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SPOUSES, SPIES AND SUBTERFUGE: THE ROLE AND EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN DURING THE NINE YEARS WAR (1593–1603)

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ABSTRACT

Women provided domestic, commercial and medical support to both English and Irish armies during the Nine Years War (1593–1603). Consequently, they were exposed to the perils of war and suffered accordingly. They lived and died in siege camps, beleaguered garrisons and suffered the brutality of punitive attacks on the civilian population. However, women were more than passive observers or hapless victims. Women influenced the course and conduct of the war to a greater extent than previously acknowledged. Women were indispensable elements in intelligence and communication networks, providing information and carrying letters between both allies and belligerents. All classes of women were involved, acting as envoys and go-betweens between Tyrone's Irish confederates and the crown. The influence of spouses guided the will of powerful (and not-so-powerful) husbands, with results that affected the course of the war.

Introduction

The chronology of the war in Ireland at the end of the sixteenth century is well-known. Hugh O'Neill, second earl of Tyrone, bolstered by support from Spain, led an unprecedented coalition of Irish lords against the forces of the English crown. The Irish troops were well organised and militarily astute. They won a string of remarkable victories, which brought English authority in Ireland to the point of collapse. In 1603, however, Queen Elizabeth I's last Irish viceroy, Lord Deputy Mountjoy, defeated Tyrone and his allies with a brutal campaign of scorched earth tactics and famine which led to the economic as well as the military collapse of the Irish confederation.

The historiography of the conflict has focused on the political developments that led to the war, the military tactics used by both sides, the role of key individuals, and the impact of the war in different regions.[1] In the past twenty years, there has been an expansion in research on women in early modern Ireland. The work of, among others, Katharine Simms, Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O'Dowd, Mary Ann Lyons and Jerrold Casway has documented the importance of elite women in the political machinations of Gaelic Ireland. Political alliances were formed through marriage and women from aristocratic families acted on occasion as mediators between warring lordships.[2] O'Dowd has pointed to the negotiating

[1] Hiram Morgan, *Tyrone's rebellion: the outbreak of the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland* (Dublin, 1993); William Kelly, *Docwra's Derry: a narration of events in north-west Ulster1600–1604* (Belfast, 2003); Darren McGettigan, *Red Hugh O'Donnell and the Nine Years War* (Dublin, 2005); James O'Neill, *The Nine Years War, 1593–1603: O'Neill, Mountjoy and the military revolution* (Dublin, 2017); Ruth Canning, *The Old English in Early Modern Ireland: the Palesmen and the Nine Years' War, 1594–1603* (Woodbridge, 2019).

[2] Jerrold Casway, 'Rosa O'Dogherty: a Gaelic woman' in *Seanchas Ard Mhacha* 10:1 (1981), 42–62; Jerrold Casway, 'Heroines or victims? The women of the flight of the earls', in David Finnegan, Éamon Ó Ciardha, Marie-Claire Peters (eds), *The flight of the earls: Imeacht no nIarlaí* (Dublin, 2010), 227–236; Jerold Casway, 'Catherine Magennis and the wives of Hugh O'Neill', *Seanchas Ard Mahacha* 16:1 (2016), 69–79; Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women in early modern Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1991); Mary O'Dowd, *A history of women in Ireland, 1500–1800* (Harlow, 2005). Mary Ann Lyons, 'The wives of Hugh O'Neill, second earl of Tyrone', *Dúiche Neill* 16 (2007), 41–61; Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic women in Ireland, c.1170–1540* (Dublin, 2007); Katharine Simms, *Gaelic Ulster in the Middle Ages: history, culture and society* (forthcoming, Dublin, 2020).

role of the Scottish women who married Ulster chieftains in the late sixteenth century. For example, Agnes Campbell was praised for her ability to represent her husband by the earl of Essex. In addition, she and her daughter, Fionnuala MacDonnell brought much needed dowries of Scottish soldiers to their new Irish husbands.[3] There has been no systematic analysis, however, of the role of women in the wars of late sixteenth century Ireland.

Historians of early modern wars in Europe have recognised that women were a common, indeed indispensable feature of military life. The recruitment of soldiers was invariably accompanied by an influx of civilians, such as sutlers (itinerant merchants who sold goods to soldiers in the field), servants and the soldiers' wives and children.[4] The numbers following an army varied, but in many cases they equalled or even exceeded the number of troops in the field.[5] Women performed domestic tasks such as washing, cooking and cleaning.[6] Though civilians were clearly needed if a camp was to function, the number of women in a camp could also hamper the ability of an army to operate effectively.[7]

This article will draw on this literature to explore the role of women in the Nine Years War. It will argue that, as elsewhere in early modern Europe, women formed an important presence in Irish army camps, fulfilling domestic roles and tending to the needs of troops both medically and sexually. Their presence also influenced the military capabilities of armies and they suffered privation and risked capture and death along with the men.[8] Beyond the battlefield and campaign trails, women of all classes participated in an intelligence war that fed information (or disinformation) into the decision-making process of both Tyrone's confederation and Queen Elizabeth's deputies in Dublin. They were spies, informants and, in some cases, saboteurs. As well as passing useful or damaging information they were also the conduits for messages between allies and enemies. They formed the basis of a system of communication between both allies and belligerents that spanned the island.

Women in army camps in Ireland

Identifying the exact number of women who accompanied troops into the field in Ireland in the 1590s is problematic as the authors of military dispatches and compilers of muster reports were not responsible for maintaining lists of civilians. The priority of the authorities was the number of serviceable troops. Nevertheless, English troops in Ireland were accompanied by a large number of women and children. When Captain Humfrey Willis entered Fermanagh during the spring of 1593 with one foot company of 100 men, they brought 160 'women and boys…all living upon the spoil of the country'.[9]

While the authorities in Dublin did not concern themselves with the fate of camp followers, they could not evade the problems associated with feeding and lodging large numbers of civilians.[10] The cost of maintaining women and children in the camp was the

[3] O'Dowd, *A history of women in Ireland*, 22, 27.
[4] John A. Lynn, *Women, armies and warfare* (Cambridge, 2008), 34–5.
[5] Barton C. Hacker, 'Women and military institutions in early modern Europe: A reconnaissance' in *Signs* 6:4 (1981), 647.
[6] Lynn, *Women, armies and warfare*, 55.
[7] Mary Elizabeth Ailes, 'Camp followers, sutlers, and soldiers' wives: women in early modern armies (*c*. 1450–1650)', in Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining (eds), *A companion to women's military history* (Leiden, 2012), 83; *J.R. Hale, War and society in Renaissance Europe 1450–1620* (2nd ed., Stroud, 1998), 161.
[8] S. Annette Finley Croswhite, 'Engendering the wars of religion: female agency during the Catholic League in Dijon', *French Historical Studies* 20:2 (1997), 129.
[9] British Library (BL), Cotton Titus C/VII, f. 156 'Sir Henry Wallop's relation of the progress of Tyrone's rebellion', 1600.
[10] For much of the war the English government in Dublin was beset by reports of disorder and theft caused by crown troops passing through loyal territories. See Canning, *The Old English in Early Modern Ireland*, 129–30, 139–40.

responsibility of the soldiers who brought them. The Lord Deputy of Ireland, William Russell, was clear that 'women and boys shall be no way chargeable to the country or towns but shall be found upon the proper charge of their husbands and masters', but in practice this was rarely the case.[11] In July 1597, the distressed inhabitants of Kildare complained that English troops in the area were 'accompanied with numbers of boys, women and horses and stragglers (a thing for charge, disorder and abuse most intolerable), exacting and wresting your suppliants with all manners of cruelty'.[12]

Inevitably, some of the woman associated with early modern armies catered for the sexual demands of the soldiers. Prostitution was a common feature of military camps in Europe and was generally tolerated, but the attitudes to ostensibly immoral behaviour within the army camp mirrored those within civil society.[13] English officers were known to order prostitutes out of the camp, but their efforts had little if any real impact. [14] In November 1601, Sir Henry Docwra, commander of the English garrison in Derry from 1600–3, reported that 'thefts and whoredoms [are] daily practised and seldom punished'.[15] While the moral impropriety was clear to officers, the trade in sex was tolerated rather than condoned.

