Comparing Ireland and Quebec: The Case of Feminism

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Comparing Ireland and Quebec

THE CASE OF FEMINISM[1]

A notable body of research in Irish-Canadian Studies

has emerged in recent decades in key areas, particularly on the history of the Irish Diaspora in Canada (for example, see several contributions in O'Driscoll and Reynolds, 1988; Akenson, 1996; and Bielenberg, 2000). In recent years, scholars have also become more aware of several interesting connections between Ireland and Quebec, in particular. This work has also centred mostly on the history of the Irish Diaspora and the ethnic Irish community *in* Quebec. However, a few scholars (notably Tom Garvin, Linda Cardinal, Micheline Dumont and Ronald Rudin) have also drawn attention to the fact that *comparative* parallels between Irish and Quebec society have been understated in the arena of Canadian studies. According to Tom Garvin:

> Ireland, it is felt, like Quebec which offers so many historical analogies, must act to preserve and protect her moral character without much moral or cultural support from elsewhere. (1988: 6)

Recently, both Dumont (2000: 80-81) and Cardinal (2000) have drawn particular attention to the comparable experience of women in Ireland and Quebec historically. The principal aim of this article is to develop further exchange with scholars in Quebec studies by analysing some comparable themes in the political and social development of feminism since its emergence in both contexts in the nineteenth century. Detailed accounts of feminism and the women's movement in both Quebec (Dumont et al., 1987; Backhouse and Flaherty et al, 1992) and Ireland now exist, which can provide a starting point for more exchange and debate (see Connolly, 1996; Connolly, 2003; Connolly and O'Toole, 2005). Real barriers in advancing a comparative Irish/ Quebec agenda exist, however – combined with difficulties between Anglophone and Francophone feminists in Canada itself. Roach Pierson (1991: 87-88) argues:

> Complicating matters in Canada is the historic Anglophone-Francophone conflict that criss-crosses the other hierarchies of power and differences. While in no way perfectly resolved, there had been, until the recent constitutional crisis, a lessening of the power differential between Anglophones and Francophones and a greater acceptance of the 'French fact' in Anglophone Canada, as a result of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, the resurgence of Quebec nationalism, and the federal government's commitment to bilingualism. Nonetheless, the speaking of English has still dominated at 'national' conferences...Moreover, the phenomenon of the 'two solitudes' has persisted in Canadian feminism and in the writing and teaching of Canadian women's history.... Evidence of this is to be

found in a tendency on the part of both Anglophone and Francophone women's historians to set linguistic cultural boundaries to the scope of their work.

The fact that Ireland is a predominantly English-speaking nation (regardless of an active Irish-language movement) has undoubtedly prevented more comparative research and exchange between scholars in Ireland and Quebec. The reality that Irish studies scholars tend to both write in English and basically rely on English language sources (mirroring in some sense the "two solitudes" of Canadian studies) is explicit in this article and in my work. Nevertheless, this article will draw on selected sources in the field of Quebec women's studies, as well as my own extensive research in the arena of Irish feminism (Connolly, 2003), in order to explore some evident points of comparison. In particular, some widely held assumptions concerning feminism both in Ireland and Quebec are explored and challenged in the analysis, including: 1. The contention that the first and second waves of feminism came "late" or "later" to Quebec and Ireland where feminism has always been historically *weaker*; 2. The related assumption that women in Ireland and Quebec have historically been less modern/more oppressed than women in other European countries/the rest of North America because of Catholicism and nationalism; 3. The presumption that the "origins" of feminism in Quebec and Ireland are always to be found *elsewhere*.

In comparative studies of nineteenth and twentieth century feminism, the women's movement in the Irish case is usually presumed to have emerged "late." This assumption also has resonance in Quebec where the "lateness" of the women's movement occurs mainly in comparison with Anglo-Canadian and American liberal feminism (see Backhouse and O'Flaherty et al., 1992 and de Seve, 2000). The so-called later emergence and weaknesses of feminism in Ireland and Quebec are generally considered to be a consequence of the salience of religion and nationalist politics in both societies. Were some feminists/groups of western feminists comparatively more "modern" or progressive than others by virtue of their socio-religious or "national" identity? If so, what is the basis of this view? The so-called "weakness" of feminism in Ireland and Quebec is particularly evident both in the dominant historiography of western feminism and in discourses of modernity, progress and development which have been

applied to both societies. The consequences of inappropriately "measuring" the development of feminism in Ireland and Quebec against other feminisms/feminism in other societies to the neglect of important considerations in both contexts are addressed throughout this article.

