Kathleen Clarke: Connecting the Competing Definitions of Women's Identity in Irish Nationalism

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Kathleen Clarke: Connecting the Competing Definitions of Women’s Identity in Irish Nationalism

Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences at Salem State University

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Abstract

The modern nationalist movement (1916-1936) presented a contradiction for Irish women. On the one hand, they were being called to perform their responsibilities as citizens by extending their patriotism outside the home and taking a more active role in the fate of their country. On the other, Irish nationalism relied heavily on tradition; women were generally seen as the keepers of that tradition. Nationalist women struggled to respond to the competing responsibilities of their traditional domestic role and the emerging roles as citizens in a new nation.

This paper examines Kathleen Clarke as a case study in how nationalist Irish women balanced their responsibilities as citizens in the new nation with their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Kathleen Clarke was the wife of one of the executed leaders of the Easter Rising and the sister of another. She was very involved in the nationalist movement and in Irish politics. After the Rising, she was left as a single mother of three smalls boys while also managing a fund for the dependents of imprisoned rebels. She eventually became a senator and then the first female Lord Mayor of Dublin. In her struggles to balance responsibilities in both the domestic and public spheres of her life, Kathleen Clarke embodied the ways that the new nation simultaneously created and restricted personal, cultural and political opportunities for women in Ireland after independence.
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The modern nationalist movement presented a contradiction for Irish women. On the one hand, they were being called to perform their responsibilities as citizens by extending their patriotism outside the home and taking a more active role in the fate of their country. On the other, nationalism strongly relied on tradition and women were generally seen as the keepers of that tradition. During the fight for Ireland’s freedom, especially while male leaders of the movement were in prison, many women took on non-traditional roles, but returned to their traditional roles after the men returned and the fight was over. However, for some women, their time in the public sphere changed their perception of women’s identities in Ireland, and they continued to play traditional and non-traditional roles as the Irish people worked to develop their nation.

Leading up to, during the fight for independence and in the war’s immediate aftermath, women often fell into one of two categories -- that of the republican mother who helped the nationalist cause from her home and performed traditional support roles for men or that of an active citizen who attempted to work in equality with men. Women who conformed to ideals of republican motherhood often saw the need to take on more active roles in order to obtain an independent nation for “the children of Ireland, the lifeblood of the nation;” once that was achieved, they were ready to return to the domestic sphere.¹ Others, however, had never been content with their traditional roles and viewed the nationalist movement as an opportunity to achieve independence for both Ireland and women. They believed that “the distinction between

the sexes and subjection of one to the other was a foreign institution foisted upon us...by a foreign government” and hoped that ending British rule would inaugurate full gender equality.2

However, throughout this period, nationalist women’s identities were not static and the two predominant categories were remarkably fluid. As Constance Markievicz observed, “War is helping to...shake women out of old grooves and force responsibilities on them.”3 Nora Connolly O’Brien said, “There is no townland that has not its tale to tell, nor a city that has not a hundred tales of girls dropping their everyday task and setting on a deed of high endeavor, recking (sic) nothing of its dangers, accomplishing it, and calmly returning once more to their everyday task.”4 It is clear from these observations that while many women took up the fight for Irish independence, there is some disagreement over the extent of the effect that the war had on women’s identities and on their desires to take on non-traditional roles. Many women were willing to do whatever had to be done to free Ireland and were then content to return to their traditionally-defined feminine roles, while others saw the fight for Ireland’s independence as an opportunity to fight for women’s independence as well. While this paper focuses on women’s identities as fluid and constantly shifting in response to the circumstances of a changing society, it is necessary to begin by identifying and exploring the two predominant female identities.

Nationalist women who embraced their traditional roles were often members of Cumann na mBan.5 From its inception, Cumann na mBan pictured women working in subordinate roles to

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2 Nora Connolly O’Brien, “Women in Ireland: Their Part in the Revolutionary Struggle,” in Ward, 175. Nora Connolly was the daughter of James Connolly, who was executed after the Easter Rising. He was the leader of the Irish Citizen Army, which allowed women to have equal membership with men, and was a strong supporter of women’s rights.