There are few clues to the scale of sexual commerce within Irish camps. Writing in *De Hibernia Insula commentarius*, the Archbishop of Armagh, Peter Lombard, claimed that Tyrone took an uncompromising stance on sexual misconduct both in civil society and the army. The earl imposed harsh penalties on 'concubinage' and enforced the same order in his military camps.[16] The weight his disfavour fell upon women, who were subject to 'exile, whipping, or deforming of their faces by branding or slitting'.[17] Notwithstanding the earl's proscriptions, there is little reason to assume that Tyrone had any more success than the crown in eradicating sexual commerce in his army.

Wives and camp followers were not confined to English units; women also joined the earl of Tyrone's armies on campaign. However, trains of civilians and baggage were not present in Irish armies during the early and mid-phases of the war, when Irish operations were characterised by speed and mobility.[18] As regional loyalties to Tyrone's confederation were eroded, the Irish system of logistics, which utilised itinerant (and undefended) supply convoys, became more reliant on baggage trains from 1599 onwards. It was for this reason that reports of women accompanying Irish units appear more frequently in the later stages of the war.[19]

Civilians attending the armies were generally drawn from the lower sections of society, but there were also instances when women of high social standing travelled with their husbands. The most senior of these was Catherine Magennis, Tyrone's fourth wife, who

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[11] BL, Cotton Titus C/VII, f. 156, 1600.

[12] 'The humble petition of the distressed inhabitants of Kildare in Ireland', 24 July 1597, in H.C. Hamilton, E.G. Atkinson, and R.P. Mahaffy (eds), *Calendar of State Papers relating to Ireland* [hereafter *CSPI*], (24 vols, London, 1860–192), vol. 6, 354–6.

[13] Lynn, *Women, armies and warfare*, 68.

[14] Hacker, 'Women and military institutions', 651.

[15] The National Archives, Kew (TNA), SP 63/209 pt. 2, f. 193, Sir Henry Docwra to the privy council, 18 November 1601.

[16] Peter Lombard, *The Irish war of defence 1598–1600: extracts from the* De Hibernia Insula commentarius, ed. and trans. M. J. Byrne (Cork, 1930), 37–9. This plea made to the Pope on behalf of the Irish confederates in 1600/1601 was eventually published in 1632.

[17] Lombard, *The Irish war of defence 1598–1600.*

[18] O'Neill, *The Nine Years War*, 150.

[19] O'Neill, *The Nine Years War*, 151; Despite the attendant dangers even the Spanish amphibious force landing at Kinsale in 1601 brought women with them. See Fynes Moryson, *An itinerary: containing his ten years travel through the twelve dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Switzerland, Netherland, Denmark, Poland, Italy, turkey, France, England, Scotland and Ireland* (4 vols, Glasgow, 1907–8), vol. 3, 19.

was with him in camp south of Armagh in 1597, when a night-time raid obliged her and the earl to flee into the woods.[20] Two years later she was in Tyrone's camp outside Newry. At the time she was four months pregnant.[21] Since the English controlled little of Ireland beyond Dublin and the country's fortified towns in 1599, the reduced English threat may have encouraged the Irish to think it safe to bring their wives. One English officer noted: '[for] the most part all their wives [are] with them, which maketh me think they regard our army but a little'.[22]

Capture by the crown appeared not to have deterred Irish women who chose to remain with their husbands, even when they were given the opportunity to move to safety. In 1600 when the garrison of Listowel Castle in County Kerry surrendered to a besieging English force, Sir Charles Wilmott, the English commander, released the women from the castle after taking their names while the men remained prisoners. The women did not leave however, but returned to the English camp to be with their husbands. Wilmott noted to Sir George Carew (the president of Munster) how the women 'lodged with them all night in the Marshalsea [a prison].[23] Believing the women had valuable information, Wilmott ordered that they were interrogated and put in 'close prison, all with bolts [iron restraints]', until he got the information he required. Soon after Carew ordered all the men executed.[24] Clearly their loyalty to their men (or lack of alternative accommodation) could, as it did on this occasion, prove counterproductive.

Civilians also impacted the tactical and operational effectiveness of armies. Large logistic/civilian 'tails' certainly slowed the pace of movement and limited the mobility of English units, which was a serious handicap in the Irish landscape and against their elusive and fast-paced Irish enemies. Moreover, the extra mouths to feed greatly reduced the operational endurance of troops in the field. To reduce the logistical burden of feeding so many non-combatants and to improve the operational speed of his troops, Lord Deputy William Russell (1594–7) proposed a range of draconian measures in 1596 to limit the numbers of civilians associated with army marching columns. His instructions stipulated that every company of 100 men was to be allowed 'but six women for laundresses such as shall be married wives to some of the said soldiers'.[25] Any civilians found over and above these limits could be executed under martial law. However, since the lord-general of the English army, Sir John Norreys, refused to countersign the orders they had little tangible effect.[26] Despite the best efforts of the Dublin government, it proved impossible to regulate women and civilians out of the armies. Consequently, women were inevitably nearby when rival troops clashed.

When combat was anticipated, measures were taken to minimise the risk to civilians by placing them in positions of relative safety. The Irish annals recorded how Sir Henry Bagenal left 'women and young persons, their horses, baggage, servants and rabble' in Armagh, before he marched his men to disaster at the Battle of the Yellow Ford in August 1598.[27] However, sometimes civilians could not be left behind, which was the situation faced

[20] Captain Edward Symes to Sir Robert Cecil, 6 June 1597, *CSPI*, vol. 6, 310–1.
[21] Lord Chancellor Dudley Loftus and council to the privy council, 2 June 1599, *CSPI*, vol. 8, 58.
[22] TNA, SP 63/206, f. 183, Sir William Warren to Lords Justices Dudley Loftus and George Carey, 23 November 1599.
[23] Sir Charles Wilmott to Sir George Carew, 5 December 1600, *CSPI*, vol. 10, 50–1.
[24] Sir George Carew to the privy council, 15 December 1600, *CSPI*, vol. 10, 59.
[25] TNA, SP 63/189, f. 126, Orders subscribed to by Sir William Russell and council, 18 April 1596.
[26] John S. Nolan, *Sir John Norreys and the Elizabethan military world* (Exeter, 1997), 229. Nolan suggested that Norreys refused as he was used to foraging and its attendant abuses during his service in Europe, therefore he believed the depredations of his troops in Ireland was not untoward.
[27] John O'Donovan (ed. and trans.), *Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* (3rd ed., 7 vols, Dublin, 1990), vol. 6, 2061.

by Sir Conyers Clifford during the retreat from Ballyshannon in 1597. His army was forced to make a rapid withdrawal south along the coast, which meant its open left flank was vulnerable.[28] Clifford's situation was dire, but he made provision to protect the non-combatants of his army. The Irish recorded how the English 'placed their women…their unarmed people, their wounded men…between them and the sea. They placed their warriors and fighting men behind them and on the other side towards the country'.[29]

In a society of heavily gendered roles, combat was the preserve of men. Extraordinary tales of warrior women were popular in seventeenth-century Europe, and some women participated in battle, but in general it was an uncommon occurrence.[30] There are no equivalent tales from the 1590s of cross-dressing women soldiers such as have been encountered from the 1640s and Williamite Wars.[31]

Though there are no accounts of women on the battlefield during the Nine Years War, there are some examples of women commanding fortified positions or castles. This was the case for both English and Irish during the war. The wife of Sir Hugh Magennis held the strategic crossing point at Narrow Water castle in 1596.[32] Red Hugh O'Donnell's mother, Fionnuala MacDonnell commanded the large Irish garrison in Sligo during the summer of 1601.[33] Women were also found defending fortified residences. Katherine Butler was paid by the crown £7 4s to command the ward at Cloughwoghter in January 1600.[34]

There is one instance where women were deployed as troops in a desperate attempt to deceive the enemy.[35] During the dying stages of the war a small number of the earl of Tyrone's allies held out against the crown. Two of these were Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare and Cuconnaght Maguire, who resisted English operations in Fermanagh into the start of 1603. A superior English force discovered O'Sullivan's camp while the bulk of the Irish forces were away on a raid. In an effort to deter the English troops from attacking, O'Sullivan made use of the women and children in the camp to make his forces appear more numerous than they actually were. He 'placed his armed men in front, the sutlers at the rear, the boys and women holding long staves for spears, he placed as if in reserve, so as to frighten the enemy as if by show of numbers'.[36] The ruse worked and the English withdrew. Participation by women in combat may have been extremely limited but this does not mean that they did not commit acts of violence. In the 1640s Irish women were reported to have participated in mob violence and to have displayed levels of aggression and brutality that matched their male counterparts.[37] It is thus safe to assume that women took part in the tumultuous overthrow of the Munster plantation in 1598.[38] However women were rarely specifically implicated in murder.