Ireland and Quebec: 'Late'/'Later' to Feminism?

In a comparative review of the first wave of feminism, Martin Pugh suggests:

> The strength of the women's movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century unquestionably lay in north-western Europe and its colonial offshoots, that is Scandinavia, Germany, Britain, the United States and Australasia. Clearly the Protestant and Anglo-Saxon societies, with their comparatively liberal political culture and parliamentary systems, offered the best conditions for feminism; conversely, in the Catholic-dominated societies of southern Europe and in the autocracies of east-central Europe women's movements were slower to emerge and generally weaker.
> (1997:158)

There is ample evidence to suggest that, in the case of Ireland, this is an insufficient view. A new wave of historical research has been emerging in Irish studies since the late 1970s which essentially challenges the perception that historically feminism in Ireland was less modern or always emerged later than "other" feminisms (in women's history especially, see: MacCurtain and Ó Corrain et al., 1978; Ward, 1983; Ward, 1995; Ward, 1997; Cullen, 1985; Cullen Owens, 1984; O'Dowd and Valiulis et al., 1997; Murphy, 1989; Luddy and Murphy et al., 1990; Luddy and Cullen et al., 1995). Existing evidence of the political activism of individual women (Cullen and Luddy et al., 1995) and autonomous political organizations and campaigns *led by* women in Ireland dates to at least the 1830s. Luddy (1997) for example suggests that Quaker women's anti-slavery societies, in existence in the 1830s, provided a breeding ground for the emergence of other issues in the second half of the nineteenth century (see also Quinlan, 2003). The historical evidence suggests that feminism in Ireland was not "slower to emerge" nor was it "comparatively weaker."

The fact that women crossed or transcended (and often rejected) religious lines to co-operate and create unique feminist movements in countries simplified as "Catholic" is ignored in Pugh's analysis. Moreover, women from minority religions in either "Anglo-Saxon" or "Catholic" countries cannot be incorporated in this kind of framework. In Ireland, for example, Protestant women were as important as Catholic activists during the first wave of feminism and in the maintenance of an active women's movement in the aftermath of independence, from the 1920s until the 1960s (see Connolly, 2003). Furthermore, feminism in Ireland has never been exclusively confined to national politics and cultural boundaries. Women's historians have demonstrated how Irish feminists consistently attended international conferences, meetings and congresses in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An international network of feminist activists and organisations was advanced by improvements in communications from the nineteenth century on, which facilitated the movement of individuals and ideas across national frontiers. Feminist ideas and politics were circulated more widely through the medium of papers and books.

A range of demands was consistently campaigned for during the second half of the nineteenth century in Ireland and formed a pre-history of twentieth century activism. In particular, critical advances in women's rights in the 1860-1900 period are evident. Significant achievements were made in areas such as, married women's control of their own property, education, employment and local government in this period (see Cullen, 1985; Cullen and Luddy et al., 1995; and Quinlan, 2003). Prominent mobilising issues during the first wave in Ireland included the Married Women Property Acts (1870, 1874, 1882, 1907) and the campaign to repeal the series of Contagious Diseases Acts passed in the 1860s (see Cullen, 1985: 191). Cullen-Owens (1984) cites how the improvement of educational opportunities for women in the last quarter of the nineteenth century particularly served to highlight the limited sphere open to Irish women.

The first push for political equality is traced to the 1870s with the demand for "votes for ladies, as distinct from women - based on property owning qualifications" (Heron, 1993: 131). A more broad based and concerted women's movement expanded in Ireland from the turn of the twentieth century (involving prominent women leaders, in which published research has now been conducted, such as Constance Markievicz, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Eva Goore Booth, Louie Bennett and Helen Chevenix) and militant suffrage and nationalist strands mobilised. Between 1912 and 1914 there were twenty-six convictions of suffragettes (Heron, 1993: 131). Early work in women's history tended to concentrate on the interplay between suffrage and nationalist-feminism in the decades before the Irish Republic/the six counties of Northern Ireland was established in 1921.