3 Ibid., 173.

4 Ibid, 175.

5 Cumann na mBan means “League of Women” in Gaelic.
the men. At the first meeting in 1914, Agnes O’Farrellly stated in her inaugural address that “from the very nature of things, the role of women will be different from that of the men.”\textsuperscript{6} She felt that women were more suited to the support roles which they had always performed, but saw these subordinate traditional roles as important to the success of the movement for independence. She saw it as an “honor” to provide support.\textsuperscript{7} Cumann na mBan continued to play a support role throughout the War of Independence and the Civil War by carrying dispatches, providing safe houses, and performing other dangerous and often under-appreciated tasks.\textsuperscript{8}

One of the most important traditional roles that women played was the passing on of Irish history and culture to their children. In her pamphlet entitled “Irishwomen and the Home Language” published in 1900, Mary E.L. Butler told women:

> This power is in the whole people of Ireland, it is true, but it is in an especial manner in the hands of the women of Ireland...Because this language movement is not an academic one. It is a living one. What is wanted is to make the language living in the land; to do this it is necessary to make it the home language; and to make it the home language it is necessary to enlist the co-operation of woman — the home maker...The heavy responsibility rests with them of deciding the fate of the language, and with it the fate of the nation...\textsuperscript{9}

Butler encouraged women to use their traditional role as mother to pass on the Irish language and culture to their children. In this way a woman could influence her sons to get involved in the nationalist movement and teach her daughters to pass the language on to their own children. Butler sets up a woman’s role as a mother and homemaker, as the most important contribution

\textsuperscript{6} O’Farrellly in Ward, \textit{In Their Own Voices}, 44.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 45.


that she can make to Ireland. Because this role was seen as so crucial to the nationalist movement, many women struggled to justify taking on a more public or active role.

The role of the “Republican mother” was an important ideal for the Irish people. In the program for the Clan na Gael Picnic and Athletic Games held on July 4, 1906, there was a full page article honoring “The Patriot Mother.” It told the story of a loving mother who begged British soldiers not to execute her son as a rebel. However, when the soldiers told her that her son would be allowed to go if he told them where his fellow rebels were hiding, she tightened the noose around his neck.\(^{10}\) While she loved her son, she was prepared to let him die for the sake of Ireland. As a young mother in 1906, Kathleen Clarke would have been surrounded by examples of republican mothers, which would have certainly influenced on her perception of motherhood.

Some groups used women’s roles as mother and the keepers of the national heritage to encourage them to step beyond their traditional roles. Although few women actively engaged in political careers, all women were called on to play a part in politics by voting. British and Irish women over the age of thirty received the right to vote in 1918 and they made up an important new group of voters.\(^{11}\) In a leaflet entitled “The Present Duty of Irishwomen,” Cumann na mBan urged women to get out and support the Sinn Féin party with their votes, claiming that this was how they could help to secure Ireland’s freedom. They reminded women that, “generations of Irishwomen have longed to possess the weapon that has now been put into your hands.” The women of Cumann na mBan saw the opportunity to vote as a way for women to make a difference in the politics of their country. They had a duty to use this opportunity, one denied to

\(^{10}\) Clan na Gael Picnic and Athletic Games Program, Box 4, Folder 26, Kathleen Daly Clarke Papers and Collection of Thomas Clarke and Irish Political Materials, MS2001-07, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

\(^{11}\) Ward, *In Their Own Voices*, 87.
their ancestors, to ensure that Ireland achieved independence. However, as Margaret Ward notes in *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, women were not expected to use the vote to voice their own opinions, but to simply vote for whichever candidate Sinn Féin put forward and trust in the men to make the right decisions for Ireland. In another leaflet entitled “An Appeal to the Women of Ireland,” Sinn Féin appealed to women as the “bearers of the spiritual heritage of the mystical Rosaleen,” who “for seven centuries have preserved to the Gael the ideal of independence.”

Rosaleen was a feminine representation of Ireland. According to Lisa Weihman in “‘Doing My Bit For Ireland: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising,’” Ireland was often portrayed as feminine and weak by the British. In this case, Rosaleen is being used by Sinn Féin to show the importance of women as preservers of tradition in their role of mother. They said that women could save Ireland by exercising their right to vote and gave women credit for the work that they had done in preserving the spirit of independence, “which thanks to the Gaelic Mother, still lives in Ireland; because in every generation Irish women have played a noble part in the struggle for freedom.” They ended their appeal by promising women that they would have a “high place in the Councils of a freed Gaelic nation.” Despite this promise, few women held government positions in the newly independent Ireland.