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[28] Sir Conyers Clifford to Lord Deputy Thomas Burgh and council, 9 August 1597, CSPI, vol. 6, 373–7.
[29] O'Donovan, *Annals of the Four Masters*, vol. 6, 2033.
[30] Lynn, *Women armies and warfare*, 164–5.
[31] A female soldier found among the dead at Roscommon in 1642 and Lieutenant de Bourdenance was discovered to be a women after she fell defending Limerick in 1690: See Bernadette Whelan, 'Women and warfare 1641–1691', in Pádraig Lenihan (ed.), *Conquest and resistance: war in seventeenth-century Ireland* (Leiden, 2001), 332.
[32] The commissioners to Russell, 20 Jan. 1596, J.S. Brewer and W. Bullen (eds), *Calendar of the Carew manuscripts preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth* [hereafter *Carew MSS*], (6 vols, London, 1867–73), vol. 3, 140.
[33] Captain Charles Plessington to Cecil, 17 July 1600, *CSPI*, vol. 10, 436–7.
[34] TNA, SP 63/207 pt. 1, f. 181, A cheque book of her majesties army in Ireland, 31 January 1600.
[35] There was no suggestion they were arrayed to take part in combat.
[36] Philip O'Sullivan Beare, *Ireland under Elizabeth: chapters towards a history of Ireland under Elizabeth*, trans. M.J. Byrne (Dublin, 1903), 175.
[37] Mary O'Dowd, 'Women and war in Ireland in the 1640s', in MacCurtain and O'Dowd (eds), *Women in early modern Ireland*, 96–7.
[38] A.J. Sheehan, 'The overthrow of the Plantation of Munster in October 1598' in *Irish Sword* 15 (1982), 11–22.

Fynes Moryson, Lord Deputy Mountjoy's secretary, penned a lurid description of violence by Irish women in the closing stages of the war. In his account of the devastating famine which wracked Ulster in 1602–3, he refers to old women preying on children. He recounts how 'some old women of those parts, used to make a fire in the fields, and diverse little children driving out their cattle in the cold mornings, and coming thither to warm them, were by them surprised killed and eaten'.[39] One girl managed to escape and raise the alarm. English soldiers returned to find the skulls and bones of children eaten by the women, who were captured and summarily executed. This event has frequently been cited as evidence of the deplorable state of Ulster by 1602–3, but the incident is too fantastic to be true.[40] Why did the women not seize the cattle for food instead of the children? Furthermore, the icon of the cannibalistic crone was a stock feature of folkloric tales in early modern Europe.[41] Moryson spent most of the 1590s travelling around Europe and the Middle East gathering information and experiences which formed the basis of his voluminous *Itinerary*; it was quite possible, therefore, that he encountered tales of the child-eating witch or crone during his travels. Incorporation of this into his *Itinerary* emphasised the brutish incivility of the native Irish.

Women and the intelligence war

War was never just a matter of armies, soldiers and combat. Information and intelligence was key to guiding decision-making by both sides, and in this sphere women played a significant role as spies and informants. Information could be freely provided or bought, but on some occasions female captives were interrogated for whatever information they held on the enemy. Recently there has been extensive work done by Nadine Ackerman on the use and impact of 'she-intelligencers' in seventeenth-century Britain.[42] This has opened a door on the shady word of female spies, agents and envoys, and resoundingly dispelled the suggestion that successful female spies were 'few and far between'.[43] In the context of the wars of the 1640s in Ireland, O'Dowd has referred to the involvement of elite women in more clandestine activities including cases where wives attempted to smuggle gunpowder or provide keys to town gates. The number involved was small and was of no real significance in the conduct of the war, which contrasts with the Nine Years War, where women played a larger and more prominent role in the murky world of intelligence gathering and subterfuge.[44]

Tyrone received excellent intelligence on his English adversaries. At the start of 1595, Lord Deputy William Russell claimed that Tyrone knew about the order to send fresh troops out of England before he did and that 'he [Tyrone] could hear anything out of England sooner than the deputy'.[45] According to the polemical *Discourse on the mere Irish of Ireland*, the author H.C. remarked how women played a key part in gathering intelligence, noting that 'in time of hostility these [women]…doe serve for espials to give all possible intelligences to the enemy of any project intended against them'.[46] Consequently, we can infer that women were

[39] Moryson, *Itinerary*, vol. 3, 282.
[40] Vincent Carey, '"What pen can paint or tears atone?": Mountjoy's scorched earth campaign', inHiram Morgan (ed.), *The Battle of Kinsale* (Bray, 2004), 214–5; Jonathan Bardon, *The Plantation of Ulster* (Dublin, 2012), 42.
[41] Charles Zika, 'Cannibalism and witchcraft in early modern Europe: reading the visual images', in *History Workshop Journal*, 44 (1997), 77–8.
[42] This has been examined in detail for seventeenth-century Britain in Nadine Ackerman, *Invisible agents: women and espionage in seventeenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2018).
[43] Ackerman, *Invisible agents*, 6.
[44] O'Dowd, 'Women and war in Ireland in the 1640s', 94.
[45] TNA, SP 63/178, f. 133, Russell to Cecil, 26 Feb. 1595.
[46] MS 154, ff. 55–74, Discourse on the mere Irish of Ireland, Exeter College Oxford, transcribed by Hiram Morgan: www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E600001-004/index.html (accessed 19 October 2015). The identity of H.C. remains unknown. See Fiona Fitzsimons, 'Fosterage and gossiprid in late medieval Ireland: some new

an integral part of Tyrone's intelligence network. Yet the crown also took advantage of female intelligence assets. When Myler Magrath, the protestant archbishop of Cashel, attempted to track down James Fitzthomas, the *sugán* earl of Desmond (Tyrone's key ally in Munster), he deployed seventeen spies, which he described as 'men and women, dispersed throughout all Munster…in disguised manner, some like fools, other lame, counterfeit blind jesters'.[47] After Onie O'More captured the earl of Ormond in April 1600, the secretary of state for Ireland, Sir Geoffrey Fenton, managed to have a 'gentlewoman' placed in the same lodgings as the imprisoned earl. From there she passed details of Ormond's captivity and brought messages to the earl from Fenton and Mountjoy.[48] We never learn the true name of Fenton's gentlewoman, as she was initially called *Honora*, and was later given the intriguing code name *Imperia Romana*.[49] For all her good efforts to maintain communications between Ormond and the state during his imprisonment, Ormond never saw fit to mention her in his letters after his release in June 1600.

Women were neither blind to, nor disinterested in, the events happening around them. Therefore, when women fell into government hands or fled to them for their protection, they often had important pieces of intelligence, though the significance of their information was not always recognised. In 1593 a small addendum to an intelligence report to Burghley noted that English troops detained a woman who reported that Tyrone, O'Donnell and Maguire had met in secret, and that the earl gave Maguire orders not to engage with the English army and 'not to adventure the loss of his men of war, but reserve them till the queen's army were dissolved'.[50] The informant's veracity could not be guaranteed at the time, but later events demonstrated she was telling the truth. Maguire refused to be drawn and the crown failed to engage the Irish main force during the 1593 campaign in Fermanagh.

