richards 1988).

Catholicism, the dominant religion in Ireland to this day, was an essential element of Irish nationalism, a fundamental difference in belief that separated many Irish from their British colonizers. In defining the Irish race, nationalists settled on Catholicism as the central guiding factor, despite the fact that many of the upper-class Irish involved in the Gaelic revival were Protestant. This choice was primarily due to the importance that religion had played in the lives of Irish lower classes throughout the centuries, as a form of resistance to a Protestant colonizer and as a form of relief from daily life in an impoverished country (Hutchinson 1987). The structure of religion can play an important part in resistance movements, and can "provide allegories for suffering and the hope of emancipation" when they cannot be expressed in a political forum (Coulter 1993: 7). In various studies of nationalist movements in colonized countries, religion has played an integral part both in the

establishment of a national identity and in the later construction of nationalist states (Coulter 1993: 7). Catholic doctrine has been crucial both in the development of Irish culture and in the nationalist invention of Irish tradition (O'Dowd 1987: 12). It has played an integral part in the establishment of a patriarchal family ideology and the maintenance of women's subordinate role in Irish society. The Irish Church, through its preoccupation with sexual matters, has also helped to develop a repressive sexual morality that has further served to oppress women through control of their fertility and sexuality. In the case of Ireland, it is clear that the Catholic Church played a fundamental role in building the system of belief and morality that was later to be a core aspect of the Irish State (Fulton 1991).

The Catholic Church as an institution has had a tremendous impact on how sexuality is controlled in the Christian world (O'Dowd 1987: 18). For centuries, the Catholic Church has sought to repress and control sexuality, especially women's sexuality because women are seen as symbols of sexuality and maternity, representing the evil forces of nature which threaten men in their attempts to gain holiness of spirit (Beale 1987: 167). Women have been viewed by the Church as a threat to chastity, a source of temptation and evil, and potentially dangerous to the sanctity of marriage and family (Beale 1987: 86). Chastity is an extremely important element of Catholic views on sexuality, and this view serves to reinforce the repression of all aspects of sexuality. The Church attempts to control these elements of society through the enforcement and reinforcement of Catholic ideology and moral teaching.

Because the Church views the family as the fundamental unit of Christian society, it holds marriage as the cornerstone of that society. Marriage is considered holy and indissoluble, a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church and the only proper place for sexual

intercourse to occur, and then mainly for the means of procreation. Despite this sacred view of marriage, the Catholic Church has throughout its history exalted a state of celibacy as the highest form of human existence. In Ireland, the Catholic view on sexuality and celibacy has been compounded by a Celtic tradition of asceticism and penitence as well as a high percentage of single men and women in post-Famine Ireland (Beale 1987: 30). These have all contributed to a state of sexual repression in Ireland that has been discussed in much of the anthropological literature (e.g. Messenger 1969, Scheper-Hughes 1979). This conception of sexuality, especially in regards to marriage and family, has led the Church to view premarital and extramarital sex, contraception, abortion, and divorce as threats to the institution of marriage, the stability of the family, and thereby to the stability of society as a whole (Beale 1987: 75). The Church consistently refuses to acknowledge that the unavailability of divorce, contraception, and abortion maintains women's subordinate status by taking away a woman's control of her own fertility (Beale 1987: 77). These views on marriage, celibacy and its resulting effects on the expression of sexuality has had a dramatic effect on Irish society, and played an integral part in the development of a unique Irish cultural identity.

Family, the most sacred unit of society according to the Church, became the primary forum for nationalist expression in the 19th century, and has continued to be considered the most important aspect of Irish life by nationalists and the Church alike. After the Famine of the mid-19th century, the structure of family life changed dramatically due to the decline of population from starvation and emigration. A patriarchal system of land inheritance developed in which land was inherited by one son in order to avoid subdivision of the family land, forcing other children into emigration. This new system of inheritance established a rigid sexual division of labor that narrowly

defined women's role within the household (Beale 1987: 23). Women were considered economically as well as physically subservient to their husbands, but were extremely important in the maintenance of land and the rural household through domestic labor and the procreation of the family line (Beale 1987: 9). Yet due to the extreme economic hardships of the 19th and early 20th centuries, rural women developed strong traits of independence and resourcefulness within their subservient role (Coulter 1993: 48). Women's subservience within the family tended to be offset by their responsibility for the children and for the domestic economy. In many cases, during periods of high seasonal migration of married men to Britain for work, women were left completely in charge of the family and the farm (Beale 1987: 29).

With the emergence of nationalist ideals throughout the colonial period, the family became the only space in which individuals could express their Irish identities; through their language, culture, religion, and especially their opinions. The family was also the only space in which the oppressed male could be a dominant figure within a patriarchal system that limited his power in the public sphere (Coulter 1993: 10). It has been stated countless times in feminist theory that family is "an effective mechanism for the creation and transmission of gender inequality" and it is clear that Irish nationalism, in extolling the importance of the family to Irish life, created and maintained a concept of the Irish family that defined women solely in relation to the family and domestic service to the husband, father or son (O'Connor 1995: 183).

Despite the Church's patriarchal attitude towards women's potentially dangerous nature, women have played a fundamental role in the maintenance of the family according to Catholic doctrine. The Church presents motherhood as women's greatest vocation, an image glorified in myth and modeled on the sacred life of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Beale 1987: 50). According to the

Church, women as mothers are the spiritual and emotional foundation of the family, shouldering the main responsibility for building and maintaining family life. On a grand scale therefore, women are responsible for maintaining the Church and society. It is only outside the sacred role of mother that women become deviant in the eyes of the Church, when they are not following Mary's example of motherhood. The symbolic importance of Mary has been especially strong in Ireland, stimulating a view of motherhood that is not only a glorification of sacrificial and submissive motherhood but also a state impossible for women to achieve (O'Dowd 1987: 13).

The expression and maintenance of nationalist ideals therefore relied on the woman as mother to raise her children as true Irish children and to acculturate them with Irish, and Catholic, values and beliefs. The image of woman as mother glorified by the Church became an important element of nationalist ideals. Sons heroically fought and died for their mothers as symbols of Ireland. The role of mother was seen as one of complete sacrifice to both the family and to Ireland. With the aid of the Church, nationalists constructed a definition of Irish femininity that equated woman with Ireland itself, denying women their sexuality and idealizing a state of motherhood that derived just as much from the goddess figure of early Irish tradition as from the religious image of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Nash 1993: 42). The image of Mother, tied up with images of the Virgin Mary and the many female saints and legendary figures, became the symbol of the nation itself. Ireland was depicted in songs, poetry and stories as a feminine force, wounded and oppressed by her enemies and relying on her sons to relieve her of her woes. The symbolism of Ireland as female was not new to Irish culture. Early Irish tradition similarly viewed Ireland in the form of the Goddess Danu, her body incorporating the actual landscape of Ireland (Nash 1993: 42). However, the nationalist appropriation

of the female image of Ireland, including Yeats' *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, the *sean bhean bhocht* (poor old woman), and *an cailleach bheara* (the old woman of Beara) of various stories and poems, associated all women with this image of the nation and denied women an identity beyond the role of mother. According to poet Eavan Boland, "once the idea of a nation influences the perception of a woman, then that woman is suddenly and inevitably simplified...she becomes the passive projection of a national idea" (Boland 1994: 81).

Paradoxically, because of this association of nationalism with the family, it was nationalist ideals that initially brought women into the public realm by creating a space for resistance to colonial domination. "The history of Ireland, especially the resistance to British colonization created considerable opportunities for women to play a role in public life" (Coulter 1993: 48). Because families with nationalist tendencies desired internal familial solidarity against colonial oppression, many women encountered nationalism through their husbands, brothers and sons and became deeply involved in all aspects of the nationalist movement, including the armed rebellions throughout the 19th and 20th centuries that culminated in the Easter Rebellion of 1916 and the Civil War of 1921-1922 (Coulter 1993: 10). In the early 20th century, organizations like *Inginidhe na hÉireann*, Daughters of Ireland, started by the infamous Maud Gonne (Yeats's unrequited love), and later *Cumann na mBan*, Society of Women, formed for women to express their nationalist fervor, as well as their newly-formed public image. Women, including Irish heroine Countess Constance Markiewicz and her sister Eva Gore-Booth, fought side by side with men in the Irish Citizen Army during the Easter Rebellion of 1916. Despite the fact that women began to assert themselves as women within their struggles for the nationalist cause beginning in the late 19th century, it is difficult to separate women's particular struggles in this period from the general

nationalist discourse. Women generally viewed themselves as an integral part of the nationalist process, and had no clear goals concerning their own status except a general desire for social equality (Ward 1980).

Though women were extremely important in the struggles for independence, women's public relationship to nationalism quickly faded with the emergence of the Irish state. The 1916 Easter Republican Proclamation that set forth the goals of Irish nationalism stated that women would be granted equality in the new Irish state, but this and other promises did not hold true in the years following the Easter Rising (Ward 1980). A full account of the rise of conservative nationalism in Ireland in the late 1920s and early 1930s is beyond the scope of this paper, but an abbreviated history of this turbulent period in Irish history is necessary for an accurate understanding of the rise of the nationalist Republic and how this period affected the construction of women's roles.

The Treaty to give Ireland independence from Britain in 1921 was an extremely divisive issue in Irish history. Great Britain agreed to the right of self-government in Ireland only on the condition that it retain the six counties of the north, the most economically productive and industrialized area of Ireland (Ranelagh 1990: 199-203). Radical nationalists would not agree to the separation of Ireland, believing a divided Ireland too much too sacrifice for independence. Other, more conservative nationalists saw the value in claiming a partitioned Ireland with the idealistic hope of regaining the six counties at some time in the future. The treaty was signed but the disagreement between pro-treaty and anti-treaty nationalists led to the 1922 Civil War that pitted Irish against Irish in a bloody struggle to define what Ireland truly was (Ranelagh 1990: 204). With the assassination of Treaty signatory and nationalist hero, Michael Collins, the anti-treaty nationalists under Eamon de

Valera and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) quickly gained control of the Irish government and began the long process towards independence with the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 and the subsequent Republic in 1948 (Ranelagh 1990: 207).

The Treaty remained the most divisive debate in the establishment of the Irish state and it underpinned much of the Free State's politics (Ranelagh 1990: 212). The two dominant political parties in the Oireachtas (Parliament) today, Fianna Fáil, the Irish Republican Party, and Fine Gael, the United Ireland Party, are based on anti-treaty and pro-treaty sentiments respectively. When the Irish gained independence after signing the controversial treaty that split Ireland into north and south in 1921, women's organizations, like many other nationalist organizations, divided internally over issues concerning the acceptance of the treaty and subsequently lost much of their organizational power (Gardiner 1993: 49). Initially following the radicalism of the 1916 Proclamation, women were considered equal and active members of society and were given a certain degree of autonomy in the early Free State (Manning 1979: 92, Speed 1992: 87). Gradually with the desire by early forgers of the Irish state to create a stable and conservative environment, especially with the rise of Cumann na nGaedhael (Society of Gaels), the pro-treaty, pro-British parliament in the 1920s, and later Fianna Fáil, Eamon de Valera's conservative political wing in early 1932, women were squeezed out of their public roles and expected to take up their "traditional" roles within the home as mothers of the new Irish state (Coulter 1993: 25).

Women and the Irish Nation

First the good news. Fifty-one percent of the total population of this island is female.

Now for the bad news.

The island has been divided in two for the last 800 years, with six northern counties under the control of Britain and twenty-six counties under the control of the Irish government. This has led to intermittent and permanent hostility with many outbreaks of quarrelsome peace.

And that's only among the women.

The men kill each other.

Nell McCafferty, *Ireland(s)*

As political activity in the nationalist movement died down with the emergence of the state, the public positions available to women quickly closed off. Some women, confident in their public role and their history of nationalist fervor, made clear their intention of remaining in the public realm as integral writers of the national narrative with the general support of many men in the nationalist movement. With the establishment of the Free State, a small number of women were elected into the Dáil and Seanad, the two houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament). Often out of duty to the anti-treaty boycott of the Oireachtas by many of the anti-treaty nationalist organizations including the IRA, women refused to take the required oath of allegiance to the English King and were unable to take their seats (Manning 1979: 93).

Outside of the Oireachtas, members of Cumann na mBan were involved with issues of the vote, welfare, food distribution, the labor movement and morality legislation in the development of the first Constitution of 1922 (Coulter 1993: 22). However, in the early years of the Irish Free State, conservative male leaders in the powerful party Fianna Fáil gradually sought to imitate the social and economic fundamentals of the British state rather than to create an entirely new system on their own. The new Irish nation saw

an integration of the institutional patriarchy of the former regime "with all the most conservative elements of local religious and cultural traditions" of the Irish nationalist state (Coulter 1993: 3). With the emergence of Eamon de Valera as a powerful national leader and his conservative followers in Fianna Fáil in the 1930s, women's role had clearly been socially altered and re-defined within a domestic sphere, primarily through the control and repression of women's fertility by the state. Women were steadily disappearing from the public realm and their ideologically-defined role was diminishing to one of reproduction: mother and wife, childrearer and housekeeper.