The nationalist woman who best represents those who desired greater gender equality was Constance Markievicz. In a speech to the Irish Women’s Franchise League in 1915,

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Markievicz criticized the subordinate role of women in the nationalist movement and encouraged women to take a more active role in the fate of their country:

If you want to walk round Ireland, or any other country, dress suitably in short skirts and strong boots, leave your jewelry and gold wands in the bank, and buy a revolver. Don’t trust to your “feminine charm” and your capacity for getting on the soft side of men, but take up your responsibilities and be prepared to go your own way depending for safety on your own courage, your own truth, and your own common sense, and not on the problematic chivalry of the men you may meet on the way.\textsuperscript{15}

Markievicz wanted women to recognize that they were more than wives and mothers. In the modern world they could not leave their fate up to the men. They shared a responsibility with the men to fight for their country. She encouraged them to get out of their “domestic ruts” and find the “masculine side” of their souls.\textsuperscript{16} They had to take on the responsibilities of a citizen if they wanted to receive the benefits. Although incorrect, she stated that idea of women serving their country in the domestic sphere was gone and told the girls to make others “look upon you as citizens first, as women after.”\textsuperscript{17} Markievicz believed that a woman’s domestic role had become secondary to her responsibilities as a citizen.

Throughout her nationalist career, Markievicz embodied her belief that women must take on an active role. She was second-in-command of the garrison at Stephen’s Green and worked as a sniper during the Rising.\textsuperscript{18} She served several prison sentences and became one of the first women in the world to serve in government.\textsuperscript{19} One of those many prison sentences was served

\textsuperscript{15} Constance Markievicz, “Buy a Revolver” in Ward, \textit{In Their Own Voice}, 52.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 53.

\textsuperscript{17} Constance Markievicz, “Women, Ideals, and the Nation,” in Bourke, 100.


\textsuperscript{19} Ward, \textit{Unmanageable Revolutionaries}, 136.
with Kathleen Clarke and Maude Gonne MacBride in Holloway Prison. After their release from prison, Markievicz and Clarke lived together for some time. Markievicz influenced some Irish women to step outside traditional gender roles and as a fellow prisoner and roommate, Kathleen certainly had plenty of opportunities to learn from Markievicz. Although Clarke occasionally found Markievicz annoying, she admired the work that she had done in the fight for Ireland’s independence.

This paper will cover the period from 1916, when the fight for independence was ignited by the Easter Rising, to the late 1930s, when Kathleen Clarke left national government. This period begins and ends with two important government documents that both consider the place of women in Ireland. The first is the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, issued at the start of the Easter Rising in 1916, which acknowledged and encouraged many women’s desires to take on more active roles. The Proclamation was addressed to both Irishmen and Irishwomen, recognizing them as equal citizens who, therefore, had the equal responsibility of fighting for Ireland’s freedom. The Proclamation stated that “the Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman.” It went on to say that the Republic guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens. According to Margaret Skinnider in her memoir Doing My Bit for Ireland, the Proclamation was the first constitution in the world to include equal suffrage, calling for the establishment of a government that was “representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrage of all her men and women.”

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22 Clarke, 209.
24 Ibid.
The period ends with the Constitution of Ireland, issued in 1937 by Eamon de Valera. This document displays the government’s attempt to institutionalize republican motherhood as Irish women’s primary role. Article 40 provided that all citizens would be equal, but added that “this shall not mean that the State shall not in its enactments have due regard to differences of capacity, physical and moral and of social functions.” This allowed the government to argue that any unequal treatment of women was due to their “differences.” Article 45 went further by specifically stating that the “inadequate strength of women shall not be abused.” Article 41 specifically discussed the importance of motherhood, saying 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. The State shall therefore endeavor to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labor to the neglect of their duties at home.” The state clearly valued women primarily for their role in raising children to support Ireland. This affected the development of women’s roles in Ireland for decades.

Many women were angered by the ambiguous wording of the constitution and argued that the government could use it to refuse them equal rights. Kathleen Clarke argued that it was the duty of every Irishwoman to ensure that the government did not rob them of the rights which they had been promised in the 1916 Proclamation. 27

This paper uses several documents from the collection of Kathleen Clarke’s papers at the Burns Archive at Boston College and Kathleen’s memoir, Revolutionary Woman. The memoir, written mostly in the 1940s, was Kathleen’s attempt to ensure that her husband would be

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26 Ibid.