The involvement of prominent women in the nationalist struggle has received particular attention in the field of Irish women's history. When Maud Gonne came to Ireland in 1888, all nationalist organisations excluded women from membership (Ward, 1995: 3). Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Erin) was formed in 1900 and Gonne became its first president. The organisation published a feminist journal entitled *Bean na hÉireann*, providing evidence of how Irish feminists saw themselves in this period. The stated objectives of Inghinidhe na hÉireann (cited in Ward, 1995) were: 1. The re-establishment of the complete independence of Ireland; 2. To encourage the study of Gaelic, Irish Literature, History, Music and Art, especially among the young, by the organising of classes for the above objectives; 3. To support and popularise Irish manufacture; 4. To discourage the reading and circulation of low English literature, the singing of English songs, the attending of vulgar English entertainments at the theatres and music hall, and to combat in every way English influence, which is doing so much injury to the artistic taste and refinement of the Irish people; 5. To form a fund called the National Purposes Fund, for the furtherance of the above objects. In 1908, Inghinidhe na hÉireann launched the first nationalist women's journal, *Bean na hÉireann* which was edited by Helena Maloney. However, in the same year a vibrant feminist critique of nationalism emerged. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was among those who refused to join Inghinidhe

na hÉireann and co-founded the militant Irishwomen's Franchise League in 1908 (Ward, 1995: 32; Ward, 1998). Whether to campaign for the vote while Ireland was still within a British jurisdiction, or not, divided Irish feminists - i.e. the question of whether the needs of the nation or the needs of women should be put first (see Ryan, 1995; Ryan, 1996).

Women's historians have also revealed that contrary to the received view that the Irish women's movement "disappeared," first wave feminist activists *did continue* to organise politically in the post-independence period and, although their opposition *was* limited and constrained, it highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the impact of organised feminist resistance in this period (see Beaumont, 1997; Daly, 1995; Cullen, 1997). A specific network of organisations sustained a women's social movement in the aftermath of independence. Consideration of networks of diverse women's groups offers an alternative perspective on both the politics exercised and institutional constraints faced by Irish women, in the period from the foundation of the State to the 1960s. In particular, it challenges the predominant *impression* that feminism had terminated as well as the view that because Irish women were confined to the private sphere of family and home in the period from the foundation of the State until the 1960s, they were oppressed in direct, unproblematic ways.

In Ireland, involvement in pre-suffrage, nationalist, labour and cultural organisations before independence had an enduring effect on a *core cadre* of feminist women who continued their activism in smaller numbers from the 1920s on, in organisations such as the IWWU (Irish Women Workers Union), Cumann na mBan (until the 1930s), the Women's Prisoners Dependants League, the Women's Social and Progressive League, the Suffrage and Local Government Association, the Joint Committee of Women's Societies and Social Workers (formed in 1931) and in the founding of the Irish Housewives Association in the 1940s (see Tweedy, 1992; Beaumont, 1997; Lagerkvist, 1998; Connolly, 1996). The Women's Citizens (the continuation of the original Dublin Women's Suffrage Association founded in 1876) and the two women graduate associations of Trinity and the National University were continually active in this period (see Valiulis, 1997; Beaumont, 1997).[2] During the 1920s and 1930s, especially, they campaigned on issues imposed legally by the new State: such as effective exclusion of women from juries, sex and marriage barriers to working in the civil service and some other occupations (known as "the marriage bar"), and limitations on the employment of women in certain industries. The National University Women's Graduates Association played a leading role in the campaign against the draft 1937 constitution and successfully opposed certain clauses.[3] However, the 1937 Constitution of Ireland still includes the following clause, in Article 41.2: "Woman by her life within the home gives to the State a support without which the Common Good cannot be achieved." The Joint Committee of Women's Societies also opposed various articles of the Constitution, along with the IWWU, the Women's Social and Progressive League and the Standing

Committee on Legislation Affecting Women (Clancy, 1990: 231).

Beaumont concludes, "twenty-five years after the extension of the franchise, there was still an active and vibrant women's movement in the Irish Free State" (1997: 187). Cullen Owens (1997) suggests many feminist women maintained good working relationships in this period even when they differed on issues, such as pacifism, republicanism, socialism, and the growing Catholic power in Irish society. Over time this network of first wave feminists coalesced with other women's groups, including the Irish Countrywomen's Association founded in 1910 and then later the Irish Housewives association founded in the 1940s. The fact that a network of women's organisations that developed in Ireland from the 1940s onwards was critical in the mobilisation of second wave feminism suggests that the historical antecedents of feminism in Ireland were as important as international events in the widespread resurgence of the Irish women's movement from the late 1960s onwards. The Irish Housewives Association and the Association of Business and Professional followed the recommendation of the International Alliance of Women, of which they were members, and established an ad hoc committee on women's rights in 1968, which successfully lobbied the government to establish a National Commission on the Status of Women. The extensive recommendations of the Report of the Commission on the Status of Women became a blueprint for change throughout the 1970s. The ad hoc committee subsequently established the Council for the Status of Women (now the National Women's Council), which became and remains the largest umbrella group representing women in Ireland.