With the emergence of conservative nationalism in the wake of the Civil War, the limited availability of contraception and divorce made possible by the early Free State was abandoned and a campaign for laws defining and controlling sexuality, and women's sexuality in particular, was undertaken by the State (Jackson 1993: 74). The 1929 Censorship of Publications Act made it an offense to publish, sell, or distribute literature advocating birth control. This was followed in 1935 by the Criminal Law Amendment which banned the sale and importation of contraceptives. Other laws were also established during this period including the 1935 Conditions of Employment Bill that prevented women from working in certain industries seen as unsuitable and the 1935 law that prohibited jazz dancing and unlicensed, unsupervised dance-halls which were blamed for the growing lack of female morality, as well as the existence of rape, illegitimacy, infanticide and a host of related evils (Jackson 1993: 75, O'Dowd 1987: 20). The culmination of this process of legally enshrining Catholic morality into the Irish state was the Constitution of 1937 (Beale 1987: 106).

In the *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, the Irish Constitution of 1937, written by Eamon de Valera and ratified by Fianna Fáil, the role of women in Irish society

is specified within the domestic sphere. Article 41 (2.1) relates that "the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" and consequently in clause 2.2, "the State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home". Article 41 continues by prohibiting divorce, supposedly to protect wives from abandonment, stating, "No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution in marriage" (Sawyer 1993: 103-104). In 1937, women intellectuals, university women and the surviving women's organizations formed the Women's Social and Progressive League to protest the addition of these clauses to the original Constitution of 1922, which reiterated the radical claims of the 1916 Proclamation, but they failed to persuade de Valera and the Dáil to change any of the articles concerning women primarily because the Constitution was widely supported by the Catholic nationalist majority (Jackson 1986: 49, Beale 1987: 9).

The laws of Ireland can give important insights into the country's approach to women, as well as general attitudes concerning the role of women in Irish society, as is shown by the above quotes. An examination of the legal systems within the state provide a material background through which gender relations are played out whether they affect sexuality and fertility directly or indirectly (Ross and Rapp 1981: 65). The 1937 Constitution enshrined nationalist values and Catholic social teaching on sexuality, marriage, family, and the place of women in society (O'Dowd 1987: 5). Because the family had become an important locus of resistance to colonial domination, nationalism in response desired to conservatively protect and maintain the family within its traditional patriarchal ideology in the construction of a new Irish state. By writing an obviously patriarchal constitution in 1937, the conservative Irish

government under Eamon de Valera (who served as Taoiseach intermittently from 1932-1959 and President of Ireland from 1959-1973) glorified the rural Irish life and dominant Catholic morality so romantically portrayed by Conrad Arensberg and assumed the right to define the 'family', enshrining it with rigidly defined roles and patriarchal Catholic values. De Valera further assumed in the writing of the Constitution that women are naturally associated with domesticity, and 'woman' and 'mother' are interchangeable in their definitions. This followed unrelentingly in the wake of nationalist definitions of womanhood, which were generally supported by the largely conservative rural population of the early 20th century (Mullin 1991: 42). According to Mary Holland, an prominent Irish journalist for the *Irish Times* (and one of the few women in Ireland to admit publicly to having an abortion):

We have apostrophized the country itself as a mother. The concept of Mother Ireland has met with whole-hearted national approval. The message has been unequivocal. The proper place for a woman apart from the convent is in the home, preferably rearing sons for Ireland. (quoted in McWilliams 1993: 88)

With the establishment of the Irish state, the close connection between Irish nationalism and the Catholic Church became very strong, and the two worked hand in hand to institutionalize and protect the Irish Catholic identity. From the early years of the Free State, there has been a clearly defined role for the Catholic Church in the state, and the Catholic ethos is bound into the constitutional fabric of Irish law (Fulton 1991: 133). Cultural nationalism, deliberately developed and fostered by the government in an attempt to construct a national Irish identity, was fully supported by the Church, both through the national school system, which is controlled by the Irish clergy, and from the pulpit to the Mass-going public (Fulton 1991: 110). The Church played an integral role in the establishment of laws pertaining to women and to

sexuality, impacting the initiation and maintenance of government policy even today.

Through this definition, the Church and State together created an idea of women as emblematic of tradition, folklore, the language, and a particular way of life that was considered morally virtuous and pure, and consequently asexual. According to a Parliamentary Commission Report of the early state, "the civilisation of Irish society depends not just on giving more power to the Catholic Church but on the transformation of Irish women into good mothers" (O'Dowd 1987: 6). The personification of Ireland as 'woman' and 'mother' necessitated that the purity of that image was maintained on all levels and a harsh system of morality and sexual repression was imposed on men and women by both Church and State in order to maintain and propagate cultural nationalism and a distinctive Irish cultural identity (Cairns and Richards 1988: 77). Women were seen as responsible for mothering Ireland's future and this provided the means to carefully and rigidly sanction women's place in Irish society.

The ideology cemented in the Constitution of 1937 and adopted by the new state was a symbol to Irish nationalists of the unity between the Irish nation-state and the Catholic church. With the construction of the Irish Republic, women's identity had clearly been submerged under an ideology of patriarchal familism that can be traced both to nationalist responses to British colonization in Ireland and to the degree of accord between Irish cultural nationalism and the strong Irish identity with the Catholic Church. The power of the Catholic hierarchy in Irish society was solidified in 1937 with the special place given to the Church in Article 44 of the Constitution which claimed the Church as "the guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens" (O'Brien 1994: 154). Ironically, Article 44 also

guaranteed Irish citizens "freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion" (Ranelagh 1990: 229). When no one opposed the introduction of Article 44 to the Constitution, it became clear that Catholicism was part of the unquestioned reality of Irish culture (Fulton 1991: 141). The subordination of women in Ireland, and significantly, the Church's and State's control over women's bodies and fertility can be linked directly to the accord between the early Irish State and the Church, reflected in the institutionalization of Catholic morality that is evident in the Irish Constitution (Fulton 1991: 18).

This has had a dramatic effect on the construction of women's roles and the status of women in the Irish state. Women to this day are viewed by the State and the Church as extremely important but generally only within the context of the family and the maintenance of Irish Catholic values. Women were viewed solely as wives and mothers, fundamentally excluded from the public sphere, denied economic independence and discouraged from taking employment (Beale 1987: 6). In a 1979 visit to Ireland, Pope John Paul II solidified the Catholic view of women and motherhood in his statement:

May Irish mothers, young women and girls, not listen to those who tell them that working at a secular job, succeeding in a secular profession, is more important than the vocation of giving life and caring for this life as a mother. (Beale 1987: 50)

The effect of Catholic moral teaching on the nationalist view of women was extensive and reflected the close association between Irish nationalism and the Church. It also reflects the necessity of the Church and the State in controlling and repressing women's sexuality and fertility in order to maintain the family, and therefore maintain society.

IV. WOMEN'S RESISTANCE IN IRELAND

A Tradition of Resistance

We will live, we have lived
where language is concealed. Is perilous.
We will be - we have been - citizens
of its hiding place.

Eavan Boland, *Writing in a Time of Violence*

Because the Irish state was built upon a history of resistance to colonial domination, it is reasonable to assume that women, fostered by a tradition of Irish resistance, would find the space within a conservative and oppressive state to express their voices. Though women were no longer considered an essential part of the public sphere, women did not become passive. Indeed, they continued to be social actors in Irish society in the years following the establishment of the Irish state. Resistance to the social control of the institutions of Church and State undoubtedly existed during this period, but it is difficult and problematic to trace the sources and expressions of Irish women's resistance because of its inherently disguised nature. The literature discussing women's power and resistance in Ireland is small and therefore the interpretation of women as social actors must come from a deep exploration and interpretation of the existing literature in order to capture the various expressions of women's voice throughout Irish history.

Irish historian Mary Clancy has done a considerable amount of research regarding women's small but important role in the period following the formation of the state, studying specifically the few women like Senator Jenny Wyse-Power who remained active within the political realm, bringing about changes in the realm of family life, education, and social welfare through the Seanad (Clancy 1990: 209). However, most women in the Dáil and Seanad were elected due to a long family tradition of political nationalism and were not

especially vocal concerning women's rights in the period after the formation of the Free State. These women, occasionally referred to as the 'silent sisters' due to their lack of protest to the 1937 Constitution, focused primarily on the provision of financial assistance for widows, children and unmarried mothers and the protection of women from sexual assault rather than on issues of divorce reform, contraception, or abortion (Clancy 1990: 210). Despite Wyse-Power's and other women's contributions to the Oireachtas regarding social reforms for women and families, there was an overall reluctance by these women to discuss matters of sexuality, allowing the government control of fertility to continue unhindered (Clancy 1990: 212).

Though it is clear that there were women in powerful political positions, the activities of these rare women do not reflect the experiences of the many women who were not publicly involved voicing their concerns or in resisting their socially-constructed identity or their socially-controlled fertility. Driven out of the public realm by the institutionalization of women's traditional role in society, most Irish women were forced to find new ways to voice their concerns and express their power. Many women simply chose to emigrate to places like Britain, Australia and the US, a silent expression of women's disapproval and disenchantment with Irish rural life (O'Dowd 1987: 28, Rossiter 1993: 177). Since the introduction of British colonial domination, emigration has been a fact of life for Irish people. By the mid-1920s, 43% of Irish born were living overseas (Beale 1987: 111). According to a study of contemporary Irish migration, women have formed the majority of Irish emigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries, with an average emigration rate in the period 1871-1971 of 15,983 per year as compared to a male annual average of 15,707 (Travers 1995: 147). Women's migration during the early years of the state and into the 1960s was particularly high, excluding the period during World War II when

military recruitment and employment opportunities in the war industries in Britain increased the amount of male emigration (Travers 1995: 148). Immigrant women interviewed in the study cited factors including employment opportunities, restlessness, dissatisfaction with their lot, poor or unattractive social conditions, lack of marriage opportunities, and the availability of an emigrant network overseas as primary reasons for emigration (Travers 1995: 151). This is contrary to popular conceptions of male emigrants who go off seeking employment and leave behind weeping mothers / wives / sisters / daughters.

Other women remained in Ireland and used their roles as mothers and wives to express their discontent and better the lives of their families and their communities. In the early 20th century, organizations like the Irish Housewives Association and the Irish Countrywomen's Association formed to both express a new public image of concerned motherhood and to bring about social change. Both the Irish Housewives Association and the Irish Countrywomen's Association were viewed as traditionally feminine and fundamentally important to the welfare of rural communities and Irish society as a whole. According to a book written by Sir Horace Plunkett about the United Irishwomen (later to become the Irish Countrywomen's Association), the qualities brought forth by organization that promoted motherhood were essential to the definition of Ireland itself:

That Ireland, more than any other country, is spoken of as a woman is probably due to the appearance in our national affairs of qualities which men call womanly. And this impression is not merely the cheap attribution of racial inferiority by the alien critic with which we are familiar, it is our feeling about ourselves. The Dark Rosaleen, straining her tear-dimmed eyes for foreign aid, is how we should fare if the shrewd practical sense, the housekeeperly instinct - real womanly qualities of the greatest value to the modern state - had freer play in our public life.

I write of women's work, not women's votes, for we who join in this book treat of things which neither parliaments nor governments can do for a people - things that they must do for themselves. But it is quite as true in the sphere of voluntary effort as in that of legislation and administration that no country needs women's help more than our own at the present time, or gets it less. If all this were changed, more might be done in Ireland for Ireland. (Coulter 1993: 33)

The women involved in these organizations, in adopting the traditional role of mother, sought to expand and develop that role in the family so that it influenced society as a whole (Coulter 1993: 33). These two organizations allowed women, cloaked in the image of traditional rural mothers, to fight oppression and transform their local environments. It also allowed a space for women to meet and gather for causes of social change that were acceptably domestic and generally supported by the mainstream political culture. "Irish women stretched and expanded these categories [of wife and mother] as they elaborated survival strategies during these years, and explored avenues of controlling their lives which tended towards the subversion of the dominant ideology, even while they largely accepted its claims" (Coulter 1993: 39).

However, there was a limit to the extent of changes that women in these organizations could foster within the role of mother. These were not organizations that actively sought a radical redefinition of women's identity or power in a patriarchal environment. These women used their role within the family to better the social conditions in which their families lived by consciously expanding their domestic role rather than redefining it. They expressed desires for change in a manner comparable to Arlene MacLeod's 'accommodating resistance' (MacLeod 1992). By taking on the role of mother and using that role to bring about social change, women managed to expand their domestic roles and broaden their limited public roles. However, by working within the state-constructed ideology of motherhood, women also

served to maintain an ideology that oppressed them, limiting their own experience in a comparable fashion to Islamic women donning the veil in protest. Identifying with the role of mother and using it as a political tool can be empowering, but it can also contribute to an essentialized identity. This is not to de-value the importance of women's protest and the expression of women's voices within this context, yet ironically like many other forms of resistance by oppressed groups it is both a useful and a limiting way of bringing about social change.