27 Clarke in Ward, In Their Own Voices, 186.
remembered as a great republican leader and that his ideals would be passed on, which was the
driving force behind many of Kathleen’s political actions.\textsuperscript{28} It also gave her the opportunity to
tell her own story at a time when many women’s voices were being silenced as the government
encouraged them to concentrate on their role within the home. Unlike the letters and other papers
in the collection at Boston College, this memoir was meant to be seen by the public and was
Kathleen’s opportunity to portray herself and her actions within the nationalist movement in a
certain light. The memoir is a biased source, but this makes it all the more interesting because it
reveals Kathleen’s gendered perception of major events in the Irish nationalist movement and her
thinking on the challenges that she faced. It also demonstrates her understanding of the
significance of her role within the movement and in the Irish government which she helped to
establish.

Women’s identities in the nationalist movement existed on a spectrum. On one side were
the women who took an active part in the fight for independence and the development of the
nation, while on the other were the women who were content to play traditional supporting roles.
Most women existed on one side of the spectrum or the other. Constance Markievicz was
actively involved in politics and the physical fighting, but she sacrificed her relationship with her
daughter and husband to do so. Many of the others who took on more active roles were
unmarried. Women with husbands and children were much more likely to show their support for
Ireland through support roles and their traditional role of Republican mother. Kathleen Clarke
was one of a few who continued to play both traditional and nontraditional roles after the
fighting was over.

\textsuperscript{28} Helen Litton, ed., \textit{Revolutionary Woman}, (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 2008), 313.
Kathleen Clarke

In her essay “Revolutionary Women,” Clare Norcio describes Kathleen’s nationalist activities as both typical and atypical. Like many women, she participated in Cumann na mBan and her activities were strongly influenced by the needs of her husband. On the other hand, the depth and length of her involvement in the nationalist movement was much greater than that of most women. She was one of only a few who knew the particulars of the coming rebellion and afterward she was left the great responsibility of caring for the dependents of the imprisoned. Her active participation in politics further separated her from the average nationalist woman.²⁹

Kathleen Daly was born into a family with strong republican ties. Her father and aunt were both Fenians and her uncle spent twelve years in prison under suspicion of Fenian activities.³⁰ In her memoir, Revolutionary Woman, Kathleen recalled the stories that her Aunt Lollie told her and her sisters about the Fenian period which she “painted in the most glowing and romantic colours[sic] so that all our early enthusiasm was centered around Fenians.”³¹ She stated that knowing their country’s history through their aunt’s stories, helped the Daly sisters through “one of the most difficult periods in our history.”³² While Aunt Lollie was a role model for a revolutionary woman, Kathleen’s grandmother was a model of republican motherhood whose sorrow over her son’s imprisonment was outweighed by her pride in his sacrifice for Ireland. In her memoir, Kathleen remembered how, each night, her grandmother prayed first for

³⁰ Clarke, 24.
³¹ Ibid., 14.
³² Ibid.
Ireland’s freedom and second for her son’s release from prison.\textsuperscript{33} Surrounded by these influences throughout childhood, Kathleen’s passion to establish a free Ireland was unsurprising.

It was through her uncle that Kathleen met her husband, Thomas Clarke. The two men were in prison together and had become friends. Despite the opposition of her mother and aunt, Tom and Kathleen were married in New York in 1901.\textsuperscript{34} They lived in the United States until 1907 when they returned to Ireland. Kathleen was reluctant to leave New York because she worried that Tom would end up in prison again, but she agreed to go because, as she said, “His happiness came first with me.”\textsuperscript{35} For the rest of her life, Kathleen often made decisions based on what she believed Tom would have wanted. Although she almost certainly would have involved herself in the nationalist movement had she not been married, Tom’s needs had a good deal of influence on her. While he was alive, most of Kathleen’s nationalist activities were meant to support her husband, while after his death, she worked to carry on his memory and create the Ireland that he had dreamed of. Almost as soon as they returned to Ireland, Tom again became involved in the nationalist movement.