Other women provided detailed reports which, if acted on at the time, might have greatly changed the course of the conflict. Joan Kelly was brought up at the earl of Tyrone's household in Dungannon, but married an English soldier, whom she accompanied on a relief expedition to resupply Enniskillen in 1594. The force was attacked and routed by the Irish under Hugh Maguire at the Battle of the Ford of the Biscuits on 7 August. Kelly was shot in the arm but was rescued by one of Tyrone's Scottish mercenaries whom she knew before the war. She was detained for several days before being released. Two months elapsed before government officials interrogated Kelly, but her declaration, which was taken by Sir Henry Duke (who commanded the English force routed by Maguire), provided detailed descriptions of Tyrone's complicity in the attack on the English army and his meeting with Maguire at Liscallaghan, just fifteen miles north-east of the battle.[51] Kelly gave details of Tyrone's receiving of equipment and horses captured at the battle, and his orders for the spoiling of Breifne and the Pale. In addition she gave the names of many senior and junior officers in Tyrone's camp. Despite this damning evidence it took Tyrone's capture of the Blackwater

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evidence', in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards and Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland* c. *1250–1650: land, lordship, settlement* (Dublin, 2004), 139–40.

[47] Miler Magrath to Cecil, 15 January 1601, *CSPI*, vol. 10, 148–50. Given that Magrath skilfully played both sides during the war it was highly likely that this network's information was passed to crown and confederates alike depending on the archbishop's needs.

[48] Fenton to Cecil, 10 May 1600, *CSPI*, vol. 9, 167–9.

[49] TNA, SP 63/207 pt. 3, f. 75, The declaration of the Irish messenger employed by Fenton in company with Honora, to speak with Ormond, 9 May 1600. Fenton to Cecil, 18 May 1600, *CSPI*, vol. 9, 180–1. Andrea Knox mentions a female courier called Imperia Romana. See Andrea Knox, 'Women of the wild geese: Irish women, exile and identity in Spain, 1596–1670', in *Quidditas: Journal of the Rocky Mountain medieval and renaissance association* 23 (2002), 27. John Johnson to Burghley, 12 February 1581, W.B. Turnbull *et al*., Calendar of State Papers Foreign (23 vols, London, 1863–1950), vol. 15, 12.

[50] A journal of Sir Henry Bagenal's proceedings against Hugh Maguire, 11 September. –24 October 1593, *CSPI*, vol. 5, 175–82.

[51] TNA, SP 63/176, f. 171, Confession of Joan Kelly, 7 October 1594.

Fort in February 1595, for the crown to finally concede that the earl was complicit in the war.[52]

While some women volunteered information, threats of imprisonment, torture and execution were often used to force women to inform or pass information about their friends, family members and associates. After Rose O'Toole (wife to Feagh MacHugh O'Byrne, the most powerful Irish lord in Wicklow and key ally to Tyrone) was captured in Wicklow in 1597, the crown convicted her of witchcraft and threatened to have her burned at the stake.[53] Rose offered to secure the capture or death of her two step-sons to secure her release.[54] However Rose was a wily adversary and highly regarded by Captain Thomas Lee.[55] Captain of the queen's kerne in Ireland and veteran of the wars in Ireland, Lee wrote that O'Toole travelled freely through Wicklow, passed information to the Irish rebels and openly supported Tyrone, yet still thought 'this be a fit woman to be countenanced'.[56]

Factors such as fear, revenge, and avarice also motivated informants. Florence MacCarthy (lord of Carberry) was informed on by his sister Julia. She passed information to the English because Florence imprisoned her husband for not actively supporting the war.[57] MacCarthy's wife also turned on him and reported his disloyalty to Captain Charles Wilmott and warned him not to trust her husband 'all that he did was but to win time'.[58] Others were more business-minded with their information. Anne Wilmar was the handmaid to Mabel Bagenal, Tyrone's third wife. After Mabel's death, Wilmar began her journey back to England in the company of a priest named Fawkner but stopped for a while at Kilmacthomas Castle (County Waterford). Wilmar had spent four to five years living at the heart of Tyrone's lordship, and would have been privy much of the policy and practices of Tyrone and his closest adherents. Her host at the castle, Henry Knowlis, suspected Wilmar had valuable information about the situation in Tyrone's camp. Knowlis reported that he used 'all kindness …at his own house, so that he may find out such things as may be advantageous to the supressing of these rebels'.[59] However, Knowlis learned nothing of any real worth. Wilmar was well aware of the value of her information on the earl, and Knowlis claimed that Wilmar suggested that the queen would be willing to pay £10,000 for her knowledge of Tyrone's movements in the Pale and who he met there.[60] There is no evidence that Wilmar received any money, or if this was idle speculation to extract cash from the crown, but it was obvious that Wilmar knew that in war crucial information could command exorbitant sums. Wilmar may have co-operated on some level, as Fenton reported later in the year that he had possession of a letter written by Tyrone and O'Donnell to the king of Spain, which was passed to him 'by means of an English woman who serveth the countess': this was almost

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[52] Tyrone had been fighting a proxy war in Fermanagh from 1593–5. He maintained a façade of loyalty while he built up his military strength in Ulster and supressed the crowns allies. See James O'Neill, 'Death in the lakelands: Tyrone's proxy war, 1593–4', *History Ireland* 21:2 (2015) 14–17.

[53] Emmet O'Byrne, 'Rose O'Toole', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

[54] Captain Thomas Lee to Cecil, 21 August 1597, *CSPI*, vol. 6, 388.

[55] A highly experienced English officer in Ireland, he may be more famously known by his portrait painted by Marcus Gheerharts the Younger in 1594, now in the Tate Gallery, London.

[56] BL Add. MSS 33743, Tom Lee, 'The discovery and recovery of Ireland with the author's apology', transcribed by John McGurk:www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E590001-005/index.html (accessed 10 September 2015).

[57] Thomas Stafford, Pacata Hibernia*: Ireland appeased and reduced, or a history of the late wares of Ireland, especially in the province of Munster under the command of Sir George Carew*, ed. Standish O'Grady (2 vols, London, 1896), vol. 1, 230–1. Julia taken from the pedigree of the MacCarthy Reagh in Daniel MacCarthy (ed.), *The life and letters of Florence MacCarthy* (London, 1867), 453.

[58] Examination proving Florence MacCarthy's treasons, [1600], *Carew MSS*, vol. 4, 515–6.

[59] Henry Knowlis to Cecil, 10 January 1597, *CSPI*, vol. 6, 199–200.

[60] TNA, SP 63/197, f. 14, Knowlis to Cecil, 12 January 1597.

certainly Wilmar.[61] While it is likely that she was an English catholic, it was clear that financial reward trumped her religious allegiance as well as her former loyalty to Tyrone.

Women as envoys and messengers

During the wars of the mid-seventeenth century, women often acted as messengers and diplomatic go-betweens; taking advantage of familial and social ties to transmit communications and mediate between men on both sides of the conflict.[62] This also occurred during the Nine Years War, but while some were elite noblewomen, there are many references to nameless women carrying messages and goods. Indeed, the anonymous *Discourse on the mere Irish of Ireland* suggests that women formed the core of a communication network that carried news and letters throughout the island. While railing against 'a roughish kind of people, some are stout beggars, some are professed whores, or common women', the discourse referred to women as itinerant messengers and letter carriers.[63] In times of trouble or stirrings of revolt women were 'the instrument, that do whisper them at all times from one to another of all the Irish faction. These be the conduits that carry and convey these evils from place to place, these do divulge and scatter this reprobate opinion in every corner of that kingdom and these do join these firebrands together'.[64] The author also claimed that the women acted as spies and saboteurs, and were likely to burn down houses or villages where, through compassion or charity, they were given shelter. Though this may simply be an attack on Irish women (a common occurrence in contemporary English literature about Ireland) it is clear that women carried letters and messages for both Irish and English throughout the war. Moreover, they could do so in greater safety than men.