It was only as a result of the dramatic economic changes and the reduction in importance of the rural economy that women began to resist with a distinctly feminist consciousness and a desire to redefine their social role. The overall economic situation in Ireland has been a key factor in the various expressions of women's resistance throughout the 20th century. The decades following the Constitution of 1937 were ones of economic stagnation, high emigration, and the rapid disintegration of the rural agricultural system where women generally lacked economic and political power and were barely represented in the workforce (Pyle 1990). The nationalist definition of women's traditional role in the family, reflected in the extensive amount of legislation controlling women's fertility and shutting women out of the workplace, discouraged women from deviating from their place in the domestic sphere. With the end of DeValera's isolationist economics in the 1960s and Ireland's entrance into the European Union in 1972, Ireland saw a period of overall economic development and political change. Ireland throughout the 1970s underwent rapid economic growth with the modernization and expansion of its industries. This led to a rise in the standard of living for the general population resulting in the growth of service industries, a boom in real estate, and ample

revenue for the introduction of new government social programs providing health care and welfare (Beale 1987).

As a result of the widespread economic expansion, more women gradually entered the workforce, especially within the new service industries (Beale 1987: 10). More married women, unsatisfied with the transformation from rural mother with a variety of duties to isolated middle-class housewife with the modernization of the household and the penetration of urban ways, were beginning to seek jobs outside the home (Beale 1987: 43). Coinciding with urbanization and the rise of women in the workforce was a trend towards marriage at a younger age and a decrease in the number of children women were choosing to have (Beale 1987: 10). Emigration to Britain and the United States decreased as jobs suddenly became available to the growing population (Beale 1987: 33). From the period 1961-1971, the average rate of women's emigration per year dropped from 19,091 to 7,215 and the total emigration average dropped from 40,877 to 13,451 (Travers 1995: 148). In droves, women were defying their traditional role as mothers and housewives and moving into the public sphere. These trends signaled an overall rejection of rural life by the Irish as well as an overwhelming desire for industrialization. It also signaled the desire of women to expand their traditional role and play an active part in Ireland's industrialization and economic growth.

Of course there were many women who had always been in the labor force despite the discouraging legislation of the early Republic. With the influx of many more women into the workforce during this period, women were able to organize, providing the momentum needed to make women's voices heard. As women solidified their place in the workforce, they began to join labor movements and take a more militant stand concerning their own rights at work, campaigning for equal pay and opportunities in the workplace (Beale

1987: 144). This, and the need to follow EU guidelines, led to changes in legislation regarding the workplace throughout the 1970s including removal of the marriage bar which prevented married women from working in the civil service in 1973, an anti-discrimination act in 1974, and legislation on equal pay in 1977 as a result of compliance with EU regulations (Beale 1987: 10). Unfortunately despite the opposition between women working outside the home and the traditional view of domestic motherhood, the overwhelming patriarchal ideology of the family did not really change in the course of economic development and women continued to be the primary caregivers and housekeepers despite working outside of the home.

It is not surprising that a general questioning of traditional social attitudes emerged in this environment, including a gradual redefinition of the traditional roles within the family as women became an important part of the expanding economy (Redlich 1979: 83). The development of the women's movement in Ireland undoubtedly corresponded directly with the full-fledged appearance of women in the workforce. Within this economic environment, women gained public power from their new positions in the workplace and a women's movement found a voice, heavily influenced by the radical movements in Britain and the United States as well as by increased militant activity of nationalists in the north in the 1960s and 1970s. The women's movement in Ireland and its results over the past few decades is perhaps the most organized, formal expression of women's resistance to their position in Irish society.

A Chronology of the Women's Movement in Ireland

In other countries a week may be a long time in politics; in Ireland a decade is but a moment. It took 12 years from the first efforts of a coalition government to legalize the sale of condoms, for another coalition government to finally and traumatically complete a dreadful deed by making them legal for anyone over 18.

Maura Molloy, 1986

When the first women's liberation group formed in Dublin in 1971, women in Ireland had fewer rights than most women in Europe. Despite the fact that more women were entering the workforce, 75% of married women still worked within the home and women were discriminated against in education, employment, and the tax and welfare systems. Women's sexuality and fertility was closely controlled, contraception and abortion were illegal, and divorce was banned in the Constitution (Beale 1987: 3). Compared to Northern Ireland, which functioned basically under the same legislation as the rest of Britain, women's overall status in the Republic was generally lower, a serious point of contention for women of a nationalist tradition who saw themselves as negatively affected by Irish independence.⁵ The early women's movement was a radical reaction to the processes of change that were occurring in Ireland, as well as the general radical movements that were spreading throughout Europe and the United States at this time, including the Civil Rights movement. However, the history of the Irish women's movement is generally one of slow rather than rapid development, reflecting the difficulties in making women's issues public in the face of nationalist turmoil and violence .

⁵ One important difference between the laws of Northern Ireland and Great Britain regards the legalization of abortion. The 1967 British Abortion Act that legalized abortion in Britain was never implemented in Ulster due primarily to the similar (though fundamentally Protestant) conservative nature of the Irish in the North as with the Irish in the South. A 1945 Infant Life Preservation Act does provide the possibility of abortion in Northern Ireland, but only in extremely limited circumstances (Jackson 1986: 58).

The early women's movement in the 1970s managed to gain considerable attention due to the number of women involved who were employed in the media. Women used their positions to inform the public of women's status and the need for change, and were highly successful in raising previously unspoken issues and taboo subjects regarding women's status in Irish society. The main women's issues brought to the public during this period were problems not very distant from earlier attempts at change by women's organizations including providing a better situation for deserted wives, shelters for battered women, and attempts to legalize contraception (Beale 1987: 64). An especially important moment came in 1971 when the extremely popular *The Late Late Show* devoted an entire program to the Irish Women's Liberation Movement, including a panel discussion on the importance of contraception reform (Smyth 1993: 254).

Similarly to women's movements in Britain, France, and the United States, contraception became one of the fundamental issues of the Irish women's movement in the 1970s, though Irish women's recognition of the importance of issues of sexuality to the movement was slow to form (Barry 1988: 320, Jackson 1993: 78). The issue of contraception was perceived and presented by the feminist organizations involved in the women's movement as the most central issue of women's lives (Smyth 1993: 260). However, despite this media attention and early focus on the importance of contraception in the women's movement, generally within the various feminist organizations issues of sexuality, contraception and especially abortion were hardly ever discussed. Sexuality is not a subject easily or readily discussed in Ireland, even today (Viney 1994: 45). Most of the rhetoric surrounding birth control in Ireland was confined to discussions of family planning (Beale 1987: 105). It is interesting to note that the issue of abortion was not a part of the 1970s Irish women's

movement or the Irish feminist lobby. The early feminist manifesto of the Women's Liberation Group (*Chains or Change? The Civil Wrongs of Irish Women*, written in 1971) mentioned contraception as a fundamental right, but lacked any reference to abortion or even an analysis of sexuality or sexual politics in Ireland (Smyth 1993: 253). It was only with the growing acceptance of discussions of contraception with its limited legalization in 1979 that issues of sexuality, including abortion, began to dominate the women's movement in Ireland.

The 1970s was a period of excited activity and growing feminist consciousness. Irish women found, like the women involved in movements in other countries, that their demands for equality and opportunity frequently led back to factors of sexuality and reproduction (Viney 1994: 56). The women's movement, influenced by Britain and the United States, campaigned for a woman's right to define her own sexuality and make choices about her own body, especially in regards to the need to control one's own fertility, but the discourse on sexuality in Ireland was limited by a tradition of sexual repressiveness that generally prevented people from discussing matters of sexuality openly (Beale 1987: 85). However, women did take part in radical and vocal resistance to the overwhelmingly conservative sexual morality of both the Church and State, involving incidents like the infamous Pill Train in 1971. A group of Dublin women took the Belfast train one afternoon and came back amidst massive media attention with a large variety of condoms, sponges, and lubricants that were legally available in Belfast but not anywhere in the Republic. They flouted their packages in front of the police and public with impunity (Viney 1994: 56). Perhaps these women hoped to follow in the tradition of Parnell and other nationalist heroes who were frequently incarcerated for their radical nationalist sentiments in the 19th and 20th

centuries, but the State refused to comply and was not willing to provide the women's movement with their own radical heroes.

The Irish government was generally quick to respond to the women's movement, establishing a Commission on the Status of Women in 1972 to investigate and define the issues put forth by the women's movement, in fact to:

examine and report on the status of women in Irish society, to make recommendations on the steps necessary to ensure that participation of women on equal terms and conditions with men in the political, social, cultural, and economic life of the country and to indicate the implications generally - including the estimated cost - of such recommendations (Robinson 1979: 65).⁶

The Commission outlined 49 areas of discrimination against women in Ireland and 17 recommendations to "eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in the fields of employment, social welfare, education, the taxation code, property rights, and in all areas of central and local administration" (Beale 1987: 4). However, the primary power of the women's movement has always come from the organizations themselves, and the legislation that has resulted from women's actions has usually been a response and reaction to women's struggles rather than legislators' policy initiatives (Coulter 1993: 57).

The struggle with the state and the public for the legalization of contraception was a long and difficult process that did not end until 1993. There were ways for women to obtain contraceptives, but it was difficult and expensive to do so. In the 1960s, the pill initially became available in Ireland with a doctor's prescription as a cycle-regulator (Beale 1987: 54). From 1969 onwards, Family Planning clinics in the Dublin, Cork, Limerick, and other cities were providing contraceptives to anyone who wanted them, only asking for

⁶ Interestingly, it was the recently politicized Irish Housewives Association and the Irish Countrywomen's Association that originally persuaded the government to establish the Commission on the Status of Women in 1970 (Smyth 1993: 247).

'donations' (Beale 1987: 106). However, direct legislative action on contraception only happened as a result of challenges to the law by women, as most of the reforms concerning women's issues have occurred in Ireland (Coulter 1993: 57). A pivotal challenge to the prohibition of contraception came in 1973, when Mary McGee filed a case against the State for confiscating a contraceptive jelly she had ordered from abroad. The High Court found the 1935 act prohibiting the importation of contraceptives to be unconstitutional by violating a married couple's right to privacy (Beale 1987: 13). This created a loophole for the 'personal use' of contraception, though since it was still illegal, contraceptives were still difficult to obtain (Barry 1988a: 57). As a result of the High Court decision, the first bill to legalize (to a limited extent) the use and sale of contraception was introduced to the Dáil in 1973 by TD (*Teachta Dala* or Dáil deputy) Mary Robinson, currently the President of Ireland (Sawyer 1993: 136). This bill was quickly shot down and the next real legislative attempt at legalizing contraception did not come until 1979 with the Family Planning Act. The 1979 Act legalized contraception in a limited fashion, making it available only to married couples with a doctor's prescription (Sawyer 1993: 113). Legislative measures continued throughout the 1980s in an attempt to make contraception more available, and a 1985 Amendment Act allowed pharmacies to sell condoms and other non-medical contraceptives to adults 18 and over. It was only with the threat of AIDS that the 1979 Family Planning Act was finally repealed in 1993, in effect altering the definition of contraceptive to exclude condoms and thereby legalizing the sale of condoms in vending machines and abolishing any kind of age limits (Sawyer 1993: 115).

By far the largest benefit of the early women's movement was in introducing women's issues to the Irish public discourse. Women involved in

the movement spoke, marched, handed out pamphlets, and campaigned for broad reforms, but these reforms did not really occur until late in the decade after the disbanding of the Women's Liberation Group. The result of the disbanding of the Women's Liberation group was the formation of a wide variety of groups focused on self-help and aid with an emphasis on legal reform. The women's movement in Ireland became (and continues to be) a loose network of organizations focused on a wide variety of social inequalities and reform rather than a monolithic organization that attempts to encompass all of women's issues under one broad scheme (Beale 1987: 11). Throughout the rest of the decade, these single-issue groups, including AIM for family law reform, Cherish for single parents, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, and the Contraceptive Action Programme, have been extremely successful over the years in tackling particular problems and in bringing specific legislative reform in Irish policy (Smyth 1993: 256). According to Ursula Barry:

By existing both inside and outside the parliamentary system, by exploiting every opportunity and loophole in the law, by drawing media attention to open breaches of the law, by the consistent provision of much-needed services, and by the growing strength of those demanding change, this [the women's movement] is a rare example of a social movement which managed to bring about social change in the rigid social structure of Irish society. (Barry 1992: 111)

The Council for the Status of Women, established by the government to deal with the growing women's movement, became an umbrella organization for the many women's groups in an attempt to provide a cohesive force within the political structure for women's issues. By 1993, there were approximately 100 women's organizations affiliated with the Council, showing the strength of this network in providing a wide variety of social reforms (Smyth 1993: 267).