It is generally assumed that the Irish women's movement retreated in the aftermath of nationalist revolution/ Independence. Elsewhere (Connolly, 2003; Connolly 1996) I have challenged the view that the women's movement stopped mobilising in the decades after Independence/ Partition by documenting the innovation of the women's movement in the period when it is generally assumed (all) "women" accepted the economic stagnation, church domination and material and cultural poverty of Irish society in the post-independence decades.[4] The impact and extent of the women's movement in this period is not exaggerated, however. The social and political climate was systemically opposed to women's full participation in the public sphere for some decades and the reality is that organised feminism was not an *immediate* concern for most women in Ireland in this period. Nevertheless, the goals and achievements of a tangible women's movement cannot be dismissed or separated from the overall context of Irish women's lives throughout this period, including their economic and social lives. Furthermore, the activism of some women's groups was critical in creating the conditions and necessary organisational base for a second peak wave to emerge in the late 1960s. Moreover, organisational continuity between the first and second peak waves of feminism in Ireland is apparent in this period (see Connolly, 1996). The fact that activists connected with the first wave movement displayed a high degree of organisation and coalesced with newer groups in the 1940s (including, the Irish Housewives

Association) to form a network that continued into the second wave contradicts the impression of Pugh. How could the second wave, for example, be merely considered to have emerged "late"/"out of nowhere" in Ireland when an active women's movement was so long in existence?

Similar ideas have emerged in Quebec studies (see especially Dumont, 1992; Dumont, 2000; Cardinal, 2000). Micheline Dumont (1992 and 2000), in particular, has developed a comparable analysis, through her study of the period after the first wave when it is generally considered feminism had also expired in Quebec. Dumont adopts a revisionist stance to the history of feminism by integrating Sarah Evans' anti-chronological view of the women's movement to capture the particularity of the women's movement in Quebec. Jill Vicker's work, for example, is critiqued because she cannot "fit" Quebec into any of her key themes. Dumont provocatively challenges the dominant periodization "applied to" the Quebec movement, arguing that the Quebec case cannot be simply applied to or support the Anglo-Canadian experience/chronology of feminism. In a piece written to commemorate the twenty years of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, Dumont details empirically the extensive activism of urban Quebec women's groups such as the Federation Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste founded in 1907 and the work of Christian feminist groups. The history of these groups shows that second wave feminism did not erupt spontaneously in Quebec and demonstrates a longitudinal history right back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The contemporary second wave women's movement did not emerge "later" in Canada because of regressive French or Catholic origins. In fact, it was characterised by a high degree of and continuity in activism throughout the century. The women's movement therefore cannot be simply explained by the apparent backwardness of Quebec women/feminism in Quebec and its trajectory must be related to certain patterns of socio-cultural integration and development particular to Quebec society.

Recognition of the potentially regressive and patriarchal aspects of Catholic dominated societies is not denied in this analysis. However, this does not deduce that women in such societies were naturally/pathologically more subservient or obedient to clerics than women "elsewhere." In another book, Dumont argues that women in Quebec may in fact have been strategically investing in the Catholic faith in very large numbers (particularly as nuns, as was also the case in Ireland where vocations were high) for their own personal need for emancipation and expression in the public sphere (in social services and education, for instance). For Cardinal (2000), Dumont's analysis suggests that Catholic women worked for other women extensively, both in their own country and in Africa and Asia throughout the last century. Catholic sisters in Quebec did what feminists wanted for secular women – notably by providing education and healthcare for women. Women were therefore engaging in social and political work extensively and clearly there were distinctive structural reasons for the specific situation in Quebec. Nationalism and Catholicism have clearly marked the formation of distinctive feminisms in Ireland and Quebec. Nonetheless, acknowledgement of the institutional

constraints in which women lived their lives must be accompanied by an understanding of how Catholic women may have also *used* their situation (both in campaigning women's organisations, within religious institutions as nuns or in the household) for their own individual emancipation and expression.