In 1914, Kathleen became one of the founding members of Cumann na mBan and served as president of the Central Branch in Dublin in 1916.\textsuperscript{36} However, unlike other members of the group, Kathleen did not take part in the Easter Rising. Tom and the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood had set her the much more important task of safeguarding all of their plans so that she could pass them on to others in case the leaders were arrested or killed. She was

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 62.
chosen because the Council thought it was unlikely that she would be arrested. She was also tasked with organizing care for the dependents of the men who fought in the Rising. At the time, the IRB believed that the Rising could last for four or five months, so it would have been up to Kathleen to make sure that the mothers, sisters, wives, and children were cared for while the men were fighting. 37

**Balancing Motherhood and Nationalism**

Despite her many responsibilities, Kathleen took her role as a mother very seriously. She believed that raising children was an important and dignified role that should not be dictated by gender. When asked if she thought that men could take on the traditionally feminine role of raising children, she said, “If men could do that job as well and as successfully as women, I do not see why they should not do it. It is most important work for the nation, though rather sneered at by men... I do not think it would detract from their dignity in any way.”38

Kathleen often had to make compromises between her roles as a mother and as a nationalist. In her memoir, she recounted a night in 1914 when she was torn between going to a *Cumman na mBan* lecture and staying home with her children. Tom was away and she did not have a maid at the time, but she had organized the lecture, so she felt that she needed to be there. She was especially worried because her youngest son Emmet “had a passion for fire and was rather wild” and she thought that she might come back to find that the house had burned down. She decided that she would put the boys to bed and then go to the lecture, but before leaving, reminded them to behave, saying, “Now, boys, my duty to Ireland tonight is to go and make this lecture a success, and your duty to Ireland is to stay in bed until I return. You are not to light

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37 Ibid., 85-86.
38 Ibid., 321.
paper, matches, or anything else. I will leave the light on. Do you promise to do your duty to Ireland?”

The boys agreed and Kathleen was able to attend the lecture.

After the Easter Rising and the execution of her husband, Kathleen was heartbroken.

“How I held myself together,” she said, “with my head up, I do not know.” However, she felt that her duty to Ireland was more important than her personal suffering. Although their men were in jail rather than fighting, Kathleen still had a duty to look after the dependents of those arrested. She was determined that the deaths of her husband, her brother, and their fellow rebels would not be in vain.

…I made up my mind that I would work to give England a very different reaction to their savagery than they had got after other risings and bids for freedom. Other risings left only despair, and efforts toward freedom left to the next generation. I would make every effort to keep the ball rolling, and in some way continue the fight for freedom, and not let it end with the Rising.

Within a week of her husband’s execution, Kathleen had formed the Irish Republican Prisoners Dependents Fund. Out of the families who qualified for aid, the Clarkes and the Dalys were the only ones who did not receive money from the fund. Although Kathleen was now a single mother of three young boys, the records of the money distributed by the fund state that she chose not to receive any assistance. Her loyalty to the cause would not allow her to draw money away from the fund, if she felt that she could support her family without it. Kathleen constantly had to weigh the cost of her decisions on her family and on the movement.

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39 Ibid., 72.
40 Ibid., 140.
41 Ibid., 145.
42 Ibid., 153
After her husband died, Kathleen continued to try to balance her work and her family. For about a year after the Rising, her children lived in Limerick with her mother and sisters so that Kathleen could concentrate on her work of supporting the dependents of imprisoned men and keeping the nationalist movement going. Being apart from her children was difficult for Kathleen, but she had responsibilities in Dublin. She made every effort to visit her children on the weekends, leaving the Dependents’ Fund money with a neighbor in case anyone came by for help while she was away. As stated in the introduction, most of the women who played a more active role in the nationalist movement did not have children. Sending her children away demonstrates Kathleen’s willingness to sacrifice her personal happiness for Ireland’s freedom.