The growth and popularity of the women's movement in the 1970s coincided with a growing disenchantment with the Church and the slow

separation of Church and State. Religious practice began declining and with it, the strict adherence to a Catholic socio-religious ethos tended to decrease. In 1972, the special place designated for the Church in Article 44 of the Constitution was removed with the general support of the Irish bishops (Beale 1987: 13). However, the Church remained adamant in its disapproval of legalizing contraception, linking the use of contraception to the general decline of virtue and morality in Irish culture. The Church continued throughout the campaign to legalize contraception to echo the sentiments of Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin who stated in 1971:

If they who are elected to legislate for our society should unfortunately decide to pass a disastrous measure that will allow public promotion of contraception and an access hitherto unlawful to the means of contraception, they ought to know clearly the meaning of their action, when it is judged by the norms of objective morality and the certain consequences of such a law. (Fulton 1991: 117)

The 1979 Family Planning Act and the resulting years of growing contraception legislation represent the first clean break between the laws of the state and the teaching of the Church (Barry 1988: 57). The widespread use of contraception before and after its legalization despite the Church's attitude towards it also indicates a growing disenchantment with the control of the Church in Ireland. As Ireland becomes a more secularized nation, space continues to grow for the discussion of issues of sexuality and women's oppression. As the women's movement slowly developed a feminist discourse concerning the relationship between sexuality and women's oppression, control of women's fertility became the focus of feminist energy. However, in the period following the development of a women's movement and its successes, the Church and the conservative elements of Irish society, concerned with Ireland's secularization and the changing patterns of women's identity, reacted with a conservative backlash that resulted in the 1983 abortion referendum.

Though the early women's movement was successful in bringing about certain legislative changes affecting the status of women in Irish society, it primarily dealt with specifically-defined "survival" issues like contraception and equal pay and failed to explore the cultural, political, and ideological roots of women's oppression in Ireland, thereby failing to attract female intellectuals to the women's movement (Jackson 1986: 50). Therefore, the women's movement had difficulty in articulating the pervasiveness of women's oppression as well as demands concerning issues of sexuality by not challenging the ideological superstructure which formed and perpetuated women's oppression and the control of women's fertility (Smyth 1993: 249). This is most likely a result of the high degree of influence of British and American feminism on the Irish women's movement which has made it difficult for Irish women to express a distinctly Irish form of feminism and social agitation that clearly expressed Irish women's voices and concerns.

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a decline in direct action as the previous radicalization of the women's movement exhausted itself. Also, economic factors involved in rapid industrialization resulted in growing unemployment, a return of emigration at a rate similar to the 1950s, and general social demoralization (Speed 1992: 93). It also witnessed the organized and extremely powerful response to women's activism by the Catholic Church and conservative groups. This organized reaction, which ultimately led to the 1983 campaign for a referendum that would prevent any legalization of abortion in Ireland, coinciding with the effects of economic recession, forced the women's movement into a period of retreat and defense of the precious rights they had fought for in the 1970s (Barry 1992: 108).

V. ABORTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The Politics of Abortion in the State

Irish debates on abortion are part of a pressure for change, resistance to change, and a clarification of cultural identity.

Elizabeth Porter, 1996

According to K. Kaufmann, in an exploration of the social control of abortion throughout its history, abortion is one of the few virtually universal phenomena, existing in practically all societies around the world (Kaufmann 1984: 215). The existence of abortion over the centuries and throughout cultures reflects the expressions of women's voices in an important if obscure fashion. It provides a link to how women have dealt with the control of their reproduction from the outside, mainly through its continued use as a highly effective method of birth control. "The history of abortion forms a continuous and irrefutable record of women's determination to make reproductive choices based on their own perceptions and definitions of their social, sexual and economic needs" (Kaufmann 1984: 229). By examining the existence of abortion legislation in the state, as well as women's response to that legislation, particularly how women have managed subversively to control the number of children they are having despite legislation restricting that decision, shows the extent of women's active resistance to the social control of their reproduction.

The issue of abortion has become integral to the agenda of many women's movements, and it has certainly become a prominent issue in the Irish feminist discourse, as well as the discourse of the more traditional elements in Irish society. Fertility control, especially surrounding the issue of abortion has become an essential aspect of the majority of women's

movements because of the importance of fertility and reproduction in women's everyday lives. Abortion and contraception have always been closely associated with the feminist lobby primarily because many feminists believe that "the issue of abortion - the induced termination of pregnancy - has served as a political terrain to curtail women's control over their own reproductive functions", especially at moments when gender identities are being reconstituted and redefined, i.e. through direct challenges from women's movements (Jackson 1987: 203). Abortion has become the focus of the continuing debates over women's right to control their bodies, their lives, and their own reproduction. To many feminists, the criminalization of abortion has become a symbol of the state control of women and women's fertility, and through its legal existence, a symbol of the ultimate exercise of individual women's fertility control (Beale 1987: 141).

The abortion issue and the debate concerning reproductive rights as a whole encapsulates the tension between both feminist and conservative visions of women's changing role in society and the realities of state policies. The choice of obtaining a safe and legal abortion reflects women's autonomy and epitomizes women's capacity to individually and collectively control fertility and the consequences of heterosexual intercourse. This issue emphasizes the fact that gains in legal rights for women may not result in the experience of legal equality in the state. If women's reproduction and sexuality are controlled by the state, it implies a fundamental belief within the ideology of the state that women are not proper moral agents capable of responsible decision-making and accountability (Porter 1996). Women may be considered equal, but by virtue of being women, their bodies exist under a different legal system than men's. Essentially, the issue of abortion inevitably brings into question the role of women as social actors in society.

In an anthropological study of the abortion debate in Fargo, North Dakota, Faye Ginsburg explored the underlying tensions that exist within this issue and why it has become; to both pro-choice and pro-life activists, the dominant issue concerning women's rights in society (Ginsburg 1989). The issue of abortion and the relevance of this issue in the feminist discourse directly challenges the construction of a female gender identity linked to motherhood, nurturance and the work and ideals associated with domesticity (Ginsburg 1989: 213). Pro-choice activists view the opportunity for safe and legal abortion as a necessity enabling women to control whether, when and with whom they will have children. However, to pro-life activists, this freedom is a denial of women's unique ability to conceive and have children and becomes a symbol of the devaluation of motherhood that comes as a result of the detached and socially-destructive materialism of capitalist society. "The desire of pro-life activists to prohibit abortions for all women is rooted in the desire to reverse the social causes and consequences of the unraveling of social order" (Ginsburg 1989: 215). On both sides, women play integral roles in abortion activism which "reveals its potent metaphorical connection to critical sources of cultural and social identity, especially in relation to sexuality and reproduction" (Ginsburg 1989: 3). Therefore the abortion issue is a "contested domain" in which the meaning of reproduction in women's lives and its relation to the place and status of women in society is constantly being argued and redefined (Ginsburg 1989: 220).

This analysis of the abortion debate in the United States can be compared to the existing tension and struggle that is occurring in Ireland over the rights of women versus the needs and desires of the state to control women and their fertility. Both the pro-life and the pro-choice activists in Ireland have been heavily influenced by the abortion debates in the United States, and this

is reflected mainly in the interpretation of fetus rights versus women's rights. The amendment campaign, with its focus on the rights of the fetus, is clearly part of a larger trend in the rise of the New Right. "The ideological force which framed the amendment does not have its roots in traditional Irish Catholicism but rather in the movement of the New Right internationally, particularly in the USA" (Barry 1988b: 319). The development of the abortion referendum accurately reflects a similar fear of the effects of industrialization and the power of the women's movement in vocally challenging women's traditional roles in Irish society.

By examining both sides of the debate, I outline how the campaign for an abortion referendum in Ireland reflects the tensions between the changing position of women in Irish society and the conservative desire to continually define women based on their reproductive capabilities. The abortion issue has become a symbol of the destabilization of Irish society due the dramatic economic and social changes of the last 30 years, as well as the profound impact of women's resistance and the questioning of women's roles that has occurred as a result, especially where women's sexuality is concerned (Smyth 1992a: 4). An examination of the issue also reflects Irish women's voices of resistance and struggles to find alternatives to the state control of their fertility. Though the conservative response to women's growing public power resulted in a demoralizing decade for the Irish women's movement, a clear understanding of women's alternative sources of strength and power can be seen in women's various responses to the abortion referendum throughout the 1980s.

The Abortion Referendum: 1983

I am Ireland and I'm sick
sick in the womb / sick in the head
and I'm sick of lying on this sickbed
Máighr  ad Medbh, *Easter 1991*

In 1983, 53% of the Irish population voted on a referendum making it impossible for future abortion legislation to be enacted into the Constitution by asserting the right to life of the fetus.⁷ Article 40 (3.3) of the Irish Constitution states: "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees to respect, and as far as practicable, by its laws to vindicate that right" (from the *Bunreacht na h  ireann*, in Barry 1988a: 59). Abortion was already illegal at the time of the referendum, dating back to the British Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, which made abortion a felony throughout the British Empire (Barry 1988a: 58). One may find it odd that policy makers, and the Irish public, felt it necessary to make an action unconstitutional when it was already illegal. Yet the abortion issue, especially issues surrounding the referendum, reveal the fundamental tensions that exist in Ireland between the traditional values held up by the Irish Constitution and the progressive need for change that has resulted in the recent modernization of the Irish economy.

If contraception was the feminist issue of the 1970s, then abortion rapidly became the issue of the 1980s and continues to be a fundamental issue of debate and discussion in Ireland into the 1990s. Due to the 1967 British Abortion Act which allows abortion for specified health reasons including a risk to the woman's life, a risk to the woman's health or mental health, or a risk to the woman's existing children, Irish women since 1967 have been traveling to

⁷ Of the 53% that voted, 66% voted yes and 33% voted no (Beale 1987: 119).

Britain to obtain legal abortions, despite Church doctrine (Jackson 1987).⁸ However, abortion was not a subject of public debate and abortion counseling, information, or referrals to clinics in Britain were not readily available until the formation of the Irish Pregnancy Counselling Centre in 1981, and its successors, Open Line Counselling, founded by Ruth Riddick, one of three women in Ireland who have publicly admitted to having an abortion, and the Dublin Well Woman Centre (Riddick 1994: 141). It was only with the introduction of the 8th amendment to the Constitution supporting the right to life of the unborn that the abortion debate became an important political and social issue in Ireland, a debate that has become one of the most divisive issues for Ireland in the 20th century.

Despite the success of women's groups that formed and took issue with women's lack of control over their own fertility throughout the radicalism of the 1970s, abortion remained a taboo subject even within these various groups. "Few dared to articulate that it [abortion] be included among the 'rights' that ought to be appropriated by women" (Jackson 1987: 214). Women were and still are silenced on the issue because abortion has been so unequivocally opposed in Ireland, by the Catholic Church, by the state, and by society at large. In fact, as of 1994, only three Irish women had publicly named themselves as having abortions (Riddick 1994: 141). Before the campaign for the 8th amendment to the Constitution, there had been no large-scale campaign on the part of the women's movement to legalize abortion. "Paradoxically, it was not until a proposal emerged to amend the Constitution

⁸ Pauline Jackson has made the argument that due to the Bourne Judgment of 1937 in Britain, where a Dr. Bourne was acquitted from violating the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act by performing an abortion on a 13 year-old victim of gang rape, which liberalized the 1861 law, the Irish women's abortion trail to Britain probably began as early as 1937. Not coincidentally in the same period, backstreet abortions in Ireland dropped dramatically as did prosecution for illegal abortions in Ireland (Jackson 1987: 212).

in relation to abortion that any from of public language appeared in which to conceptualize abortion" (Jackson 1987: 214). In fact, most women were undecided over the abortion issue and women involved in the women's movement had taken great trouble to separate the abortion issue from the issue of contraception. Irish feminists made a conscious effort not to include abortion as a part of the general campaign for fertility control in the 1970s.

It was not until 1980, only three years before the introduction of the abortion referendum, that the first Women's Right to Choose group formed to discuss the lack of abortion facilities in Ireland, establishing the Irish Pregnancy Counselling Centre for non-directive pregnancy counseling and abortion referral, the first to discuss the option of abortion with pregnant women (Beale 1987: 113). This was the first time that the issue of fertility control became linked to the issue of abortion in the Irish women's movement and this was only by a small group of women in Dublin. Their statement included an determined avowal of the importance of fertility control in ending women's oppression, stating:

We recognize that control of our fertility is one of the most basic of our human rights and without this control we will never be able to achieve the other aims of feminism, i.e. the right to enjoy our sexuality independently of our reproductive role, the right to work outside the home, to make choices of careers and partners (Beale 1987: 112)⁹

Overall, the various groups involved in the women's movement refused to acknowledge the connection between fertility control and abortion. It was only with the challenge to women's fertility control that other feminist organizations began to view abortion as essential to the Irish women's movement.