Dumont (1992) sharply demonstrates the inappropriateness of direct comparison of Quebec feminism to the chronology of events in Anglo-Canadian feminism, which has many parallels with the findings of my own research on feminism Ireland (Connolly, 2003). *Distinctive* events and political processes were central to the continuity of an active women's movement in Quebec, especially in the intervening years between first and second wave feminism. For Dumont, more careful articulation of the relationship between religion and secular life, and between traditions and feminism, is required to account for the specific trajectory of feminism in Quebec (Cardinal, 2000: 19). Simplistic analysis/comparison only serves to exaggerate the freedoms experienced by women in other religions, such as Protestantism. Other issues are occluded in this kind of analysis. For instance, some women have also rejected the constraints of institutional religion or adopted feminist ideas as individuals through their writing, in other alternative politics and travel.

The so-called "lateness" of second wave feminism in Ireland, and in Quebec, derives from associating women in Catholic societies with an innate and essential traditionalism to the neglect of the rich history of feminism in each context. Apart from the plausibility of suggesting that a large percentage of Catholic women may have expressed a different political or public role than "feminists" by participating within the institutional structures of the church (in providing and managing education, healthcare and social services, for instance), an active network of women's organisations that are pejoratively labelled "traditional" in contemporary terms were extremely innovative in the post-independence period in Irish society right up to the 1960s and in Quebec over this same period. Dumont (2000) discussed the work of urban Quebec women's groups such as, the Federation National Saint-Jean-Baptiste founded in 1907 and other groups, which, she argues, prepared the conditions for later feminism. To paraphrase Linda Cardinal (2000), how can we account for the fact that in the sixties and seventies Quebec feminism was already radical, politicised and successful in transforming a pre-existing network of women's organisations into a vibrant contemporary, second wave movement? The so-called late emergence of the second wave of feminism in Ireland and Quebec was presumed to reflect the fact that because the majority of women were predominantly Catholic, nationalist and rural they could not create the conditions for the emergence of a modern women's rights agenda – they essentially followed the lead of women *elsewhere* so that they could liberate themselves from their culture. In the extreme view, Catholic social teaching (still manifest in Ireland, for instance, today in the absence of abortion legislation) is viewed as hegemonic and unequivocally irrepressible in shaping women's lives – women in Ireland and in Quebec

are devoid of agency. However, as this analysis has demonstrated, although Ireland and Quebec are culturally and politically marked by Catholicism and nationalism, there were clearly active women's organisations and networks in evidence during the first wave, throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century and during the second wave of feminism which challenges the view that the women's movement emerged "late" as well as the essentialising view of women in Ireland and Quebec, which underpins this interpretation.

A more informed analysis is required in comparative feminist studies in order to understand and locate the circumstances in which feminism has developed in regions like Ireland and Quebec. Events in the American women's movement in the 1960s were clearly influential and relevant to the second wave Irish movement, for example. Founding members of the Irishwomen's Liberation Movement had witnessed the emergence of radical feminism in the US and brought these ideas to the Dublin-based movement. And the writings of feminists elsewhere were particularly critical in a society characterised by a high degree of censorship in the preceding decades. However, the second wave of feminism in Ireland was not merely a by-product or sudden consequence of radical feminist activism and writing elsewhere. The longstanding history of feminism was as important in generating a new second wave of activism that was to generate substantial changes in Irish women's lives in subsequent decades.[5]

The tendency to use nationalism to essentialise Irish and Quebec feminists to the neglect of the complex relationship that has evolved between nationalism and feminism in both societies has also been revised and challenged in recent scholarship.[6] For de Seve (1992), the assumption that feminists were all on the same side is a further deep misunderstanding of the structure and heterogeneity of the Quebec women's movement.[7] In the case of Ireland, the women's movement is unique in that a range of political and social questions apart from nationalist aspirations were interwoven in its agenda. In fact, the movement has always had several mobilising centres during each 'wave' of activism, all of which are not yet recovered or integrated into an inclusive history (see Connolly and O'Toole, 2005). Dumont (2000) also assesses why the Quebec movement is frequently 'blanketed' as a nationalist movement. As can be similarly argued in relation to the Irish case, according to Dumont, feminism in Quebec has been both nourished *and* opposed by nationalist movements at different stages. While nationalism and feminism in Quebec often seem to work in opposition, in other ways the two issues are inextricably linked. In the case of Irish feminism, while nationalist politics have always been intrinsic to the emergence of specific groups, in practice the historical relationship between nationalism and feminism was much more dynamic and often conflictual. It is important to clarify that first wave feminism in Ireland was divided (not unified) by the "national question" (that of Irish independence), firstly between unionist and nationalist feminists, and secondly of course on whether the vote for women or the national cause took precedence.[8] Equally, during the second

