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For Lucy Campbell, and for Kate and Hugh Varley

Land questions in modern Ireland

Edited by
Fergus Campbell and Tony Varley

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Heather Laird: Decentring the Irish Land War: women, politics and the private sphere

The dominant Irish historical narrative, at its most basic, sees the history of Ireland since the beginning of the nineteenth century as a series of revolts and risings which posed a direct challenge to the colonial state with lulls in between. This narrative is underpinned by a narrow notion of the political, with events and actions only considered historically significant if they affect the structures of organized politics relating to the sphere of the state. The historical writings which seek to challenge the parameters of this dominant narrative by focusing attention on what James C. Scott refers to in *Weapons of the Weak* as 'everyday' forms of resistance are generally considered to belong to social as opposed to political history.[1] For the Indian historian and postcolonial scholar Ranajit Guha, a distinction between 'political' resistance, which directly impacts on the state, and 'social' resistance, which operates outside the domain of the state, is symptomatic of a state-centred historiography that condemns certain sectors of the population to political and historical insignificance.[2] The Subaltern Studies Collective, of which Guha is a founder member, believe that such suppressed histories can only be restored if the political arena is extended outside the structures of the state.

In historical accounts of Ireland in which the political is defined purely in terms of that which directly affects the state, and historical change is believed to be powered by these narrowly defined political forces, women, who were for the most part excluded from formal male political culture, tend to be assigned a marginal role. State-centred histories, in other words, are invariably patriarchal histories. One of the means employed to counteract this marginalization is to seek out examples of 'exceptional' women who did operate in the arena of the state, or close to it, and focus attention on them. This strategy, which most commonly takes the form of the biographical study,[3] could be categorized, with reference to the feminist historian Gerda Lerner, as 'compensatory history' in that it is concerned

with inserting 'notable women', who have 'achieved' in the same way men who are deemed 'notable' have achieved, into the 'empty spaces' of mainstream historiography.[4] While scholarship of this kind reminds us of the impressive contribution that women like Constance Markievicz made to Irish society, it fails to challenge the values and structures of the historiography it is supplementing. In this chapter, I will demonstrate, with reference to women and agrarian unrest in the 1880s land agitation, that an historical framework which decentres familiar notions of power and the political and, consequently, expands the category of the historically relevant brings women in from the margins of Irish history.

In state-centred Irish historiography, the impetus for the transformations that took place in the Irish land system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is traced, in its nationalist variations, to the words and actions of the nationalist leadership and, in its revisionist variations,[5] to the words and actions of the colonial government. Nationalist and revisionist historiographies, therefore, while ideologically opposed, are both based on the assumption that the driving forces of historical change are to be found within the realm of public power. That some of those working within the field of Irish women's history share this assumption is evidenced by Margaret Ward's claim that members of the Ladies' Land League who were denied 'prominent positions in [...] political circles' were 'denied access to the "front"' of the Land War.[6] It would appear that the 'front' of this war for Ward, as for many nationalist and revisionist historians, is to be situated in the public sphere of organized politics.

Contemporary accounts of the Land War suggest, however, that its 'front' may be more accurately located within the domain of everyday life. In November 1881, the *Leinster Leader* reported on a series of events in County Carlow that followed the refusal of a member of the Clonmore branch of the Land League, James Carty, to pay his rent. Having been informed that Carty's crops were to be confiscated and sold,[7] three thousand women and men, many of whom had to be turned away, are said to have gathered in the fields to save his potatoes and turnips. When the work was completed, this 'army' of labourers are reported as having 'marched in processional order to Clonmore, a distance of two miles', shouldering 'their forks, shovels, and spades, as if they were weapons of defence'.[8]