Florence MacCarthy noted in 1600 that the letters sent by Carew during the summer of 1600 would have cost the messenger his life 'if he had been taken [by the Irish] along the way'. MacCarthy's replies to Carew and the earl of Thomond were 'hid or stitched in women's apparel'.[65] This suggests that a man may have been killed if caught whereas a woman would not have been treated so brutally. Robert Devereux, earl of Essex and lord lieutenant of Ireland (1599) alluded to the differing treatment of men and women on the road in his instructions to Captain 'J.C.' in 1599. While endeavouring to persuade Neil MacBrian Fertagh O'Neill, lord of north Ards, to defect, he was careful to send a woman to make contact 'because a man should have been suspected'.[66] It would be too much to suggest that the roads were entirely safe for women messengers, but clearly women appeared to have greater freedom of movement than men.[67]

Often women adopted roles that were far more active than a basic functionary for delivering letters or message; they were often used by both the crown and Irish confederates as envoys or representatives. During the discussions with Sir John Norreys in 1597, Tyrone specifically requested that Feagh Mac Hugh O'Byrne send his wife, Rose O'Toole, to represent Feagh's interests 'to the end that O'Neill may knit such peace…for you as he will do for himself'.[68] In 1602 Rory O'Cahan was forced to submit to English forces in northern Ulster. Tyrone demanded O'Cahan meet with him (O'Cahan was a client lord of Tyrone), but

[61] Extracts from two letters sent to Fenton from Richard Weston, [November] 1597, *CSPI*, vol. 6, 447–8.
[62] O'Dowd, 'Women and war', 94.
[63] MS 154, ff. 55–74, Discourse on the mere Irish of Ireland, Exeter College Oxford, transcribed by Hiram Morgan: www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E600001-004/index.html (accessed 19 October 2015).

[64] MS 154, ff. 55–74, Discourse on the mere Irish of Ireland, Exeter College Oxford
[65] Florence MacCarthy to Carew, 2 August 1600, *CSPI*, vol. 9, 371–3.
[66] Lane to Essex, [June] 1599, *CSPI*, vol. 8, 69–76.
[67] TNA, SP 63/200, f. 249, Lee to Piers Hackett, 11 August 1597.
[68] TNA, SP 63/198, f. 341, Tyrone to Feagh MacHugh O'Byrne, [17] 27 April 1597.

possibly fearful of being accused of associating with Tyrone, O'Cahan used his wife, Rose O'Neill (Tyrone's daughter), as his proxy.[69] Fear that direct contact with enemies may suggest complicity might have been behind Lord Delvin's request for the Irish council to grant his wife a commission to parley with the Irish rebels.[70] Oliver Stephenson was in a similar quandary when summoned by James Fitzthomas, the *sugán* earl of Desmond.[71] He sent his wife, but still felt the need to contact the lord president of Munster to ensure that this was not perceived as an act of disloyalty to the crown.[72]

Soft power of persuasion

Throughout Europe women wielded indirect political power, and marriages to powerful or influential husbands enabled women to influence their spouse to their own ends. Citing Merry E. Wiesner, Bernadette Whelan notes women's ability to shape events despite their exclusion from the official structures of power.[73] As O'Dowd noted, while women were denied official political office in sixteenth-century Ireland, this did not mean they lacked political influence. Eleanor Butler was deeply involved in family affairs during the 1570s, and Joan Maguire, the mother of Hugh O'Neill, was described as 'head and counsel of advice to the gentlemen and chiefs of Ulster'.[74] Women could hold influential positions, as connections through marriage or affiliation to powerful ruling families allowed them to act as powerbrokers between warring factions.[75]

There was a long-standing hostility in English government circles to the negative impact that intermarriage had on English culture in Ireland.[76] At the beginning of the Nine Years War in 1593 this was still a matter of grave concern for the crown. The English poet Edmund Spenser summarised the issues by cataloguing the dangers of Irish wives, citing examples such as the Bermingham family, who through 'licentious conversing with the Irish, or marrying, or fostering' were 'now waxen the most savage Irish'.[77] The *Supplication of the blood of the English most lamentably murdered in Ireland* written in 1598 added that Irish wives could draw their husbands to ignore their duty, protect Irish relatives in revolt and even coerce their spouses to defect or surrender their wards or castles into Irish hands; Irish wives changed the English in name to Irish in nature.[78]

Tudor officials in Ireland were frequently of the opinion that Irish wives of Englishmen acted to undermine the authority of the crown in Ireland. Local women were

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[69] Sir Thomas Philips to Cecil, 27 July 1602, *CSPI*, vol. 11, 454–5.
[70] TNA, SP 63/206, f. 94, Motions made to the lords justices and council on the behalf of Lord Delvin [Christopher Nugent], 24 November 1599.
[71] James Fitzthomas was a claimant of the vacant earldom of Desmond. He was appointed to the position by Tyrone in 1598, but was known derisively as the súgan earl or 'straw-rope' earl by those still loyal to the crown.
[72] TNA, SP 63/202 pt. 3, f. 247, Oliver Stephenson to Sir Thomas Norreys, 16 October 1598.
[73] Bernadette Whelan, 'Women and warfare, 1641–1691', in Padraig Lenihan (ed.), *Conquest and resistance: war in seventeenth-century Ireland* (Leiden, 2001), 317; Ailes, 'Camp followers', 69.
[74] Cited in O'Dowd, *A history of women in Ireland*, 23.
[75] Ciaran Brady, 'Political women and reform in Tudor Ireland', in MacCurtain and O'Dowd (eds), Women in early modern Ireland, 78–81; Andrea Knox, '"Barbarous and pestiferous women": female criminality, violence and aggression in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Scotland and Ireland', in Yvonne Galloway and Rona Ferguson (eds), *Twisted sisters: women, crime and deviance in Scotland since 1400* (East Linton, 2002), 18.
[76] 'Lord Chancellor Gerrard's notes of his report on Ireland', *Analecta Hibernia* 2 (1931), 96, 122. 'Degeneration' was a term used by the English to describe the Gaelicisation of the Old English (Catholics), descendants of the Anglo-Norman conquerors, by marriage, fosterage, adoption of Irish customs, language and dress. The term was used by New English (Protestant) settlers to undermine the authority of the Old English and question their loyalty to the English crown.
[77] Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser: A view of the state of Ireland* (Oxford, 2003), 173–4.
[78] Willy Maley, 'The supplication of the blood of the English most lamentably murdered in Ireland, cryeng out of the yearth for revenge',*Analecta Hibernia* 36 (1995), 31–3.

considered to be culpable in the failure of the Laois–Offaly plantation of the 1550s. The English authorities in Dublin hoped to use two forts as the focus of a new plantation. The soldiers who were to be responsible for military defence and civilian settlement were not, however, as committed to the colonial project as the administrators in Dublin. They fraternised freely with the indigenous community and entertained women within the forts. The Dublin government blamed the soldier's matches with Irish women for the failure of the plantation as it was believed that the wives spied on the garrison and passed sensitive information to their Gaelic relatives.[79] In seeming support of this view, in 1587 Captain Thomas Lee set aside his Irish wife, Elizabeth Eustace, as she was (allegedly) divulging sensitive information to the crown's enemies.[80] The loss of Athy in November 1598 may have confirmed fears that marriage could compromise loyalty to the crown. The constable and fourteen of his warders, all of whom were English (or Old English), defected to Tyrone. Sir Richard Bingham, formerly the governor of Connacht and by then Marshal of Ireland, suggested that it was because the constable was married into the O'Mores and by this means was 'drawn to be a villain'.[81] There are also scattered references to wives drawing away formerly loyal Old English lords. The earl of Ormond claimed that it was the baron of Cahir's link to Viscount Mountgarret that incited his rebellion against the crown. Mountgarret was allied to Tyrone, and Ormond claimed that Cahir was 'simple and foolish, carried away by his wife that was Mountgarrett's sister'.[82] Nevertheless, the persuasiveness of wives also acted in the crown's favour.