wave the emerging circumstances in Northern Ireland was a source of conflict in groups like the Irishwomen's Liberation Movement and Irishwomen United.[9] For some women, solidarity with Northern Catholics and/or Republican organisations was intrinsic to feminism while many others were vehemently opposed to nationalism and/or republicanism in any shape or form.[10] In light of the historical relationship between Ireland and Britain, nationalism and colonialism are, of course, integral dynamics in any understanding of the development of the Irish women's movement at all stages.[11] Nationalist-feminism is clearly an important ideological strand in the Irish women's movement. However, so is opposition to nationalism. Newly available archives demonstrate that nationalism was also widely considered an oppressive as opposed to liberating force in Irish women's lives and was a source of conflict and debate in feminist organisations.[12] As the examples of Ireland and Quebec demonstrate, there is no essential relationship between nationalism and feminism in any given context – including societies dominated by unresolved nationalist conflicts. Maille (2000: 96) highlights the creative contradictions generated by the junction of feminism and nationalism. In reality, feminists in Ireland and Quebec have simultaneously mobilised both in co-operation with and in opposition to nationalist movements at various stages, creating a unique and complex situation.

Nationalism is in itself a gendered construct. Nonetheless, mainstream theories of nationalism have tended to ignore gender as a category constitutive of nationalism itself. In feminist theory, several scholars (including, Yuval-Davis, Anthias, West, Walby, Enloe and Jayawardena) have profoundly challenged mainstream accounts of nationalism. Several studies have analysed how feminism resists the predominant construction of women in nationalist agendas and myths (such as, Mother Ireland). According to Maille (2000: 96): "Nationalism is often defined as a conservative, anti-feminist value...It is also assumed that the only possible reaction feminists can have to nationalism is rejection." In the Irish case, the erosion of women's rights after Independence, in the period of nation building, has been cited as an example of how women were used in the period of revolution and subsequently marginalised. At the same time, several other studies have analysed feminist-nationalism as a liberating force and unfinished project, both in Ireland (Coulter, 1993, 1998) and in a variety of other contexts. For Maille (2000: 96) a fundamental question is: how is feminism constructing nationalism? Feminism has not just existed to support nationalist causes in any given context, therefore. At the same time, feminist –nationalism is an integral dynamic in the history of the women's movement. The historical development of nationalism in Ireland and Quebec is extremely complex and researchers have only recently begun to theorise the positioning of feminism in relationship to nationalism in both contexts. It is perhaps this arena more than any other that offers most potential for more debate, theorising and exchange among feminist scholars in Ireland and Quebec, in the near future.

Feminism, Modernity, Discourses of Development

In the 1960s, economically, socially and politically Ireland and Quebec were considered to lag behind other states as well as provinces in the case of Quebec. The treatment of Ireland and Quebec as exceptional and slow in development in mainstream theoretical debates concerning socio-economic progress and development (see McRoberts, 1993: 12-25) has been extensively critiqued. For Letourneau, (1997: 59-60) in spite of having made some progress toward becoming an urban, industrial society, the province of Quebec also still lagged behind other states and provinces, notably, Ontario and the US, in the 1950s. McRoberts (1993: 21) writes: "...perhaps its cultural distinctiveness has placed Quebec at a greater disadvantage than would otherwise have been the case, thus reinforcing economic and even political dependence. In fact, over the years many students have argued that the relatively low level of development in Quebec's economy can be traced to this cultural distinctiveness." On the whole, French Canadian society (like Irish society) was considered not entirely, or even sufficiently, modern – and thus was flawed. The political influence drawn from this evaluation of Quebec's history was self-evident: it was nothing less than getting to the root of this flaw, that is, picking up the pace of progress and reorienting the historicity of the community toward its future, away from its past. For Letourneau (1997: 62-63): "One has to understand the importance of these notions of Quebec as being out of step, being behind, inferior, frozen in time, all of which pointed to a single generative fault, that of inadequacy." Words like "inadequate" or "backward" cannot be considered adequate qualifiers of a societal state - more accurately, they highlight the divergent conditions of "being a community" in the social world, and, in essence, they simply characterise the stereotypes of a collective subject in relation to its other(s). The French Canadian subject was considered flawed as a result of having been influenced by (internal) rulers with limited horizons (i.e., clerics and conservatives) and was theorised as being in the process of missing out on its current historical moment, namely, modernity. According to Letorneau, the prognosis in Quebec was simple. It was imperative to dissociate the community from its reactionary elite and to register it in a new temporality, one that would allow the community to eventually reach this new idealised evolutionary stage of other contemporary western societies – the stage of liberalism, democracy, and modern progress. More to the point, modernisation was considered not just the order of the day, but also a vital necessity for the regeneration of the entire community and for the complete development of a collective subject, hitherto caught in the stranglehold of *the past*.