Men and women like those who marched to Clonmore carrying their farming implements as if they were rifles dictated the terms by which the Land War would be fought and ensured that the British army spent much of that war performing what army superiors considered to be inappropriate tasks. In the case of a tenant farmer like James Carty who was refusing

to pay his rent, British army units might be involved in the confiscation of animals and crops. Troops were called on in Queen's County (now County Laois) in May 1881, for example, to prevent a crowd of over 400 people disrupting the seizure of a herd of cattle.[9] In *Ireland under the Land League*, Clifford Lloyd, who in 1881 had been assigned to the newly established position of special resident magistrate, described a week-long expedition for the seizure of stock. Included in the expedition were an agent, a sheriff, 'sixty men of the 48th, under Captain Bell, sixty men of the RIC, thirty horses, and six army service-wagons, carrying the bedding, food, and necessaries for the week'.[10] Lloyd tells us that as soon as they were seen approaching, church bells were rung and the cattle they had come to seize were hidden in old sheds or driven up the sides of mountains. On some such occasions, the expedition was forced to retire, 'amidst the jeers of the groups of men and women who had collected in the fields'.[11] According to Lloyd, a sheriff embarking on this task in Kilmallock requested a force 'made up of a squadron of the Greys, detachments of the 25th, 48th, and 57th Regiments and Transport Corps, which, with about 200 of the RIC, make a total of about 500 men'.[12]

On the occasions when farm stock was successfully seized, army units might be drafted in to help transport the confiscated stock to a sheriff's sale and to ensure that the sale itself proceeded unimpeded. Soldiers attempted to confiscate vehicles to transport crops and animals to a sheriff's sale near Edenderry at the beginning of January 1882, for example, but found their efforts thwarted as 'drivers escaped by galloping at full speed'.[13] By the end of 1881 and the beginning of 1882, sheriff's sales had become one of the main 'battlefields' of the Land War. The *Freeman's Journal*, reporting on a sheriff's sale that took place on Lord Mayo's estate in December 1881, stated that there was a 'large assembly of people, and their numbers were momentarily increased by the ringing of chapel bells in the district and the blowing of horns'.[14] Amidst the haycocks, 'decorated with pictures taken from the *Weekly Freeman* of Davitt, Parnell and Dillon', that were put up for auction, a woman 'opened a bag of feathers and [...] thickly coated the uniform of the police'.[15] In the same month, there were no bidders for cattle belonging to Mary Cole at a sheriff's sale held in Trimblestown that was heavily attended by members of the Ladies' Land League. The sale was subsequently adjourned.[16]

British army units, in other words, spent much of the Land War engaged in duties that under ordinary circumstances would have been considered within the realm of the civil forces.[17] As pointed out by Donal O'Sullivan in his history of policing in Ireland, it was not uncommon at this time to

see 'two neat, well-turned-out Guardsmen, in white jackets, deep in the mountains of Kerry, protecting a herdsman on an evicted farm'.[18] Moreover, according to one contemporary commentator, the RIC as they operated in Ireland during the period of the Land War were not policemen in the conventional sense of the term: 'They are armed and drilled soldiers; armed with muskets, buck-shot, and bayonets, and under military discipline'.[19] The British government's appointment of an auxiliary force drawn mainly from the army reserve in December 1881 to assist the RIC in the day-to-day policing of rural Ireland was a tacit acknowledgement that the Land War was being fought in the civil domain. Consequently, the arena that Margaret Ward has argued women's activities were for the most part confined to during the Land War was in actuality the site of the 'front' of the war.

Anti-eviction agitation

Contemporary and subsequent writings on the 1880s land agitation point to the centrality of women to one of the Land War's key combat zones: evictions and their disruption. Verbal taunts, scalding water, boiling gruel, burning turf, manure, mud, rocks and sticks were some of the weapons employed by rural women against process servers armed with eviction notices and protected by the police and military. In the early stages of the Land War, it was reported that a process server in County Mayo 'had a narrow escape' at Newton Clogher, when he was chased by 'about one hundred' women armed with 'tongs, sticks, stones, etc'.[20] Around the same time, a land agent to Sir Arthur Guinness was 'warmly received by a young woman named Noonan, who, it appears, was not content with giving him the contents of a bucket of boiling water until she let the empty vessel fly at his cranium'.[21] In *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, Michael Davitt gave an account of events he witnessed during a trip to the village of Carraroe in County Galway in January 1880. These events, which have since being termed the 'Battle of Carraroe', centred on an attempt by a local process server, who was accompanied by Sub-Inspector Gibbons and a contingent of police, to serve eviction notices on tenant farmers living on Thomas Kirwan's estate. When the process server, a man named Fenton, approached the home of Mr Faherty, he was 'set upon by the women and the process snatched from his hand and torn to pieces. A skirmish ensued in which a few bayonet wounds were received by boys and women, but the body of men, who marched as "lookers-on," took no part in the first onset'. Fenton, still accompanied by the police, subsequently attempted to serve a process