The stress of working all week and then traveling to Limerick on the weekends to see her children caused a great strain on Kathleen’s health, which had always been somewhat poor and was further weakened by the fact that she was pregnant. Despite the advice of a doctor to check into a hospital to rest, Kathleen continued to work. She simply did not have the time to rest and said that she was “quite indifferent about what was happening to me.” She continued to work until one day she was in so much pain that she had to leave her office and go home to bed. After her maid brought the doctor to see her, Kathleen learned that she had miscarried her baby and was devastated. According to her doctor, for a few moments, Kathleen appeared to have died. In her memoir, she claimed to have seen her husband and Seán MacDermott. She wanted to stay with them, but MacDermott told her that she had to go back to continue the work they had left her. Kathleen then wrote that she was revived and disappointed not to be dead, but determined to

44 Ibid., 140. Kathleen knew that she was pregnant at the time of the Rising, but never told her husband for fear of adding to his anxieties.

continue her work as MacDermott and her husband had asked. “But now I knew what I had to do,” she said, “and gave up trying to take the easy way out. I just had to take up my burden and carry it as well as I could.” She was determined to continue the struggle for independence because she believed that that was what Tom wanted her to do.

Sometimes, Kathleen was not able to separate her roles. She often had weapons or incriminating papers hidden in her house or was asked to smuggle items while she was traveling with her children. On one occasion during the civil war, just before a raid by Free State troops, she was looking for a place to hide some papers that she had been asked to look after. She could not think of a place that the soldiers would not think to look, so Emmet, who was twelve at the time, suggested that she hide them under his shirt. Kathleen worried that the soldiers would see the papers under his shirt and hurt him, but Emmet insisted and sat at the kitchen table with his arms folded all through the raid. In her memoir, Kathleen expressed concern over the stress her sons must have felt after the Rising. Because of her political activities, her sons were asked to be brave and endure things that many other children did not. As a loving mother, it was certainly a struggle for Kathleen to place her children in danger, but as she had told her boys on the night that she left them alone to attend the Cumann na mBan lecture, they all had a duty to Ireland. Kathleen’s role as a republican mother was to model for her children that Ireland came above all else. Her willingness to put the boys in dangerous situations was also influenced by one of Tom’s

46 Ibid., 162.
47 Ibid., 273.
48 Ibid., 223.
last requests that she “train them to follow in his footsteps” which she promised that she would
do her best to carry out.49

In 1918, the British began arresting hundreds of people in connection with the alleged
“German plot.”50 Although she was warned by a friend that she was on the list for arrest because
of her political activities and connections to revolutionaries, Kathleen chose not to go on the run
because such a life would be difficult for a single mother of three young boys. When the British
soldiers did come to arrest her, she asked if they could give her time to find someone to care for
her children, as she had no family in Dublin, but the soldiers refused. Before they took her,
Kathleen told her children that they must be brave and not cry in front of the enemy. She wrote
that she was heartbroken at having to leave them.51

On her way to Holloway Prison, Kathleen overheard the English soldiers escorting her
say that they were hungry and did not have enough money to buy more food. Despite her dislike
of the English, all she could think about was that these soldiers were only boys whose mothers
must be worrying about them just as she worried about her own sons. She gave them all of the
money in her purse and told them to buy dinner with it. In this case, Kathleen’s motherly feelings
won out over her nationalist dislike of the British.52

During her first few weeks in jail, Kathleen received very little news from home. During
that time she lost nine pounds due to anxiety over her children.53 She had no idea if her sisters
had retrieved the children and she was distraught over not being able to get to the boys if

49 Ibid., 137.
50 Ibid., 195.
51 Ibid., 196-197.
52 Ibid., 201.
53 Ibid., 203.
anything happened to them. Because she had very little else to do, a large portion of her time in jail was spent worrying about her children.\textsuperscript{54}

Eventually, Kathleen was able to send letters to her family and found out that her children were with her mother and sisters in Limerick. The letters between Kathleen and her children show her ability to balance her roles of mother and nationalist rebel. She asks the boys about their days and what they are learning in school and reminds them to behave for their aunts. In a letter that she wrote to Daly, her oldest son, she says that she plans to write to his teacher because he is not taking algebra.\textsuperscript{55} Even from prison, she carried on with her motherly duties. However, not all of her letters to her children are filled with this normal conversation between mother and child. In another letter to Daly written in December, 1918, she wrote, “Let us look at it this way. We are all soldiers of Ireland, we are at war with our enemy, England, I am taken prisoner, these things will happen when a people are at war, and there is no use in going to war if you are not prepared to take things as they come...”\textsuperscript{56} She attempted to comfort her son by reminding him that they both have a duty to Ireland. One may look at this as part of her duty as a Republican mother, to instill in her son the belief that the fight for Ireland’s freedom comes first.