At the same time that the Women's Right to Choose group was initially forming its first discussions of the abortion issue, the Irish Society for the

⁹ Quoted from the Women's Right to Choose Campaign, 1984

Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) was forming with the idea of a constitutional amendment against abortion in an attempt to maintain the traditional values they saw slipping away through modernization (Beale 1987: 113). In 1981, a small conference on abortion, contraception and sterilization brought a great deal of consternation among the SPUC and resulted in the formation of the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) in 1983. In proposing the amendment, the PLAC wanted to prevent any attempt to legalize abortion in the future, rather than just desiring to make abortion unconstitutional. The PLAC represented a large group of pro-life supporters, doctors, the Catholic Church and various groups affiliated with the Church including the Irish Catholic Doctor's Guild, the Catholic Young Men's Society, the Knights of St. Columbanus and the Legion of Mary, and other groups that pledged to use the abortion issue to maintain traditional Catholic morality within the state, and especially within the Constitution (Beale 1987: 115).

The Church played a fundamental role in the establishment and maintenance of the amendment campaign, both by providing an institutional grounding for the various groups as well as preaching a pro-life messages from the pulpit. The Church hierarchy has always seen issues of sexuality, abortion, and contraception as being enemies to the structure of the family and therefore dangerous to the Church itself. Catholic morality backed the formulation of the referendum, especially in regards to the doctrine of 'indirect intent' that was written into the referendum only allowing for abortions that were acceptable to the Catholic Church, primarily for the termination of ectopic pregnancies and carcinoma of the uterus. Even in these acceptable cases, the fetus had to be removed as a part of an operation to save the mother's life (Beale 1987: 115, Reid 1992: 27). Both from the prominence of Church-affiliated organizations in the referendum campaign and the

forcefulness with which these groups campaigned for fetus rights, it becomes clear that the PLAC was not just a campaign against abortion, but also against the overall liberalization of Irish society, especially concerning the changing role of women. "That such a constitutional amendment was felt to be necessary by conservative groups...is indicative of the anxiety which changes in women's role and self-concept have induced in Ireland" (Meaney 1994: 189).

The overall campaign was an extremely divisive issue, pitting women against women. While it was women who organized and demanded change in the 1970s to seek greater control over their lives, it was also women who formed the basis of the PLAC campaign across the country in the early 1980s. Women were at the forefront of the amendment campaign, working at the national and at the grassroots level, focusing on the importance of motherhood and the maintenance of Irish culture in the face of industrialization and urbanization (Beale 1987: 117). Currently, a woman, Mary Lucey, is the president of SPUC, and she has been extremely vocal in the need to maintain traditional Irish society (Mahoney 1993: 57). Women's activism in the pro-life campaign in Ireland must also be viewed as a form of women's resistance, yet in this case it is resistance against the secularization and modernization of Irish society, and it is in many ways comparable to actions of accommodating resistance. Within the PLAC, women are campaigning to maintain the essentialized roles as wives and mothers that the state has constructed. In a similar fashion to women who enter politics as mothers and wives in many Latin American countries, the women in the PLAC are public figures even while they serve to maintain their mother identity (see Martin 1990: 471-2).

Feminists have found women's activity in the amendment campaign and other conservative campaigns including divorce and contraception paradoxical, stating "it has often seemed in Ireland that where attempts are

being made to hold on to the image of Irish society, it is women who play the central role" (Barry 1992: 114). It has been argued by feminists that women in the PLAC are perhaps trying to perpetuate women's role as mother because it has traditionally been one of the few roles in which Irish women could express their voices and power (Meaney 1994: 189). The PLAC, with the help of these women activists, transformed the abortion issue from an issue of fertility control to an issue of the role of motherhood in Irish society, by employing symbols and tactics that essentialize women's feminine identity. This was aided by the desexualization of the abortion issue by the PLAC. The referendum was formulated for the specific protection of the fetus' rights, separate from the rights of the pregnant woman. Abortion has never been considered by the Church to be a "women's issue" and the amendment campaign did not discuss abortion in the context of women's control over their fertility (Jackson 1986: 56). The complicated medical terminology and constitutional rhetoric used by the amendment campaign was worrisome to feminists, who saw the rhetoric as a tactic to remove women's issues from the abortion issue. Not including the specific relevance of abortion to women is damaging because it removes the issue from the realities of women's lives, especially from the intense and complex emotions involved in the decision to abort (Beale 1987: 117).

Response to the amendment campaign was slow to occur, most likely due to the complex nature of the abortion issue and the desire of various women's organizations to avoid the issue. Gradually, however, as these groups realized the impact of such an overwhelming redefinition of woman under the law, one that according to Ursula Barry equates woman to "that which is not yet born", the referendum became the catalyst for a new decade of feminist mobilization and a revitalization of the Irish women's movement (Barry 1988a:

59). Because the amendment campaign arose from a desire on the part of conservative groups to suppress women's further control over their fertility, the anti-amendment campaign in reaction attracted a motley group into political activity that had never before been connected with or in support of feminist issues (Jackson 1986: 57). The struggle to oppose the abortion referendum became the focus of a wide variety of progressive, liberal, and feminist attempts to contradict the traditional morality and values that were being catapulted into center-stage by the amendment campaign. These liberal groups did not necessarily morally support abortion, but they united in opposition to the conservative right and the step backward from social progress represented in the PLAC campaign (Beale 1987: 116). The anti-amendment campaign also formed ties with the Protestant and Jewish communities in Ireland who were against the referendum for its sectarian nature. The Nationalist cause also backed the anti-amendment campaign, viewing the referendum as a hindrance to a future unification of Ireland because it would make the Constitution even more unacceptable to Northern Protestants than it already was (Beale 1987: 117). Despite the success of the amendment campaign, the feminist and other groups that worked together to prevent the introduction of an abortion referendum forged links that survived the campaign itself. In fact, many of these organizations re-united in support of the unsuccessful divorce referendum in 1986, as did many of the groups involved in the PLAC to oppose it (Beale 1987: 119).

Because the groups organizing against the amendment campaign were struggling against the powerful and rich resources of the Catholic Church and possibly also some of the resources of the American New Right, the anti-amendment campaign encountered a great amount of difficulty opposing the referendum campaign (Mahoney 1993: 56). These organizations were fighting

against the status quo of conservative Irish nationalism, the maintenance of an Irish way of life based on Catholic morality that was sealed into the Irish Constitution. The amendment was generally supported by both the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and head of Fianna Fáil Charles Haughey and the leader of Fine Gael and future Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald, and abortion was morally opposed by the majority of the Irish population (Beale 1987: 115). Within this environment, women's control over their own fertility, especially the use of abortion, could be considered a subversive activity, anti-Catholic and therefore anti-Irish. "In a society where motherhood remains virtually the only source of canonized validation for the majority of women, the decision not to be a mother is deeply subversive and risky" (Smyth 1992c: 144). However, the limited response to the referendum by voters reveals how much Ireland has changed in the past 30 years. In spite of the Church's encouragement to vote, only half of the electorate turned out. This suggests that the Church's influence over the public, though successful in narrowly passing the referendum, has diminished substantially since the formation of the state (Beale 1987: 121).

The Aftermath of the Referendum

On the day after the referendum, the body of a dead foetus was washed up in the sewers of Dublin. As voting on abortion took place, somewhere in the city a mother struggled in desperation and despair.

Pauline Jackson 1986: 57

After the PLAC's success in passing the abortion referendum, they followed the campaign with a succession of court cases aimed at preventing the dissemination of abortion information and closing down pregnancy counseling services in Ireland (Barry 1992: 115). The PLAC was concerned about

abortion referrals to Britain, primarily because those services were not illegal and the new law could not prevent women from going abroad for legal abortions in Britain (Beale 1987: 114). In 1984, the PLAC was successful in influencing legislation preventing the dissemination of information about abortion (Riddick 1994: 144). Following the 1984 legislation, the SPUC went to court against Open Line Counselling and the Dublin Well Woman Centre in 1986 to prevent non-directive pregnancy counseling. The court found in favor of the SPUC and the counseling centers were forced to discontinue providing women with any type of information concerning legal abortion in Britain. In 1988, the Dublin Well Woman Centre and Open Line Counselling were finally forced to shut down through the efforts of the SPUC (Barry 1988a: 60). Unfortunately, despite the PLAC's success in passing the abortion referendum and making it more difficult for women to obtain information and counseling, the organizations involved in the campaign did little to provide alternatives or help to pregnant women, or alleviate the social pressures on unmarried mothers (Beale 1987: 119).

The years following the referendum also saw the defeat of the divorce referendum in 1986 due to a similar intense political and religious campaign by the SPUC and the organizations affiliated with the PLAC. When the referendum, intended to conditionally remove the divorce ban from the Constitution, was initially introduced, opinion polls had shown that an increasing percentage (49%) of people were in favor of some sort of divorce legislation (Fulton 1991: 161). At the time, the state offered absolutely no way for couples to end an existing marriage contract. Most couples made private arrangements through a lawyer for dispersal of assets and the maintenance of spouse and children, despite the fact that marriage was considered indissoluble by the Church (Beale 1987: 81). The divorce referendum was intended to

provide for marriages "irretrievably broken after five years of separation" (Fulton 1991: 161). With the introduction of the referendum, the PLAC began another powerful and wide-reaching campaign to defeat the referendum, concentrating their campaign on women's economic and social vulnerability. The PLAC's argument centered around the claim that if divorce were legalized, men would leave their wives for the first woman that caught their eye at the pub and that divorce was infinitely harder on women than men because it provided men with an escape from family responsibility (Fulton 1991: 162). The referendum, assumed to easily pass at its introduction, was defeated 63.5% against with a turnout of 62.5% of the population (Fulton 1991: 164).

Though the abortion referendum and the resulting actions of the PLAC and SPUC were a demoralization for feminists and other liberal groups who saw not only a conservative backlash but a deep fissure in their hard-won progress towards secularization, in many ways the PLAC's campaign failed in its attempt to force a return to a more traditional way of life. The issue remained prominent throughout the 1980s and even today, issues surrounding the availability of abortion dominate moral discussions and political debates (Beale 1987: 112). Paradoxically, the abortion referendum became the means by which this issue and other issues of fertility control and women's sexuality were brought into the public arena. Previously taboo subjects were being commented on in newspaper editorials and debated on television (Holland 1992). Similar to the abortion debates in Fargo, North Dakota, the debates sparked by the abortion referendum "engendered a counter-discourse of the dominant interpretation of abortion" (Ginsburg 1989: 34). Also, women who had previously no information about abortion in England were now fully aware of the availability just a ferry-ride away in Britain, though that information could only be accessed in subversive ways. "The flow of information to women

who need it was seriously interfered with but not entirely staunch" (Smyth 1992c: 139).

Most importantly, despite the referendum and the subsequent legislation preventing the dissemination of information, the numbers of Irish women achieving legal abortion in Britain (approximately 7000 in 1994) has remained virtually unchanged (Meaney 1994: 188, Riddick 1994: 145). Though abortion is now both criminal and unconstitutional, women have not felt prevented by the referendum, as they did not feel prevented by Church morality, to take measures to control their own fertility. According to Rosalind Petchesky in an analysis of the control of fertility and women's relationship with abortion, "neither the practice of abortion and birth control nor the expression of sexual desire has ever been successfully stamped out by repressive religious or legal codes" (Petchesky 1984: 276). The state control of women's fertility, especially in the criminalization of abortion has only succeeded in driving abortion underground, or in the case of Ireland, exporting it across the Irish Sea. What the referendum has succeeded in doing is limiting the amount of information accessible to women, and forcing women to undergo the trauma of traveling abroad alone, without counseling or referral. "The practical effect of the anti-abortion amendment has not been to reduce the number of Irish women having abortions but to ensure they are both vulnerable and isolated when implementing that decision" (Barry 1992: 116).

Women responded to the unavailability of pre-abortion and post-abortion counseling by subversively providing information and counseling about abortion to pregnant women throughout Ireland. With the passage of information between women, including through magazines, women's groups, acquaintances, and from messages written on bathroom walls, information about the availability of abortion in Britain was transferred, even to the more

rural areas of Ireland. Rosemary Mahoney was informed, in an interview with Ruth Riddick, somewhat of a cult hero for many Irish women, that despite the demand to shut down Open Line Counselling in 1986, Riddick still manages to provide support services to women over the phone from her home in Dublin (Mahoney 1993: 66). There is also an organization of Irish women living in London, called the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group, who provide Irish women with information about clinics, a place to stay when women come to Britain, and sometimes even funds to women who may not have enough money to pay for the trip and the abortion (IWASG 1988: 70). According to a woman involved in the organization:

Women choose to get involved in IWASG for different reasons. For some it provides an opportunity to continue their involvement in issues that they'd previously worked on in Ireland. For others of us it is a practical way of taking some action around an important issue. We are conditioned as women to be helpful, to look after other people, but there seems to be a contradiction in providing support for women having an abortion, as it would never be seen to be a good cause by either our families or the Irish state. It's a subversive activity - enabling women to have terminations undermines the dominant values of both the Church and State in Ireland. (IWASG 1992: 53)

One interesting aspect of Irish women's determination to obtain abortions that differs from women's control of their own fertility in other countries where abortion is illegal is the absence of backstreet abortions in Ireland (Jackson 1986: 60). Historically, it has been shown that Irish women preferred infanticide over abortion when dealing with an unwanted pregnancy, and this is proven by the overall lack of evidence pointing to the occurrence of backstreet abortions in Ireland, except for the few exceptional cases including the fetus found in the sewers of Dublin in 1983 and the recent report (March 1997) of an illegal abortion in Dublin in 1995 (Jackson 1986: 53, Clarity 1997b). Despite a possible historic trend against illegal abortion in Ireland, it is

primarily the existence of legal abortion in Britain, especially with the ease of travel, that has removed the conditions for backstreet abortions, not only in Ireland, but in Spain and Portugal as well (Jackson 1993: 82).