Wives could exert strong influence on the Irish confederates and some were reported to have compelled their husbands to defect to the crown. It was alleged that Florence MacCarthy's wife Ellen refused 'to come to his bed until he reconciled himself to Her Majesty'.[83] In Connacht, John Burke was allied to Tyrone, but the intercession of his wife and mother persuaded him to return his allegiance to the crown.[84] The power of wives to influence husbands was not lost on the English officers in Ireland. A key feature of Lord Deputy Mountjoy's renewed efforts to defeat Tyrone from 1600–3, was a determined effort to cause defections in Irish ranks. The best documented case was the plot to entice Dermot O'Connor's defection. He was one of Tyrone's principal captains in Munster, but O'Connor's wife Margaret was the sister of the imprisoned James Fitzgerald, son of the 15th earl and a claimant for the vacant earldom of Desmond. Carew offered to have her brother not only released from the Tower of London, but also reinstated as the earl of Desmond if Margaret could persuade her husband to betray James Fitzthomas, the *sugán* earl of Desmond,[85] Carew was unambiguous when he wrote 'the chiefest motive that draws him [O'Connor] to the queen is the persuasion of his wife, who works him to no other end than to enlarge her brother', although the £1000 offered by the lord president may have sweetened the deal.[86] Ultimately, the plotters bungled the complex plan. O'Connor captured Fitzthomas but loyal confederate troops quickly rescued Desmond.[87] The fiasco resulted in O'Connor's death,

[79] Mary O'Dowd, 'Women and the colonial experience in Ireland, *c*. 1550–1650', in Terry Brotherstone, Deborah Simonton and Oonagh Walsh (eds), *Gendering Scottish history* (Glasgow, 2000), 156–7.
[80] Sir Nicholas Malby to Sir Francis Walsingham, 24 October 1580, *CSPI*, vol. 2, 262; Andrew Trollop to Lord Burghley [William Cecil], 27 October 1587, *CSPI*, vol. 3, 428.
[81] TNA, SP 63/202 pt. 3, f. 390, Bingham to Loftus and Gardiner, 27 November 1598.
[82] TNA, SP 63/202 pt. 3, f. 281 'Portions of some manuscript history of the time', [Oct. 1598].
[83] Stafford, Pacata Hibernia, vol. 1, 126.
[84] Stafford, Pacata Hibernia, vol. 2, 295–8.
[85] O'Sullivan Beare, *Ireland under Elizabeth*, 133.
[86] Carew to Cecil, 27 June 1600, *CSPI*, vol. 9, 260–6.
[87] O'Sullivan Beare, *Ireland under Elizabeth*, 134; O'Donovan, *Annals of the Four Masters*, vol. 6, 2173–5.

although Carew made sure to look after Margaret, as she was later granted £100 per annum as a pension.[88]

Violence against women

Descriptions of attacks on civilians permeate the history of war, and women were frequently targets of intercommunal and confessional violence during the early-modern period.[89] The theme of aggression towards women has been addressed in conflicts in Ireland, England and further afield.[90] William Palmer has examined gender and violence in Ireland during the Tudor and Stuart periods, but deployed few examples from the Nine Years War.[91] In the collection of essays entitled *Age of atrocity: violence and political conflict in early modern Ireland*, little attention was paid to the events of the Nine Years War.[92] Only Joan Redmond addressed gender-specific violence during the conflict. Her focus was, however, on the overthrow of the Munster revolt in 1598, which in itself was aberrant in the overall conduct of the war.[93] The collapse of the social order, refugee episodes, attacks by civilian insurgents and levels of violence were unlike anything experienced during the war to that point.[94]

In the history of warfare in Ireland it is not hard to find examples of the mistreatment of, or direct attacks on, civilians. Before the Nine Years War, civilian victimisation and brutality are found in both the first (1569–73) and second (1579–83) Desmond wars. The vicious campaigns conducted by Sir Humphrey Gilbert (Sir Walter Raleigh's half-brother) in Munster became a byword for brutality and cruelty.[95] Moreover Gilbert was renowned for his harsh treatment of old women.[96] According to the contemporary English author Thomas Churchyard, 'the men of war could not be maintained, without their churls, and calliackes, or women, who milked their creates [herds of cattle], and provided their victuals, and other necessaries. So that the killing of them by the sword, was the way to kill the men of war by famine'.[97] During the wars of the 1640s, the Dublin government took a severe line against women associated with the Irish rebels, and justified the killing of women by troops as 'manifestly very deep in guilt of this rebellion'.[98] Killing of Irish women was not only excused but encouraged.[99]

There were many cases where massacre and executions took little if any account of the sex of those killed. After the fall of Enniskillen Castle in 1594, Captain John Dowdall

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[88] Carew to the privy council, 20 December 1600, *Carew MSS*, vol. 3, 498–9.
[89] Barbara Donegan, 'Law, war and women in seventeenth-century England', in Elizabeth Hieneman (ed.), *Sexual violence in conflict zones: from the ancient world to the era of human rights* (Philadelphia, 2011), 189–201.
[90] Mary O'Dowd, 'Women and war in Ireland in the 1640s', 91–111; Diane Hall, 'Women and violence in late medieval Ireland' in Christine Meeks and Catherine Lawless (eds), *Studies on medieval and early modern women: pawns or players?* (Dublin, 2003), 131–40; Gillian Kennedy, 'Women's experience of war in later-medieval Ireland', in Conor Kostick (ed.), *Medieval Italy, medieval and early modern women* (Dublin, 2010), 243–54.
[91] William Palmer, 'Gender, violence and rebellion in Tudor and early Stuart Ireland', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23:4 (1992).
[92] David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan and Clodagh Tait (eds), *Age of atrocity: violence and political conflict in early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2007).
[93] Joan Redmond, 'Memories of violence and New English identities in early modern Ireland', *Historical Research* 89:246 (2016), 708–29.
[94] O'Neill, *Nine Years War*, 182.
[95]David Edwards, 'Atrocities: some days two heads some days four', *History Ireland* 17:1 (2009), 18–21.
[96] Brady, 'Political women', 69.
[97] Thomas Churchyard, *A generall rehearsall of warres, called Churchyardes choise* (London, 1579), Q. ii.
[98] Cited in Mark Stoyle, 'The road to Farndon Field: explaining the massacre of Royalist women at Naseby', *English Historical Review* 123:503 (2008), 904.
[99] Stoyle, 'The road to Farndon Field'.

murdered 30–40 women and children in cold blood.[100] O'Sullivan Beare described how English troops threw women and children to their deaths at Dursey Island, Co. Cork, in 1602.[101] Captain George Flower reportedly killed as many men, women and children as he could find, whereas Sir Arthur Chichester's frequent attacks on civilians are well-documented.[102] Both English and Irish alike condemned the other for killing civilians, but both sides were known to kill women and children. Bagenal alleged that Art MacBaron's raid near Newry in March 1594 burned women and children in their homes.[103] Furthermore, a punitive raid by Tyrone on Ely O'Carroll left 'women, sons and daughters dying'.[104] However, there is some evidence to suggest that crown troops were more prone to attack civilians than the Irish confederates. After his lands were devastated in 1598, Lord Roche noted that the Irish destroyed churches, mansions and spoiled the land, whereas English troops 'spoiled my tenants [and] killed both men, women and children'.[105] The proclivity of the crown in Ireland to resort to attacking civilians as a means to assert its authority suggested that indigenous Irish women were more likely to be attacked than Old/New English women.

Clearly gender provided no protection or immunity from aggression in wars against the Irish. However, there is little evidence to suggest they were deliberately targeted by either side because they were women. Palmer claimed that Irish women were subject to greater hostility than their English counterparts during rebellions (such as the Northern Rebellion in 1569) in Tudor England, but if one looks further afield into contemporary European warfare, it is clear that while women were killed along with men and children in Ireland, this also occurred in France and the Low Countries.[106] Indeed the brutality inflicted upon women in Ireland during the war was part of general victimisation of civilians and not specifically directed according to gender. In Europe the situation was much worse.

Reports of attacks on women in the Low Countries and France were frequent and graphic.[107] Gratuitous violence against women was a characteristic of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre in Paris in 1572.[108] Women fared no better in the Dutch revolt, where rape was commonplace.[109] This was not just during the large-scale ransacking of towns, such as of Antwerp in 1576, but also at a local level in rural districts. An account of a woman tortured to reveal the whereabouts of her money had an unmistakeable sexual element. [110] Sexual violence is a common aspect of war and has a long history, which included attacks not only upon women, but also upon men and children.[111] Sexual assaults on women is an enduring aspect of war but there is little evidence to suggest that rape, sexually motivated assault or gender violence was a major issue.[112] In general, rape was rarely mentioned during the war.