on Mrs Mackle, who 'succeeded in throwing a shovelful of burning turf upon Sub-Inspector Gibbons, and thereby driving him from the house'.[22]

When David Sears, a local process server with a bodyguard of 17 constables, attempted to serve eviction notices the following September on tenant farmers on an estate near Lough Mask that was owned by Lord Erne and managed by Captain Charles Boycott, a woman named Mrs Fitzmorris, who refused to accept the writ that Sears was presenting to her, waved a red flag to warn the inhabitants of the nearby cabins of his approach. The women who gathered as a result of this signal are said to have 'descended on David Sears and the constabulary, pelting them with mud, stones and manure, stopping them from serving the remaining notices and eventually driving them to seek shelter in Lough Mask House'.[23] According to Joyce Marlow, Captain Boycott, who was out for the day, returned in the evening to find 'Sears and the constables still sheltering in the house' and talking 'of the howling ladies'.[24] That night, Sears' wife is reported to have received a visit from 'a woman of the parish of Neale' who informed her that

> the women had found out that a process-server had no legal right to nail his writs on a cabin door, unless it was closed against him, nor to take in a constable unless he was resisted, and that they had determined to leave the doors partly open and not to fight him until he should enter; 'and, then, every woman of them'll have a kettle of hot water handy, and fling it in his face'.[25]

Not surprisingly, David Sears resisted Boycott's demands that he deliver writs the following day. It was this series of events that inaugurated the infamous 'Boycott Affair'.[26]

That the employment of flags to warn of an approaching process server was not particular to the women on Lord Erne's estate is suggested by a series of interviews held with the American reporter and political activist, James Redpath:

> In some parts of the West of Ireland the peasantry have a secret code of signals. By waving a flag (you may call it petticoat if you like) of a certain colour, the neighbours come to a cabin to assist the signalling party [...]. If I remember rightly, the red flag means that the process-server has come. These signals caused all the women and girls in the neighbourhood to assemble.[27]

When asked by the interviewer whether the men also gathered at the signal, Redpath stated that the assembling women 'won't allow the men to resist the process-server because they are sent to jail so long for doing so, and, besides, these women think they can take care of the process-server themselves'.[28]

Available evidence confirms that women who resisted evictions were less likely to be arrested than men engaged in similarly confrontational behaviour.[29] Nonetheless, some of these women did face possible imprisonment for their actions, as is evidenced by Adam Mitchell's contribution to a House of Lords' report on Irish jury laws:

> There was a very bad case I prosecuted not long ago in Tullamore at the petty sessions, in which nine women were charged with violently beating a process server, taking the processes from him and throwing them into the canal. They battered his face. There were nine charged, and the magistrate convicted six out of the nine, and sentenced them to a month's imprisonment.[30]

In the later Plan of Campaign, 43 people, most of them women, were arrested on charges of assault and obstruction when 200 soldiers and between 300 and 400 policemen were drafted into County Clare to evict tenant farmers on Colonel O'Callaghan's Bodyke estate.[31] The journalist, F. J. Higginbottom, who witnessed the events, claimed that notwithstanding these arrests, it took 'a whole fortnight to dispossess the tenantry, amid scenes of excitement and strife'.[32] Among those arrested were possibly the woman who 'threw an iron hoop at one of the emergency men' and struck a district Inspector of Constabulary instead, and the three girls who threw 'bucketful after bucketful of [...] boiling gruel' at emergency men holding umbrellas.[33]