The SPUC, aware of the power of these subversive activities and of the widespread availability of abortion information from a variety of sources, has tried to force the government to enact measures to prevent the spread of information, including banning books like the UK edition of *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, which lists clinics providing abortion in Britain, and feminist classics like *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. The state has also attempted to prevent magazines commonly read by women from printing any information about clinics in Britain (Riddick 1994: 152, Smyth 1992c: 140). For example, the January 1990 issue of *Cosmopolitan* included a note stating:

Following complaints from the Office of Censorship of Publications in Dublin, this page, which is usually devoted to advertisements providing abortion advice and help, has been left blank in all editions of this magazine published for distribution in the Republic of Ireland. We deeply regret that we are unable to provide the relevant information, but we are advised that if we continue to publish these advertisements it could result in this magazine being made the subject of a prohibition Order under the Censorship Publications Act 1946 as amended by the Health (Family Planning) Act 1979. (Mahoney 1993: 66).

Though the state has been predominantly supportive of the conservative groups in enacting legislation preventing the dissemination of abortion information, it has also been surprisingly lenient in regards to the number of women who travel to Britain to obtain abortions. In fact, Ireland is unusual in that the state has not in recent times jailed women for seeking abortions or for helping women procure abortions (Riddick 1994: 155). However, this could suggest that the state is simply ignoring the needs and practices of women rather than dealing with the problems of legislating women's issues. Irish

feminist Ailbhe Smyth has argued that "women's real life needs do not suit the image of Ireland preferred by our legislators and by our religious police so they effectively deny the very existence of those who do not fit" (Smyth 1992c: 21). It also suggests that amendment campaigners were fighting tenaciously during the referendum not just for the prevention of abortion but also for the overall control of women through their fertility. The abortion referendum became a symbol of a complete rejection of women's changing status in Ireland (Meaney 1994: 189). There is also an implication of a remaining colonial dependence on Britain to take care of Ireland's needs by foisting the problem onto Britain's shores. "In permitting Britain to assume responsibility for Irish women seeking abortions, the state evades the responsibility to address the needs and interests of all its citizens" (Porter 1996).

Irish Feminism After the Referendum: A Feminist Counter-Culture

Private?

They objected, "These things are private,
you must not write about them." But
privacies are the stuff, the sine qua non
of writers: subtly placed, distanced,
transmuted, tangential - merely being,
they will out whatever shape,
the academician's boon, ground for beavering.

Eithne Strong, *Let Live*

Though the period during and after the referendum was considered a litany of defeats for the Irish women's movement, it also was a dramatic turning point in the development of feminism in Ireland. For the first time, women's issues were catapulted into public view and were frequently discussed on a broad scale, finally creating a space in which a distinctly feminist discourse could be

contemplated (Mullin 1991). Over the course of the 1980s, there was a considerable growth and broadening of the women's movement, marked by a flurry of political, ideological and theological debates concerning women's changing role (Jackson 1986: 59). Politically, the women's movement had seen the end of its radical political period. Women continued to campaign, but on a smaller scale and focused more on specific instances of discrimination and on help for battered women and rape victims (Viney 1994: 64). Feminists during this period desired, instead of political agitation, to explore intellectually, culturally, and spiritually, the roots and expressions of women's oppression in Ireland. In so doing, they wanted to create an alternative environment for women to express and explore ideas and this resulted in an "unprecedented blossoming of cultural expression by women" (Mullin 1991: 33). There was a development of women's writing groups and feminist publishing houses, self-help and therapy groups, sports groups, rape crisis centers, lesbian information services, Christian women's networks, women's art groups, and the establishment of Women's Studies as a discipline in the National universities (Beale 1987: 193). "Paradoxically, although the movement was less forceful...extraordinary energy was channelled into the development of what amounts to a new feminist 'counter-culture'" (Smyth 1993: 265).

A considerable amount of literature has resulted from this new wave of feminist expression, including much of the feminist analyses of Irish history and culture that I have used in my research for this paper. Feminist publishing houses have been crucial in developing and releasing this new cultural expression to the outside world, publishing a variety of poetry anthologies, women's history and analyses of current political actions and events (Smyth 1993: 265). One publisher, Attic Press, has printed a vast store of feminist pamphlets, called LIPS, on a variety of topics that resulted in

an anthology edited by Eavan Boland entitled *A Dozen Lips* in 1994. According to Irish feminist and LIP author Ailbhe Smyth, "we felt that this was a time when we wanted to have more *lip* from women. The pamphlets [transform] a centuries-old prohibition, a suppression of women's voices, into something positive" (Gray 1994: 107). These pamphlets explore ideological and social constructions of gender, the role of fertility control in the oppression of women and the maintenance of 'traditional' gender roles in Ireland. The feminist movement as a result has achieved a whole new level in Ireland as more women create a space and a language for specifically Irish feminist issues and needs to come into the open.

Feminists have attempted to regain a sense of women's history in Ireland by examining a wide scope of Irish history and appropriating images of historically powerful women-figures including the *Síle-na-gCíoch*, or Sheela-na-gig (see cover page for illustration), a small figure exposing its genitals which has been found on many early Irish cathedrals and is thought to be a symbol of fertility or protection. Feminists argue that images like the *Síle-na-gCíoch* rebel against national constructions of Irish femininity and unravel representations of that construction in Irish history. Now its image can be seen on feminist posters and publications as a symbol of women's sexuality, Irish feminism and the re-construction of Irish women's identity (Mullin 1991: 48). Other studies have focused on images of powerful women in Irish legends and the changes in women's status from early Irish society to the period of British settlement where the "relatively free and powerful position enjoyed by women in Gaelic society was replaced by their relegation to domesticity and powerlessness under English Common Law" (Ní Chuilleanáin 1985: 3). These studies resulted in ground-breaking collections on women's history like Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha ÓCorráin's *Women in Irish Society: The*

Historical Dimension in 1979 and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's *Irish Women Image and Achievement: Women in Irish Culture from Earliest Times* in 1985 (MacCurtain and ÓCorráin 1979, Ní Chuilleanáin 1985).

Many feminists have been concerned with the construction of a new identity as the old role of wife and mother becomes ever more obsolete. Yet there is a difficulty in reconstructing women's identity without denying a unique Irish nationality, tied in directly with nationalism and Catholicism. Women have confronted the need to be both feminist and nationalist, women and Irish. Poets like Eavan Boland, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Medbh McGuckian and Eithne Strong have explored through poetry the dissidence existing between women's identity and nationalism, the difference between women's actions in modern Ireland and the nationalist and Catholic ideology that has created women into passive asexual mothers (Haberstroh 1996). Boland especially has written extensively in both prose and poetry concerning the position of the Irish woman poet in a long and glorified tradition of male poets in Ireland, attempting to fit herself into a place alongside these male poets and at the same time remain distant from the masculine tradition and construct a new definition and identity of Irishness within poetry (Boland 1994, 1995). In particular, her poem "Mise Éire", a re-working of Patrick Pearse's nationalist poem "I am of Ireland", is an excellent example of Boland's attempt to challenge the romanticized vision of Ireland and illustrate how that vision has oppressed women:

I won't go back to it-

my nation displaced
into old dactyls,

oaths made
by the animal tallows
of the candle,

land of the Gulf Stream,
the small farm,
the scalded memory,
the songs
that bandage up the history,
the words
that make a rhythm of the crime

where time is past.
A palsy of regrets.

No. I won't go back. (Haberstroh 1996: 25)

Feminists have also had to struggle with their relationship to the Catholic Church which has been the institution through which much of Irish women's essentialized identity and oppression has been constructed. Irish nationalist and suffragist of the early 20th century Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington once said that "to read or think oneself out of the Church is a hazard of being a feminist" and this has held true for the continuous battles between the women's movement and the Church in Ireland throughout the 20th century (MacCurtain 1993: 209). The women's movement has consistently been at odds with the Church over the role of women in society and Irish women "are forced to confront the central paradox that their religion is, on the one hand, the embodiment of ideological and institutional sexism, and on the other, a consolation and an inspiration" (Rossiter 1993: 195). This has resulted in somewhat of a spiritual crisis for Irish women that has not been aided by the ever-increasing secularization of Irish society. Though Ireland still characterizes itself as a country dominated by the Catholic religion and over 90% of the population describe themselves as Roman Catholic, the number actually attending Mass has been dropping dramatically in recent years, especially among the youth of Ireland (Sawyer 1993: 174).

In 1985, amidst various reports throughout Ireland of statues of Mary moving, the spiritual crisis of Irish women can be understood. Irish historian Margaret MacCurtain, in an analysis of the event, connected the belief in the spectacle by many Irish men and women to women's oppression in Ireland, especially in the context of the abortion referendum. According to Irish journalist Mary Holland, the moving Marian statues "dramatize the problem facing the Church...for the yearning after the old certainties goes beyond religious practice to reflect an unease with the quality of life in Ireland and with a society which, it now seems to many people, has failed them materially as well as spiritually" (MacCurtain 1993: 205). Though the event itself is questionable, the belief in its existence (reflected by the number of people who have made pilgrimages to the various sites) points to the dramatic changes that have been occurring in Ireland and their effect on the religious, economic, and social stability of Ireland. This was further compounded by the recent exposure of Bishop Casey of Galway as a 'secret father' of a 17 year-old son living in New York as well as a few cases of sexual harassment by priests, which have managed to undermine the moral authority of the Irish clergy and the Catholic hierarchy as a whole (Smyth 1992c: 144, Taylor 1995: 248).

VI. WOMEN IN IRELAND TODAY

The Abortion Legacy: The X Case

A measure of strength of the feminist movement in any country is the strength and confidence of its abortion rights lobby.

Mary Gordon, Irish campaigner

The debates over abortion in Ireland certainly did not end with the referendum and the ensuing legislation. The PLAC's proposal of an abortion referendum unleashed an overwhelming response and Irish society is still reeling from its effects, especially because it created absolutely no barrier to women obtaining safe and legal abortions in Britain with the help and advise of those in Ireland and Britain who saw the ability to choose a fundamental right for women. The ambiguity inherent in the referendum and the resulting legislation, not to mention the availability of abortion in Britain led to an new explosion in the debate over these issues in 1992 with the emergence of the infamous "X" case, an amazingly divisive moral crisis that is still being discussed as an example of the need to clarify abortion laws in Ireland today.

The X case involves a 14 year-old girl who was raped by a friend's father, became pregnant and was taken to England by her parents to obtain an abortion. While in London, her father phoned the police in Ireland to ask if fetal tissue could be used in a case against the rapist, and the police turned the case over to the Attorney General who felt bound to prevent an illegal event from occurring and ordered the family home to Ireland. The family did return, without the abortion. The public was amazed that the family returned and it created a national stir of epic proportions, though no one even knew the girl's name (Taylor 1995: 247). It became not just an issue of the right to have an abortion in the case of rape, but also an issue of the government's role in the

family (Speed 1992: 96). The case was quickly brought to court and though the Irish High Court had initially forbidden the abortion, the Supreme Court overruled the High Court in favor of the girl receiving an abortion in Britain (Sawyer 1993: 171). The court interpreted the 8th amendment's clause allowing abortion when the life of the mother was in danger to cover this particular case because the girl had been threatening to commit suicide since she had returned to Ireland (Taylor 1995: 247).

Most of the people interested in the X case were concerned for the plight of an innocent girl with an enforced pregnancy that she could not legally terminate, and were not engaged in the rhetorical debates that raged between abortion activists over the moral, religious and political implications of the case. However, the case managed to shake the nation once again into awareness about the issues surrounding abortion and it continues to be the symbol of the need for discussion and legislative change to account for the rapid secularization of Irish society. "Evidence from opinion polls taken after the X case showed a growing recognition and acceptance of the social need for abortion in limited circumstances irrespective of Catholic moral teaching" (Smyth 1992c: 144). The X case in Ireland has become similar in power and scope to cases like the Finkbine case in 1962 and Roe vs. Wade in 1973, cases that point to the discrepancies between abortion law and practice and continue to dominant political discussions and debates in the United States (see Ginsburg 1989: 36-37). Combined with the changes wrought by the abortion referendum, the X case has resulted in a fundamental reorganization of the cultural framework in which abortion is understood. In a sense abortion has been legitimized even though it is still illegal in Ireland.