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[100] TNA, SP 63/173, f. 104, Dowdall to Fitzwilliam, 7 February 1594. O'Sullivan Beare, *Ireland under Elizabeth*, 73

[101] O'Sullivan Beare, *Ireland under Elizabeth*, 156

[102] John McGurk, 'The Pacification of Ulster, 1600–03', in David Edwards, Pádraig Lenihan and Clodagh Tait (eds), *Age of atrocity: violence and political conflict in early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2007), 122.

[103] TNA, SP 63/173, f. 285, Bagenal to Fitzwilliam, 20 March 1594.

[104] O'Donovan, *Annals of the Four Masters*, vol. 6, 2147–9.

[105] TNA, SP 63/202 pt. 3, f. 281, Portions of some manuscript history of the time, [October] 1598.

[106] Palmer, 'Gender, violence and rebellion', 712.

[107] Mack P. Holt, *The French wars of religion*, 1562–1629 (Cambridge, 1995), 62, 86–7; Penny Roberts, 'Peace, ritual, and sexual violence during the religious wars', *Past and Present*, 214:7 (2012), 97; Henk Van Nierop, *Treason in the Northern Quarter: war, terror and the rule of law in the Dutch Revolt* (Princeton, 2009), 148.

[108] Van Nierop, *Treason in the Northern Quarter*, 86–7.

[109] Robert O'Connell, *Of arms and men: a history of war, weapons and aggression* (Oxford, 1989), 133.

[110] Van Nierop, *Treason in the Northern Quarter*, 148.

[111] Roberts, 'Peace, ritual, and sexual violence', 97.

[112] Examined in detail in Elizabeth D. Heineman (ed.), *Sexual violence in conflict zones: from the ancient world to the era of human rights* (Philadelphia, 2011). Rape during military attacks were not unheard of. 'Ravishing' of women was reported during the sack of Youghal in 1579. See Richard Bagwell, *Ireland under the Tudors* (3 vols, London, 1885–90), vol. 3, 34.

This can be explained by one of two reasons: it was not widely reported because it was not common, or there was a failure to comment on it by both sides of the conflict.[113] Furthermore, cases may have been dealt with in a summary manner that were not recorded in writing. Rape was a serious crime in both English and Irish Brehon law. Russell's orders for the army in 1596 stated that a soldier would be put to death 'for the ravishing or carnal knowledge of any woman against her will'.[114] Similarly in Irish law, it was an offence but was punished by a system of fines and compensation.[115] However investigating rape in early modern Europe is no easy feat as there is a remarkable paucity of material to work with.[116] In her study of women and the Irish wars of the 1640, O'Dowd suggested that the shame and humiliation associated with rape ensured that many cases went unreported.[117]

In a draft response to 'Tyrone's libel' in 1600, the unsigned author referred to the brutalities of the war in terms such as 'robberies, murders, extinguishing of families, burning of houses and all kinds of bloody licentiousness and cruelty'.[118] This sentence was later amended by the lord high treasurer, Lord Bruckhurst, to include the word 'rapes'. Alteration of what was already a strong rebuke of Tyrone suggested that despite all the savagery and destruction seen in seven years of war, sexual violence was not frequent enough to warrant mention. Where rape was noted, it was always in a general sense.[119]

It is difficult to assess the frequency of attacks on women. Limited references make assessments based solely on the small number of reported cases tenuous at best. Consequently, it is worth highlighting the overall levels of brutality and violence prevalent in the war, by examining the occurrence of civilian flight during the conflict. Refugees were often associated with the breakdown of social order or economic collapse. In his study of the effects of early-modern warfare in England and continental Europe, Quenten Outram posited that relatively peaceful/non-violent relations between belligerents and civil populations could be observed by the lack of large-scale refugee migrations.[120] When applied to the war in Ireland it is evident that there were only a few instances of civilian flight. These were associated with major breakdowns in civil order, agricultural collapse or in response to deliberate targeting of civilian populations. Although the war started in 1593, large numbers of refugees first occurred in 1598 during the collapse of the Munster plantation, which began more as an insurrection by the lower orders of the rural population than a military operation ordered by Tyrone. Later, the scorched earth tactics by Lord Deputy Charles Mountjoy, relentlessly prosecuted from 1600–3, forced civilians to abandon their homes in large numbers, but for most of the war relations between civilians and soldiers never deteriorated to the point where the civil population felt obliged to abandon their lands. Sir Richard Bingham noted that while the Irish confederates dominated much of the Irish countryside by the end of 1598, 'the people neither fear nor fly the rebels'.[121] This suggests that the conflict

[113] The contemporary definition of what constituted rape made this all the more difficult. See Barbara J. Baines, 'Effacing rape in early modern representation', *English Literary History*65:1 (1998), 69–98; Garthine Walker, 'Rereading rape and sexual violence in Early Modern England', *Gender and History* 10:1 (1998), 1–25.
[114] TNA, SP 63/189, f. 126, Orders subscribed by Russell and the council, 18 April 1596.
[115] Diane Hall and Elizabeth Malcom, 'The rebels Turkish tyranny: understanding sexual violence in Ireland during the 1640s', *Gender and History* 22:1 (2010), 61.
[116] Hall and Malcom, 'The rebels Turkish tyranny', 56.
[117] O'Dowd, 'Women and war', 101.
[118] TNA, SP 63/207 pt. 6, f. 338, 'A draft answer to Tyrone's libel by the honest Catholic lords of the Pale', [December] 1600. Morgan suggested that this document was written by a government official. See Hiram Morgan, 'Faith and fatherland or queen and country?', *Dúiche Néill* 9 (1994), 21–2.
[119] Thomas Jones to Burghley, 22 March 1598, *CSPI*, vol. 7, 86–96; Plan for the reformation of Ireland, [Anon.], 1603, *Carew MSS*, vol. 4, 457–63.
[120] Quentin Outram, 'The demographic impact of early modern warfare', *Social Science History*, 26:2 (2002), 245–6.
[121] Sir Richard Bingham to Cecil, 5 December 1598, *CSPI*, vol. 7, 392–3.

had more in common with the restraint of the English Civil War (1642–51), than the untrammelled brutality of the Thirty Years War (1618–48).

Where rape was mentioned there was rarely any detail provided. Assaults on women were usually mentioned in general terms. The first reference to rape during the war came from Spenser, who described the Irish as 'common ravishers of women, and murderers of children'.[122] However the first specific allegation was by the earl of Ormond against Tyrone's allies in Leinster. Ormond claimed that 'they [the O'Mores and O'Connors] have abused men's wives, and their daughters in such villainous manner, as it is not to be spoken'.[123] Tyrone denied the accusation, but Bishop Thomas Jones (who recounted the meeting in a letter to William Cecil, Lord Burghley) claimed that the Leinster Irish had even caused disorders while in Ulster. An annotation in the margins of the manuscript by Jones notes that 'the inhabitants of Tyrone have vowed to cut their throats if they come there'.[124] After bringing the ringleaders into Tyrone's presence, the earl was unable to defend his allies actions, causing him to '[grow] into a rage, partly against those rascals themselves and partly because he was so strictly charged for them'.[125] The authorities in Dublin exploited the opportunity to present Tyrone with proof of his allies' brutality, and further instances would have undoubtedly been used in a similar fashion to smear Tyrone's reputation. Yet this was the only time in ten years of war when the crown levelled charges of this type against the earl.

There was one case of rape for which some details survive. This was an attack on a woman in Limerick in 1601. The men from the earl of Thomond's company of crown troops were reported to have 'ravished an aged and decrepit woman'. The incident was only mentioned as part of the reasons for not paying for the earl of Thomond's foot company.[126] While detailed descriptions of specific attacks were rare but not unknown, the *Dialogue of Silvynne and Peregrynne* recounted how Teague MacMurrough threatened to torture an English woman in Killucan, Co. Westmeath.[127] After dining in Redmond Frayne's victualling house, MacMurrough allegedly demanded 40s from Frayne's wife, but she refused claiming they had no money. MacMurrough threatened to 'roast her upon a spit at the fire', upon which the English couple relented and gave their unwelcome guests what little money they had in the house.