Modernisation theory was given a particular role in explaining and remedying the distinctiveness of both Quebec and Ireland from the 1960s on. Within this paradigm, "progress" in Irish women's rights has been generally considered a straightforward symptom of external and "sudden" modernising influences. In other words, the "origin" of social change fundamentally lies *elsewhere*. An inventory of institutional changes (such as, joining the European Community, secularisation, popular culture,

television and film), stimulating a so-called liberation of Irish women since the late 1960s, occurs in modern Irish history as well as empirical sociology. Prominent histories increasingly render feminism visible in analysis of social change in Ireland, but almost entirely in direct relation to the 'unambiguous turning-points' of the modernisation process.

While international influences clearly impacted "Irish women's lives" in this period, research into the political role and strategic mobilisation of the women's movement in the period from the 1960s to the present is eluded. Intricate and longitudinal research into feminism and the women's movement demonstrates in a practical way that external developments in women's rights, cited in the modernisation process, did not reverberate the Irish polity passively. Organised feminist activists and campaigns, mobilising in civil society and within the jurisdiction of the Irish State, frequently generated institutional change. For example, the practical availability and legalisation of contraception is intrinsically related to the long-term mobilisation of organisations and activists aligned to the women's movement, *both* before and during what is unequivocally presented as a period of "sudden change." Tangible examples of change in women's rights in the law, for instance, clearly coincide with specific feminist campaigns (through the domestic courts, for example) and waves of activism. Neither Anglo-American modernisation nor the EEC/European Union impacted Irish women's lives in a direct cause/effect manner in this period. In several instances of legislative and political change (the question of equal pay, for example) feminist activists drew on international developments (such as EC directives) as a resource to support their cause. Evidently, in the absence of an active women's movement the Irish State would not have implemented women's rights established "elsewhere." To conclude that women's lives were crudely dominated or merely changed by objective structures implies that, historically, Irish women were both *easily* oppressed and *exceptionally* impressionable. Moreover, it ignores the persistent role a strategic women's movement has had in Irish political culture up to and after the 1960s.

Modernisation theory is the implicit theoretical framework underlying much analysis of contemporary Irish society. The modernisation thesis presupposes women in "traditional" societies were more "backward" or "late" in development, in comparative terms, until they caught up with the rest of the modern world. However, women's lives in Ireland must be considered in more complex historical terms. Irish (Catholic) women cannot be considered merely pathologically traditional, and a one-way flow of modernisation (or indeed dependency) processes from outside of Ireland has not enforced change on women's lives in a direct or simple manner. Fundamentally, the unique development of Irish and Quebec feminism cannot be adequately theorised *solely* with reference to the apparent belated liberation of women in these societies and their adaptation of ideas and politics developed "elsewhere."

The issues highlighted in this analysis need further investigation. However, some basic conclusions can be made. Clearly, there were active women's movements in both

Ireland and Quebec in periods when it is considered feminism had terminated or else did not exist. Innovative research demonstrates that the women's movements of Quebec and Ireland have comparatively distinctive themes and chronologies quite apart from the defining moments and theories of mainstream Anglo-American feminism, which must be explained in more appropriate terms. At the same time, feminists in Quebec and Ireland did not mobilise in isolation from feminism elsewhere at any stage and were connected to intra/international developments in feminist theory and activism (such as, the campaign for the vote and reproductive rights). Nation-state boundaries alone, in other words, do not define the parameters or ideological basis of women's social movements in any given context – including societies with active nationalist movements and conflicts. Furthermore, neither a narrow expression of nationalism nor Catholicism exclusively marks the beginning and end (or retardation) of feminism in both societies. It does not follow that because women were overwhelmingly and universally oppressed, feminism was weaker in both contexts and 'late' in emergence. A more nuanced understanding of feminism in Ireland and Quebec must consider both the structural inequalities that circumscribed women's wider roles and functions alongside a clearer acknowledgement of the agency women exercised in their lives, as well as the relative importance of organised feminism and the women's movement in both societies.