The ruling by no means ended the debates surrounding the X case, and neither side of the abortion debate was satisfied with the Supreme Court

decision. It further complicated the already complex legal issues surrounding abortion in Ireland, by making it lawful in Ireland in the event of there being a "real and substantial risk to the life, as distinct from the health, of the mother" as in the case of threatened suicide (Smyth 1992b: 13). The SPUC was unhappy with this decision because it provided a constitutional loophole for abortion to occur in Ireland and feminists and pro-choice activists were unhappy because of the unreliability of the law in providing for women's needs and its unsuitability as a solution to the problems of reproduction. Primarily the decision revealed the legislative ambiguity of the abortion referendum in providing for the complexity of the issue (Smyth 1992b: 14).

Because the X case revealed this legislative ambiguity to the general population, it resulted in the introduction of a new abortion referendum in 1992. People voted to amend the 8th amendment (the 1983 abortion referendum) with the addition of new subsections to allow the freedom "to travel between the state and another state" and the freedom of access "subject to such conditions as may be laid down by law", and to "information relating to services lawfully available in another state" making it legal for women to both obtain information regarding abortion and to lawfully travel to Britain to obtain legal abortions there (Sawyer 1993: 172). While this provided for the legal existence of women's actions in Ireland, it did nothing to settle the ambiguity surrounding abortion legislation in Ireland, making it legal to obtain abortions despite the fact that they are illegal and considered morally wrong in Ireland. This only shows the complexity of the abortion issue when seen in relation to the economic, political and social instability in Ireland over the past 40 years and its dramatic effect on women's changing role in Ireland. "The confusion and inconsistency of abortion law seems accurately to reflect a state of flux and uncertainty in public opinion" (Reid 1992: 37).

Abortion Rights in the European Community

Lately, things seem to be changing...so now again a strong tide of liberty seems to be coming towards us, swelling and growing and carrying before it all the outposts that help women enslaved and bearing them triumphantly into the life of the nation to which they belong.

Countess Constance Markiewicz, 1909

One essential factor of the X case in Ireland was its influence on the resulting debates and legislation regarding Ireland's relationship to the European Community and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, which was a move to a more politically and economically unified Europe, in 1992. As Europe moves towards a unified political consciousness, issues concerning women's status and the state control of reproduction in regard to basic human rights have come ever more into play. The X case became linked directly to the European Community and the discussion over the Maastricht treaty because the girl not only sought abortion, but she sought the ability to do so by traveling freely between two European states (Taylor 1995: 248). The nationalist issues relating to the incorporation of Ireland have been difficult, and though the financial attractions of being a member have been essential to Ireland's economic expansion, they are somewhat offset by the moral dilemmas which being a member entails (Sawyer 1993: 171). Throughout the X case, 'Europe' was used by both sides of the abortion issue "either as a model of 'Enlightenment' to which Ireland should aspire, and in the face of which should be ashamed by [its] backwardness, or as the latest embodiment of soulless secularism" (Taylor 1995: 247).

A few months after the X case in 1992, the Irish government introduced the Maastricht referendum for the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. In order to make the Maastricht Treaty more palatable for the more morally

conservative members of Ireland's population, especially those who took up seats in the Dáil, the Irish government persuaded the European Community to include a Protocol as a protection clause to the Maastricht Treaty relating directly to abortion legislation in Ireland, despite the fact that abortion was already both unconstitutional and a criminal offense. Protocol 17 provides that:

Nothing in the Treaty on European Union [the Maastricht Treaty], or in the Treaties establishing the European communities, or in the Treaties or Acts modifying or supplementing those Treaties, shall affect the application in Ireland of Article 40(3.3) of the Constitution of Ireland [the article relating to abortion]. (Sawyer 1993: 171)

Therefore with the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, the Irish constitutional ban on abortion would become immune to challenge from any other legal system, for the European Community and especially the European Convention on Human Rights would have little power to counter decisions made regarding abortion as a result of the Protocol (Reid 1992: 35). "The Protocol sought to ensure that abortion could never be introduced in Ireland as a consequence of membership in the European Community" (Smyth 1992b: 17). In response, feminist groups quickly organized and campaigned for the removal of the Protocol because it would prevent pregnant women from traveling abroad for abortions, from obtaining information about abortion, and most importantly would prevent pregnant women from having any kind of legal recourse to the European Court of Justice with regard to abortion (Smyth 1992c: 18). After the ensuing uproar over the Protocol, so soon in the wake of the X case, the Irish government relented; they did not remove the Protocol but modified it with a Solemn Declaration, a legal interpretation of Protocol 17, which reads:

That it was and is their intention that the Protocol shall not limit freedom either to travel between member states or...to obtain in

Ireland or make available in Ireland information relating to services lawfully available in member states. (Sawyer 1993: 172)

With the inclusion of the Solemn Declaration, Ireland conceded, through a referendum, to ratify the Maastricht Treaty and further the goals of the European Union, despite the possible moral threats to Irish society. The Maastricht Treaty therefore provided an outlet in the European Court for Irish women and men to appeal for changes in Irish legislation from the outside.

Somewhat coincidentally in the same year, the Dublin Well Woman Centre appealed to the European Court in response to the earlier ruling that prevented the dispersal of information regarding abortion. The European Court found in favor of the Well Woman Centre, stating that to deny a woman's right to receive factual information was in breach of Article 10 of the 1980 European Conventions on Human Rights which states "the life of the foetus is intimately connected with and cannot be regarded in isolation from, the life of the pregnant woman' and if protection of the fetus is seen as "an absolute, abortion would be an illegal activity even if the pregnant mother's life is at risk, contrary to the object and purposes of the European Convention", overruling the 1988 Irish High Court decision against the Well Woman Centre and Open Line Counselling (Sawyer 1993: 117).

People in Ireland seeking social change have discovered that they will be far more successful by appealing to the European Community than gaining any type of social change within the Irish government. In fact, many of the social reforms achieved in Ireland in recent years have been as a result of membership in the European Community rather than through the initiative of the Irish government (Holland 1992: 10). Regarding the abortion issue specifically, "while conservatives have sought to define an absolute

Constitutional right to life for the foetus in all circumstances other than those acceptable to Catholic theology, feminists and other liberals have mobilized the resources of European Community law and the Convention on Human Rights to support rights for women to travel abroad for abortions and to reasonable information about abortion services abroad" (Reid 1992: 37). The ability to rely on the European Court for changes in social legislation is a powerful mechanism for oppressed groups, like women, who have little weight in the Irish political system (Coulter 1994: 107). The European Community has provided the means for change that have succeeded in altering both Irish men and women's conceptions about women's role, as well as aiding in altering Irish law to reflect changing attitudes.

The Changing Face of Irish Women

Wildish things these
little newbreed Irish girls, scarce
parented, not to be grooved into rectangular requisite
Eithne Strong, *Identity*

Compared to Europe and the United States, Irish women are still far behind in basic civil rights, including availability of reproductive rights such as abortion, women's health and counseling, information and education about sexuality and pregnancy, access to divorce, and equality in the workplace (Beale 1987: 3). Over the last twenty years, Ireland has moved through periods of economic development and severe economic depression, with corresponding fluctuations in emigration rates and nationalist and Catholic fervor (Smyth 1993: 250). A quarter of the Irish population lives below the poverty line and women form the majority of those receiving some sort of social welfare from the state (Beale

1987: 18, Jackson 1993). Yet compared to Ireland 20 years ago, women have achieved an extraordinary amount of equality and are far more visible in the public sphere. In 1993 married women formed 41.5% of the female labor force in Ireland, a telling sign of changing attitudes towards women's work and motherhood (Gardiner 1993: 54). Issues concerning sexuality, abortion, contraception, and women's place in Irish society are openly discussed and debated (Smyth 1993: 266). Most importantly, the supposed national homogeneity of Irish culture is gone, and a diverse range of cultural identities has emerged in its wake that provides the opportunity for women to expand and redefine their social roles.

Yet equality on paper does not necessarily suggest that equality in the workplace, and in the public eye, is in practice in Ireland. Developing a high-profile and active feminist political stance in Ireland has been extremely difficult for Irish feminists due to its inherent challenge to the nationalist Irish identity. Perhaps people fear that modifications in women's role is dangerous to Ireland, that something integral to Irish culture will be lost with the improvement of women's rights (Sawyer 1993: 178). It is primarily the result of overall economic development and the influence of women's resistance, especially in the context of the women's movement, that have made these changes possible. According to feminist Ursula Barry:

Against all odds, women have fought tenaciously in this country and have forced through real changes in our lives. Hundreds and thousands of women are using contraceptives, tens of thousands of women are separated and seeking their legal rights, thousands of Irish women continue to travel to England for abortions, more and more married women are in paid employment, increasing numbers of women are rearing children outside marriage, lesbians are becoming more visible, more vocal and more confident, women are talking, writing, performing, producing, and simply expecting more. (Barry 1988b: 318)

According to Irene Silverblatt, "History tends to be 'made' by those who dominate" and women have frequently suffered from their lack of access to positions in historical construction (Silverblatt 1991: 163). The creation of spaces for women's voices to be heard provides women with the opportunity to re-write history in a more inclusive manner. In Ireland, women are in the process of re-constructing their Irish identities in a variety of ways, broadening their socially-accepted roles and expanding their opportunities. The contemporary women's movement in Ireland encompasses a melange of issues, concepts, and opinions, in a newly defined space through which women's voices can be heard (Beale 1987: 193). Despite the teachings of the Church, Ireland has one of the highest birth-rates outside of marriage in Europe (Coulter 1993: 47). Women are defining the concept of motherhood in a more diverse and open manner, to include the alternative desires and roles that women are choosing. More and more women are becoming single parents, despite the practical and ideological difficulties of illegitimacy in Irish society, where both mother and child are still denied rights and access to social welfare (Beale 1987: 60). Women have the opportunity and ability to make choices about their sexuality, their occupation, and their identity. Unfortunately, acceptance of these abilities may still be far in the horizon. Sexuality in many ways is still an obstacle in Irish society. The oppression of gay and lesbian men and women in Irish society continues, reflecting an extreme form of the general Catholic-imposed disapproval of non-marital sexual relations (Beale 1987: 96).

A culmination of the dramatic changes that women's resistance has wrought in Ireland is the result of the divorce referendum in 1995. Initially in 1986, a referendum was introduced to legalize divorce to a limited extent in order to make some provision for couples who had previously no legislative

recourse for separation. The 1986 divorce referendum became a secondary battle for the organizations involved in the PLAC, who joined forces again to campaign against the passing of the referendum. They succeeded in their efforts and the majority of Irish people voted against the referendum. However, the lack of any type of officially-sanctioned separation remained a difficulty for couples seeking separation and most couples were forced to make private arrangements for separation and maintenance (Beale 1987: 80). In many cases, a man or woman was forced to move to Britain or the United States and obtain a divorce abroad, a pattern of exporting the problem that has become extremely common in Irish culture (Beale 1987: 78). In 1989, Judicial Separation was established, which provided a couple with legal separation if they agreed to live apart for a year. Acceptable reasons for separation included adultery, desertion, intolerable behavior within the family dwelling, or the evidence of an abnormal marital relationship. This legal separation basically provided couples with everything except the right to remarry, and took into account the maintenance and provision for children's welfare, the ownership and occupation of property, the disposal of personal property and the arrangements for settling outstanding debts (Sawyer 1993: 107).

In 1995, another referendum was brought to the Irish public, advocated by the Taoiseach John Bruton, for the removal of the divorce ban in the Constitution. Marriage breakdowns have increased in Ireland as elsewhere, and it has been estimated that between 75,000 and 80,000 people were officially separated in 1995 (Holland 1995). The referendum provided for people seeking a divorce, but the couple would have to prove not only that reconciliation was impossible, but that they have lived apart for four of the previous five years (Clarity 1997a). This time, despite the efforts of the

Church and conservative groups, the referendum to legalize divorce passed by a vote of 50.3% to 49.7% (Clarity 1997a). Though the change in public opinion reflected in the passing of the referendum in 1995 shows the downward trend of the Church's influence on legislation and attitudes in Ireland, the closeness of the vote also reflects the grip that the Church still maintains over Irish morality. The campaign against the referendum succeeded in reducing the public's support of the referendum from an original 61% of people supporting some sort of divorce legislation to the resulting 50% who voted 'Yes' to the referendum at the polls (Holland 1995). Through the Supreme Court, the conservative groups involved in the campaign successfully prevented the coalition government, who introduced the legislation, from spending public money canvassing for a 'Yes' vote, and spent a considerable amount of money themselves to advocate a 'No' vote, with slogans including "Hello Divorce, Goodbye Daddy - Vote No" (Holland 1995). In a similar manner to conservative campaigns in the past, these organizations appealed to women's weaknesses, to women's inability to maintain a family without her husband's support. Divorce has become another fight between those who want a secular society and those dedicated to the conservatism of de Valera's 1937 Constitution (Holland 1995). That the Irish public was not quite persuaded by the conservative arguments reflects the changes in Irish society and the willingness of many Irish people in confronting those changes.