It was possible that these were isolated cases and not representative of relationships between the Irish confederates and the civilians of the Pale. Only during the Munster revolt in 1598 did allegations of rape and sexual violence became more frequent. The plantation of protestant settlers from England was overthrown almost overnight by a popular insurrection. The entry of Irish confederate troops into Munster precipitated widespread attacks on English settlers, leading to outrages and atrocities that were not a feature of the war to that point.[128] Lurid and descriptive accounts were recorded in the *Supplication of the blood of the English most lamentably murdered in Ireland*. It claimed that the Irish attacked women of almost any age, even children of twelve or eleven as 'none that lighted into their [Irish] hands escaped

[122] Hadfield and Maley, *Edmund Spenser*, 74.
[123] TNA, SP 63/202 pt. 1, f. 225, Thomas Jones, [bishop of Meath] to Burghley, 22 March 1598.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Memorandum on reasons for refusing the earl of Thomond's foot company, [4 August] 1601, *CSPI*, vol. 11, 2–3.
[127] TNA, SP63/203, ff 283–354, Dialogue of Silvynne and Peregrynne, edited by Hiram Morgan: www.ucc.ie/celt/online/E590001-001.html (accessed 16 September 2010), ff 298v–299.
[128] Sheehan, 'The overthrow of the Plantation of Munster', 18.

their beastly lust'.[129] Daughters were attacked in front of their fathers, while a priest assaulted and 'barbarously abused' an elderly woman.[130]

The chief justice for Munster, William Saxey, described all manner of brutality with 'infants taken from the nurse's breast, and the brains dashed against walls' and the murder of a husband in front of their wife, his heart 'plucked out'.[131] Furthermore, the assailants forced the said wife to allow the murderer to clean his hands on her apron. As cruel as this vignette is, Saxey made no suggestion that the woman was physically assaulted. He did, however, refer to refugees in Youghal who were deliberately mutilated to strike fear in their fellow English 'with their tongues cut out of their heads, others with their noses cut off'.[132] Nose cutting can be associated with early modern attacks or judicial punishment of women. Prostitutes could have their noses slit and during the ransacking of the Royalist baggage train after the battle of Naseby in 1646, many of the women that were considered Irish 'whores that attended that army are marked in the face or nose, with a slash or cut'.[133] The nose cutting reported by Saxey may be evidence of non-fatal but nonetheless brutal attacks on women, but without further corroboration this remains speculative.

While both *Supplication* and Saxey provide the primary sources for atrocities during the overthrow of the Munster plantation, they must be viewed with some circumspection. The polemic quality of the *Supplication* was unmistakeable and may have been exaggerated to elicit a strong response from England. Yet, as the author is unknown it is impossible to know the full context of the work. Saxey's reputation as chief justice in Munster was questionable. Lord Deputy William Russell had requested that Saxey be detained in England rather than returned to his position as Chief Justice in Munster in 1597, as Saxey was 'un-meet a man he is to supply so high a room…his intemperate and indiscrete proceedings in many causes far dissonant from the duty of a learned, sincere and wise judge'.[134] In addition to the questionable nature of two main sources for the atrocity narrative in Munster, there were no calls for compensation or judicial punishment after the war. One would have expected demands for retribution once the war had been won and English authority re-established in the province. The atrocities of 1641 resulted in a wealth of depositions taken by government-appointed commissioners, which were used to prosecute those implicated in the outrages. Nothing of the sort was enacted or even called for at the end of the conflict. Saxey, though Chief Justice in Munster, never attempted or even requested any prosecutions after the war ended in 1603, suggesting that the *Supplication* and other claims may have been exaggerated.

Nevertheless, other sources confirm that the levels of violence exhibited in Munster were greater than elsewhere. William Farmer noted the Irish burned, spoiled and murdered Englishmen 'or any other that would not allow their doing'.[135] O'Sullivan Beare reported how 'whatever English were in the countries of those who took up arms against the Queen, were plundered of their goods and expelled'.[136] In contrast, English settlers were not forcibly cleared from the Laois and Offaly plantations, nor where they targeted in Ulster.[137] The

[129] Maley, 'The supplication of the blood of the English', 17–8.
[130] Maley, 'The supplication of the blood of the English', 18, 43.
[131] Information of William Saxey to Cecil, 26 October 1598, *CSPI*, vol. 7, 300–2.
[132] Information of William Saxey to Cecil, 26 October 1598, *CSPI*, vol. 7, 300–2.
[133] Frank Tallett, *War and society in early modern Europe: 1495–1715* (London, 1997), 132; Quoted in Glen Foard, *Naseby: the decisive campaign* (Guildford, 1995), 288.
[134] TNA SP 63/198, f. 282, Lord Deputy William Russell and Council to the Privy Council, 12 February 1597. Commissioners were sent who produced a long list of grievances against Saxey. See TNA SP 63/198, f. 232, An abstract of some of the disloyal and corrupt practices of William Saxey, Chief Justice of Munster, 24 March 1597.
[135] C. Litton Falkiner, 'William Farmer's chronicles of Ireland from 1594 to 1613', *English Historical Review* 22:85 (1907), 110.
[136] O'Sullivan Beare, *Ireland under Elizabeth*, 116.
[137] There were significant English settler populations in Lecale and Ards, Co. Down.

refugee crisis caused by the revolt in Munster, when there were few other occurrences during the conflict, indicate there was something different about the nature of the violence that precipitated civilian flight to the relative safety of the port towns.

Overall, the evidence suggests that rape or sexually motivated assaults were less common than in contemporary wars in Europe. Though there is some evidence for rape, the crown authorities would have exploited them as propaganda to denounce Tyrone and his confederates, if they had been a significant feature of Irish campaigns. Conversely, the Irish records are silent on the subject. O'Sullivan Beare recounted in detail the brutality of English troops against women and children throughout the war, but never mentioned rape or sexual assaults.[138]

Conclusion

It is evident that women did not draw back from the Irish political, social or military arena with the advent of war. Although the documentation is fragmentary, it seems clear that women at all levels of society were engaged in efforts which facilitated or hindered the war effort of both the Irish lords and the Elizabethan state. During military campaigns women fulfilled roles similar to those of their counterparts in wars elsewhere in early modern Europe. They tended to the domestic, medical and sexual needs of the troops. However, the fast-paced mobile warfare prevalent in the early Irish campaigns suggests that they may have played less of a role than elsewhere. Women were present but played no active part in battles/combat, although both Irish and English women took charge of castles and fortified houses.

As seen in earlier periods, elite women exercised power through family ties and marriage. Although not vested in official political position in either English or Irish cultural spheres, their ability to influence male relatives was clear. This was recognised and exploited by both belligerents during the conflict. Furthermore, their influence and use of soft power could impact the course of the war where direct military power proved ineffective. Women of all social classes acted as envoys, proxies and messengers. They were intrinsic to the systems of communication and carried vital intelligence and dispatches. Women actively provided intelligence to both sides, essential to military and political decision making. Their motivations may have differed—expediency, loyalty, fear or cash payment—but their impact was significant.

War did not always require killing, but bullets, disease and death were an inescapable part of the conflict. Consequently, women fell victim to the perils of war as much as the men. Disease and hunger which plagued armies on campaign would have affected soldier and civilian alike. However, where Europe would plumb the darkness of human experience with the horrors of the Thirty Years War, Ireland was spared this descent into untrammelled barbarity. Though death and misery abounded, there is no evidence to suggest troops deliberately targeted the female population, nor does there seem to be the unfettered sexual violence which occurred in continental Europe. Women suffered privation and brutality as part of the general population and not because of their gender.

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[138] O'Sullivan's description of the massacre of 300 civilians on Dursey Island, Co. Cork, in 1602 was visceral but never hinted at sexually motivated violence. O'Sullivan Beare, *Ireland under Elizabeth*, 156.

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