\textbf{Life in Politics}

Unlike most of her fellow Cumann na mBan members, Kathleen became actively involved in politics. She was elected as a Sinn Féin representative for the Second Dáil in 1921 and as a Senator for the Fianna Fáil party in 1928. She was also the first woman to be elected

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 203-205.

\textsuperscript{55} Kathleen Clarke to Daly Clarke, November 29, 1918, Tom Clarke and Kathleen Clarke Papers, 1890-1972, National Library of Ireland.

\textsuperscript{56} Kathleen Clarke to Daly Clarke, December 18, 1918, Tom Clarke and Kathleen Clarke Papers, 1890-1972, National Library of Ireland.
lord mayor of Dublin in 1939. Before the Senate election, De Valera asked Kathleen to step aside in favor of Mrs. Pearse, who had also been nominated to represent Fianna Fáil in the Senate. As they would only be able to elect five members of the party, de Valera told Kathleen that the party would not support two women. Clarke could see no reason for the party not to support two women after the part that they had played in the fight for freedom and refused to withdraw. She suspected that she was being tested to see if she was the “pliable type that de Valera seemed so fond of gathering around him” and she made it clear that she was not. In the end, Mrs. Pearse withdrew and Kathleen Clarke received the highest number of votes for the Fianna Fáil candidates.

According to Helen Litton in her epilogue to Revolutionary Woman, Kathleen often represented a woman’s point of view in the mostly male government. For example, during a debate on whether or not police officers should wear uniforms during traffic duty, Clarke stated that, as a woman, she would not feel comfortable stopping for a man who was not in uniform. She also actively defended a woman’s right to work and argued that they should not be barred from certain types of jobs. Kathleen believed that women were just as capable as men, saying in an interview, “I am terribly keen on the fact that women, if given the opportunity, could do just as well in positions of public life as the men. I have great faith in my own sex.” However, she

57 Clarke, 305.
58 Ibid, 293.
59 Ibid.
60 Litton, 316. This debate came up while the Road Traffic Acts were being discussed in 1933.
61 Ibid., 320. The 1935 Conditions of Employment Bill sought to prevent women from taking industrial jobs.
62 Ibid., 313.
also supported higher pensions for widows and orphans because she recognized that not all single mothers were able to work and raise children as she had done.63

Kathleen Clarke was aware that in the public sphere her gender could be a disadvantage. She had been entrusted by the leaders of the Rising to make sure that the fight for freedom was carried on by getting information to other leaders around the country, but in 1916, all of the men whose names she had been given had already been arrested. She had to find new men to get the IRB and Irish Volunteers going again, but she worried that many would be hesitant to get involved if they knew that their information was coming from a woman. She recruited Liam Clarke to get her message out and told him to only give vague answers about who he was representing.64 Despite the trust placed in her by the leaders of the Rising, Clarke knew that the divisions of gender in Ireland were too strongly ingrained in the minds of some people. It was through Kathleen’s efforts to keep the movement going that the Easter Rising became the starting point for Irish independence rather than another failed rebellion, but the lack of respect for women in leadership roles forced her to keep her involvement quiet.

Kathleen Clarke faced criticism for her active role in politics. She was not afraid to voice her opinion when she felt that the government was not staying true to the promises made in the 1916 Proclamation and this occasionally got her in trouble. She often faced hostility from members of her party when she dared to disagree with Eamon de Valera, who was the leader of Fianna Fáil, but she firmly believed that she “had as much right to have an opinion and to air it as de Valera or any other man things which affected my country.”65 Kathleen was not the only

63 Ibid., 320. Widow and Orphans’ Pension Bill 1935.
64 Clarke, 172.
65 Ibid., 254.
woman to face backlash for criticizing men’s decisions. In her notes on the 1917 Sinn Féin Conference, Kathleen recalled the reaction to Constance Markievicz’s criticism of John MacNeil, “I never felt so angry as at the treatment she received because she who had gone out in the fight and done a man’s part in it dared to say a word about MacNeil, who, no matter what anyone may say to the contrary, acted a coward in 1916.”\textsuperscript{66} Clarke strongly opposed the treaty with England because she felt that to accept it would be to meekly accept Home Rule.\textsuperscript{67} However, none of the women who opposed the Treaty were reelected to the Dáil, although they were “all women who had worked and suffered for the freedom” of their country.\textsuperscript{68} Just as Margaret Ward pointed out about women’s votes, political women were expected to support the men in their party, and when they did not, they were forced out.