The election of Mary Robinson as the first female president of Ireland in 1990 has signaled a new era for women's expression in Ireland and Robinson's popularity among Irish men and women only shows how willing many are to become a more pluralist society. Though the presidency holds little power and is largely a symbolic representation of the state, Robinson's term as president has marked a turning point in the secularization and modernization of Irish

society (Mahoney 1993: 283). Her focus on women's issues and human rights has generated a strong sense of renewed belief and optimism among Irish women (Smyth 1993: 250). Robinson, an early women's rights legislator and member of the Dáil since the 1970s, is actively engaged in the changing nature of Irish society. According to Robinson, "I have this real sense that at the moment we are experiencing as a people a very deep crisis in ourselves. I hope we have the courage, which we have not always had in the past to look squarely at the problem and say 'this is something we have got to resolve'" (quoted in Holland 1992: 10). Mary Robinson has become only one of a new wave of prominent female heroes, "voices for the voiceless", who are symbols of resistance and represent change such as Ruth Riddick, Mary Holland and Eavan Boland (Mahoney 1993: 282). And of course there is a string of martyrs that remind women of how far they have come, including the girl involved in the X case, Eileen Flynn, a single woman who lost her teaching job because of pregnancy and cohabitation with a married man, and Ann Lovett, a fifteen-year-old girl who died giving birth to an illegitimate child in a Marian grotto (O'Connor 1995: 185).

Symbols such as these, added to the heroic female symbols in Ireland's past, provide Irish women with the ability to realize what has been achieved and what still can be gained. "These individual women, and the public debate they inadvertently generated, has played an important role in challenging the discourses within which women are traditionally defined" (O'Connor 1995: 186). These 'normal' women have challenged in their own ways the social control of their bodies and their lives and represent the continual struggle for women to make their voices heard. It is through these symbols that women's cultural identities will be broadened and redefined, and the result will be a reconstruction of the Irish national identity. "As women claim and change

their role and seek a different identity for themselves as women, they will also change the meaning of national identity" (Meaney 1994: 201).

Women in Ireland today are living in an Ireland far less insular and parochial than it was twenty years ago (Smyth 1993: 246). Ireland, by becoming a member of the European Community, has been forced to adapt to a more European-influenced framework that is aiding in the re-construction of women's Irish identity. With the opportunity to apply to the European Community for support in their resistance, women have reached a new plateau of women's rights and opportunities in Ireland. The challenge facing Irish women today is in developing a discourse through which all women's lives have value, creating a space in which all voices can be heard. In the future, perhaps, Irish women will not feel ostracized for expressing and making choices about their sexuality and fertility. The challenge facing Ireland today is the changing face of Irish women, and adapting to the emerging Irish identities in a changing society.

VII. CONCLUSION

An Exploration in Theory

One of the most intriguing elements inherent in anthropological theory is its dynamic nature. Anthropologists are constantly questioning the relevance and usefulness of various theories, changing theoretical models to fit new ethnographic data and responding to new critiques of older data. The sub-discipline of feminist anthropology appeared as a result of this constant redefinition, and is now itself being questioned and redefined to become more inclusive and useful in anthropological research. Recent theories, influenced by postmodern critiques, have provided the means to better understand the diversity of gender configurations based on individual experience by acknowledging the limitations of specific categories such as 'women' and 'state'. However, in the eyes of most anthropologists, these theories have not managed to depreciate the value of general models for analysis. Anthropologists like Irene Silverblatt still remain aware of the uses of these models in interpreting general trends throughout cultures while maintaining that these models can never fully explain complex social arrangements in specific societies (Silverblatt 1988, 1991).

One of the primary benefits of theories of women and the state is that they are rooted in historical processes (Silverblatt 1991: 147). Therefore, the use of these theories challenges previous anthropological conceptions of rural, and urban, Irish life and provides the ability to view the current changes in Ireland from an anthropological perspective. Irish culture is certainly not dead as a result of industrialization and the decline of the rural economy, and anthropologists have been surprisingly slow to engage in a new era of research in this area. It is in the spirit of Silverblatt's critiques of generalized theories of women and the state that I have attempted this discussion of the specific

history of women in Ireland. By formulating a framework for the study of women in Irish society based on anthropological theories of women and the state, I have been able to examine the complex factors that have assisted in the construction of women's identities as mothers and the maintenance of those identities through the state control of reproduction.

It is through the understanding of women as social actors that women's roles in Ireland can be better interpreted and evaluated within the context of the power of the Irish state'. Women's resistance has become a useful category for a more intricate analysis of the relationship between women and the state that takes into account women's specific avenues for expressing power in an oppressive situation. By examining a specific historical event in Irish history - the abortion referendum- and its place in the broader social realities of Irish culture, I have observed how complex social structures are reflected in a historical moment. I have examined particularly what factors were involved in making abortion such a divisive issue in Irish society, what resulted from the referendum, and especially women's activities and responses to the issues surrounding the abortion referendum, and this examination has provided me as an outside observer of Irish culture with the ability to better interpret the complex relationship of power that exists between women and the state. While Silverblatt found little corroboration between theories of women and the state and her own research on women in Incan society, I have been greatly aided in my understanding of the status of Irish women by engaging these theories, most likely because these theories were constructed within a European Enlightenment tradition of state formation that would have influenced the structures of the Irish state (Silverblatt 1991: 147).

By relying on feminist anthropology and theories of women and the state, it is only fair to acknowledge the politics of a feminist re-appraisal of

anthropology in Ireland. There is no denying the political implications of a study based on feminist anthropology, and the limitations it might represent to a study of Irish culture, and I have approached this study with the deliberate attempt to specifically capture women's experiences in Ireland. Studying women's lives and their relationship with the state is inherently a political action. Of course it is impossible to study women without studying the powers that interact with and are shaped by women's choices. There is a tangible conviction underlying this paper that women are able in a variety of ways to express their diverse voices and make choices about their lives that resist the dominant power structures. I argue that this understanding of women's relationship to power structures is essential in the study of women's 'muted' past.

It is exciting to see how far feminist anthropologists have come in the interpretation of gender hierarchies. It is even more exciting to anticipate where the next generation of feminist scholarship will take us. It is clear that anthropologists relying on theories of gender need to become more aware of other power dynamics involved in social processes by building more inclusive and diversified frameworks for the analysis of gender constructs. Issues such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, and the effects of colonialism and the spread of a world capitalist economy that serve to vary the experiences within societies and break down generalizing categories must be analyzed in conjunction with issues of gender. Gender studies cannot remain closed off from other realms of power structures between human beings and within social structures and institutions if they are to succeed in reformulating anthropological research. Anthropologists relying on feminist studies must also be aware of the risks of re-constructing histories and ethnographic data that incorporate women's diverse voices but fail to include variant voices that

do not correspond with feminist theories. According to Silverblatt, feminist anthropologists "have to take account of our own field - its ideas and procedures, its institutionalizations and practices - by assessing its place in the thicket of social, ideological, and political relations" (Silverblatt 1991: 164).

There is much to be gained from a new wave of anthropological research in Ireland, and ethnographic data should play a fundamental role in that research. I would greatly like to see a future in the study of Irish women's place in a new Ireland and how Irish culture responds to its own "Europeanization" in the coming years. This study suggests a dramatically changing role for women in Irish society as Ireland adjusts itself to the past 40 years of cultural turbulence. Grasping the complex processes that construct Irish women's identity within a historical and theoretical framework is only the beginning. Placing Irish women within their own past can only aid ethnographic research of Irish women in the future.

VIII. APPENDIX: A USEFUL CHRONOLOGY

- 1861: Offences Against the Person Act (British) makes abortion illegal under any circumstances
- 1916: Easter Rising in Dublin, Republican Proclamation outlining intentions of Irish Republic
- 1918: Representation of the People Act (British) allows women (married, householders, or university graduates) over 30 the right to vote
- 1921: Signing of Treaty to partition Ireland into North and South, resulting in Civil War until 1922
- 1922: Independence from Britain, original constitution written for the Irish Free State
Irish Free State gives right to vote and equal civil rights to all adult women
- 1929: Censorship of Publications Act made it illegal to advocate the use of contraceptives
- 1932: Fianna Fáil under Eamon de Valera comes into power in the Dáil
- 1935: Criminal Law Amendment Act tightens State control over family planning by prohibiting sale or importation of contraceptives
Conditions of Employment Act prohibits women from working in certain industries, fixed proportion of female workers in certain circumstances
- 1937: de Valera's Constitution ratified, affords special position to Catholic Church
- 1941: Irish Housewives Association forms, United Irishwomen becomes Irish Countrywomen's Association
- 1946: Censorship of Publications Act clarifies the sexual priority of Irish censorship
- 1948: Transition from Free State to Republic
- 1932: Beginning of a period of isolationist policies in Ireland under de Valera, continues until 1959
- 1967: Abortion becomes legal in Britain
- 1969: First Family Planning clinic opens in Dublin
- 1970: State provides Deserted Wives allowance, first legislation in Ireland to provide for deserted women and single parent families
- 1971: Pill Train to Belfast where a group of feminists took the Belfast-Dublin train and returned with illegally imported contraceptives as a protest
First women's group forms in Dublin, heralds the beginning of the Irish women's movement
- 1972: Ireland becomes a member of the European Economic Community, signaling the end of a long period of economic isolation
Cherish, a self-help group for single parent families forms, campaigns for better financial and social rights for single parents and their children
Government establishes Commission on the Status of Women that defines 49 recommendations to eliminate discrimination

- Referendum to Article 42 removes the privileged place of the Catholic Church in the Constitution, with the reserved support of the Hierarchy
- 1973: Removal of Marriage Bar in Civil Service
 Bishops of Ireland make a statement that the State is not obliged to defend the moral teaching of the Catholic Church through legislation
 Mrs. Mary McGee brings case against the State for confiscating a contraceptive jelly she has ordered from abroad, High Court found that the 1935 Act prohibiting the importation of contraceptives violated a married couple's right to privacy
 Mary Robinson, TD, introduces a bill to legalize, to a limited extent, the sale and use of birth control, rejected by the Dáil
- 1974: Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act for equal pay, but women seeking equal pay can compare only with men employed on the same payroll
- 1977: Employment Equality Act, as a result of membership in the EU
- 1979: Health (Family Planning) Act legalizes contraceptive devices only on a doctor's prescription and only obtainable from a pharmacist, giving doctors and pharmacists the right to refuse on moral grounds, called 'an Irish solution to an Irish problem' by its author, Charles Haughey
 Pope John Paul II visits Ireland calling on the Irish people to protect Catholic morality
 At this time, five family planning centers are open in Dublin and one each in Cork, Galway, Limerick, Bray, and Navan--all openly selling contraceptives to anyone who wants them
- 1980: Women's Right to Choose Group forms in Dublin, establishing Irish Pregnancy Counselling Centre
 SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) forms and introduces a referendum for an amendment to the Constitution protecting the rights of the fetus
- 1981: Minimal maternity leave given to working women
- 1983: Abortion referendum passes and amended to Constitution
 New Ireland Forum compares women's status in the North and South, in many ways finds situation of women in the Republic compares unfavorably with that of women in Ulster
- 1984: Eileen Flynn, secondary school teacher, dismissed on grounds that she had a baby out of wedlock and her partner is a separated man; appeals to the State and loses
- 1985: Amendment Act allows condoms and other non-medical contraceptives to be dispensed in pharmacies to adults of 18 and over
- 1986: Dublin High Court finds Dublin Well Woman Centre and Open Line Counselling in breach of law when providing counseling and information about lawful abortion in UK (in defiance of European Commission of Human Rights)
 Divorce Referendum arises to remove ban on divorce, shot down
- 1988: Well Woman Centre and Open Line Counselling shut down by efforts of SPUC
- 1990: Election of first female president Mary Robinson, women's rights activist and member of the Irish Labour Party

- 1992: European Court finds in favor of Well Woman Centre--to deny a woman's right to receive factual information is in breach of Article 10 of the European Convention (overruled 1986 High Court decision)
Amendment Act lowers age for buying contraceptives to 17
'X' Case--a 14 year old rape victim forbidden by High Court to obtain abortion in England, overruled by Supreme Court of European Community
Amendment to Article 40(3.3) allowing freedom 'to travel between the State and another State' and freedom of access 'subject to such conditions as may be laid down by law' to 'information relating to services lawfully available in another state'.
- 1993: 1979 Family Planning Act virtually repealed, effectively abolishing age limits and legalizing the sale of condoms in vending machines, allowing definition of contraceptives to exclude condoms to stop the spread of AIDS
- 1995: Divorce Referendum brought again to the Dáil, this time the vote passes and the ban on divorce is conditionally removed

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