In comparative feminist studies, the variegated nature of the women's movement in Quebec and Ireland requires more critical analysis and integration in mainstream theoretical debates about difference. The conflicts that have *actually* occurred within or between feminist organisations suggest a more heterogeneous and less ethnicised or monolithic view of women in Ireland and Quebec. Issues for further comparison includes the political conflicts and social differences that have traditionally shaped and divided feminism both North and South in Ireland. Differences among women on the basis of their class, sexuality, ethnicity and religion are occluded in any simplistic "nationally ascriptive" analysis of each context. For example, the experience of Protestant and unionist women in Ireland has been occluded in the dominant framework. Finally, the terms "Irish" and "Quebec" "women's movement" are now highly problematical, in themselves, in light of critiques of essentialism in feminist theory, the growing multicultural character of both societies and calls for wider definitions of citizenship in both jurisdictions. More complex theoretical appraisals of the particularity and centrality of the women's movement in both the Irish and Quebec contexts will clearly depend on more innovative comparative reference points, new evidence and revisionist histories of all these issues.

Notes:

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[2] According to Beaumont (1997: 176), "The Irish Women's Citizens and Local Government Association was affiliated to the National Council of Women, set up in 1924 to promote co-operation among women all over Ireland interested in social welfare. Membership of the National Council included non-feminist women's organizations such as the United Irishwomen and the Mothers' Union." (The United Irishwomen later changed their name to the Irish Countrywomen's Association).

[3] Beaumont documents how the Joint Committee of Women's Societies and Social Workers and the IWWU were successful in lobbying the government to amend Article 45 of the draft: "This article proposed to protect 'the inadequate strength of women and the tender age of children' and ensure that women and children would not have to 'enter avocations unsuited to their sex, age or strength'" (1997: 182).

[4] Inglis (1998) provides an excellent analysis of Irish Catholicism.

[5] For an in-depth analysis of the second wave see Connolly, 2003 and Connolly and O'Toole, 2005.

[6] A special edition of the *Journal of Canadian Studies* edited by de Seve and Vickers in 2000 included several contributions on the subject of nationalism and feminism in Canada, including Quebec.

[7] de Seve (2000) provides an excellent account of how the "Quiet Revolution" in Quebec marked a radical move towards modernizing nationalism and analyses the relationship of the role of feminism in this.

[8] Feminist scholarship has probed the complexities of how demanding votes for women within a British jurisdiction conflicted with nationalist allegiances in the early twentieth century (Ryan, 1995, 1996, 1997; Ward, 1998; Cullen-Owens, 1984). However, apart from its relation to the substantive question of achieving Irish independence, unionist feminism (as both suffrage-based and involved in other feminist causes) in this period has not yet received detailed analysis.

[9] For a detailed account of events specific to Northern Ireland and feminism see Evason (1991); Connolly and O'Toole (2005); and Ward (1991).

[10] Documents in the Roisin Conroy/Attic Press Archive, held in the Boole Library at University College Cork, demonstrate the firm opposition of some activists to nationalist politics in Ireland.

[11] Cumann na mBan (the Irishwomen's Council), formed in 1914, as the female counterpart of the Irish Volunteers (established in 1913) has received much attention in historical analysis of the women's movement. For Ward (1995), disagreement arose within the organisation over whether the women would be part of the Volunteers, or would be content to perform tasks, such as fund-raising, when requested by the male leaders. Women's role in the wider nationalist movement was frequently viewed in terms of an extension of their domestic responsibilities. Members of the Irish

Women's Franchise League attended the first meeting of Cumann na mBan and criticized their subordinate status in the nationalist movement. Ryan (1996) focuses on how heated exchanges concerning the relationship between Cumann na mBan and the Volunteer movement persisted over several months in the *Irish Citizen*, the newspaper of the Irish Suffrage Movement.

[12] For an in-depth discussion see Connolly and O'Toole (2005).

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