Although Kathleen was angered by the criticism she received, she did not let it stop her work. In an article in The Daily Sketch written in 1939 she was quoted as saying, “Sex is not the test of ability for a job,” in response to a criticism of women in government. She then called the criticism “blather” and rushed off to take care of her many responsibilities as mayor of Dublin.\textsuperscript{69}

In another article in the Irish Press written in the same year, she said,

I never before found any educated man express that opinion, especially nowadays when women have entered into every walk of life with men, and have shouldered the same responsibilities and are working shoulder to shoulder with them... If a

\textsuperscript{66} Kathleen Clarke, 1917, “Notes, compiled by Kathleen Clarke, following her attendance at the Sinn Féin Convention,” Tom Clarke and Kathleen Clarke Papers, 1890-1972, National Library of Ireland.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 260.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 268.

\textsuperscript{69} “Irish Press, August 24, 1939,” Box 6A, Kathleen Daly Clarke Papers and Collection of Thomas Clarke and Irish Political Materials, MS2001-07, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.
woman is competent to rear intelligent men, she should be competent to sit on any board with them.\textsuperscript{70}

Many women felt that they should have equal rights with men after sharing in the responsibility of fighting for independence. In her memoir, Kathleen remembered her frustration at not receiving the same respect her male colleagues did, “I had worked and suffered for my country at least as much as de Valera or any other man alive, and I thought I had as much right to have an opinion and to air it as de Valera or any other man on things which affected my country.”\textsuperscript{71} Kathleen firmly believed in the gender equality which had been promised in the 1916 Proclamation and felt that she deserved it after all that she had done for Ireland. She felt it was right that she and other women be treated as equals after having worked alongside the men during the fight for freedom. However, after the deaths of the signatories of the Proclamation, there were few men left who cared to protect the rights that had been promised to women. In the “Scheme of Organization for Sinn Féin” which was proposed by Catal Brugha at the 10th Sinn Féin Convention in 1917, it said, “All persons of Irish birth or descent, irrespective of class or creed...are eligible for membership.” Kathleen felt that this statement was missing an important aspect and so in the margins of her copy she wrote “or sex” and drew an arrow to after “creed.”\textsuperscript{72} Brugha’s omission of sex showed the Sinn Féin party’s unwillingness to formally recognize the roles that women played and Kathleen’s addition showed her refusal to allow men to dictate what she could and could not do based on her sex. Whether or not the government was willing to

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\textsuperscript{70} “Daily Sketch, August 25, 1939,” Box 6A, Kathleen Daly Clarke Papers and Collection of Thomas Clarke and Irish Political Materials, MS2001-07, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.
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\textsuperscript{71} Clarke, 254.
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\textsuperscript{72} “Scheme of Organization for Sinn Féin,” Box 4, Folder 3, Kathleen Daly Clarke Papers and Collection of Thomas Clarke and Irish Political Materials, MS2001-07, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.
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recognize women as equals, Kathleen did. She saw the ability of women to work and fight alongside men.

**Conclusion**

Kathleen Clarke was outspoken about her opinions on government at a time when few women spoke publicly about such a topic. Although she was often criticized for expressing her ideas, especially when they contradicted those of her party, her memoir, published after her death by her niece, allowed her to have her say. She took the opportunity to express her thoughts on the nationalist movement and its members, politics, motherhood, and a women’s place in Ireland. Although it is not an objective historical account, *Revolutionary Woman* shows one woman’s perception of her experience and reveals how that experience was shaped by her gender. Writing the memoir demonstrates Kathleen’s understanding of the importance of the role that she played and that it was important that her story be remembered, not only as that of a revolutionary and a politician, but as a woman.

Although it was not her intention, Kathleen Clarke helped to forge a new identity for modern Irish women. A single mother who worked in the public sphere while also tending to her duties in the domestic sphere, she transcended the traditional boundaries placed on women’s roles. She not only served as an example of women’s ability to actively engage in the public sphere while also tending to the domestic sphere, but worked to protect a woman’s right to do so through her work in the government. Kathleen did not allow herself to be defined by the dominant female identities around her, but rather chose to shape her own identity as a loving republican mother and as an intelligent woman capable of working in the public sphere in equality with men.
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