Furthermore, women who resisted evictions were not exempt, by virtue of their sex, from violence on the part of the authorities. Following Fenton's failed attempt to serve the process on Mrs Mackle in Carraroe, a 'fierce fight' is said to have broken out between the women present and the bayonet-wielding constabulary who had accompanied the process server.[34] It was only after some of the women had been injured that the previously docile men entered the fray, surrounding the constabulary and attacking them with 'stout blackthorns and stones'.[35] Women who attempted to disrupt evictions on Hans Browne's estate near Claremorris, in the same month as the 'Battle of Carraroe', were reported in the *Connaught Telegraph* to have been stabbed with bayonets, hit with fists and clubbed with the butts of rifles. One young woman named Mary Fahy 'received a terrible gash on the back of the hand, another what looked very like a bayonet stab in the arm, whilst several were knocked down, trampled upon, their faces blackened, and their garments torn'.[36] In September 1880, women who resisted evictions on George Moore's estate are said to have received 'rough handling' from 'one or two old grisly veterans'.[37] The following year, six women, one of whom was pregnant, who were part of a crowd comprised mainly of women and children that confronted a process server near Kiltimagh in County Mayo, were set upon by the policemen accompanying the process server and beaten with fists, kicked and struck with the butts of rifles. Shots were then fired at the crowd, and one of the women present, 17-year-old Kate Beirne, was badly wounded.[38]

Women's engagement in the kinds of anti-eviction agitation outlined above has tended to be interpreted by historians and cultural commentators working within the field of Irish women's history as an extension of their domestic role. Janet K. TeBrake, in 'Irish peasant women in revolt', proposes that 'the large numbers of women participating in this form of social protest did so because the peasant community considered it a woman's traditional responsibility not only to take care of the home but also to preserve it'.[39] Margaret Ward, in her work on the Ladies' Land League, asserts that 'political agency for peasant women in rural Ireland was confined to defence of land and home from the demands of the landlord. That agency was a product of their domestic role and community acceptance of their participation was rooted in that understanding'.[40] Niamh O'Sullivan, in her analysis of attempts to deny women access during the Land War to what she refers to as the 'revolutionary public space', states that 'women saving homes was, apparently, acceptable, women saving Ireland was not'.[41] In the work of the latter of these commentators, attention to drawn to Michael Davitt's assertion in *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* that Irish women 'could not be better employed' than in '[t]he fight [...] to save the homes of Ireland – the sacred, domestic domain of a woman's moral supremacy in civilised society'.[42]

Given this perceived link between women's disruption of the eviction process and a gender ideology that proclaimed the rightful place of woman to be the home, the confrontational behaviour of the women on Thomas Kirwan's and Lord Erne's estates can be interpreted as reinforcing as opposed to undermining the public/private dichotomy. As stated by Margaret Ward, '[w]hile [women's] resistance to evictions was expected (and could take the form of physical attacks and rioting) there was never any suggestion that the gendered separation of spheres was being breached'.[43] In response to Ward, it could be argued that the notion of a clear female-private/male-public sphere divide is based largely on the experiences of middle-class women in 'advanced' metropolitan countries and, consequently, may not be as applicable to other locations and classes.[44] Moreover, even if we are to accept Ward's thesis that women's anti-eviction

activities operated largely within the private sphere and ultimately failed to transgress the public/private boundary, we must also question Ward's aforementioned notion of the public sphere as the location of the 'front' of the Land War.

'Charitable' activities

As is the case with women's participation in anti-eviction agitation, the erection of Land League huts by the mostly middle-class membership of the Ladies' Land League could be interpreted as reinforcing the public/private dichotomy in that it involved providing homes, even if only temporary, for evicted tenant farmers.[45] In addition, the role of the Ladies' Land League, according to Margaret Ward, was initially 'conceived solely as one of dispensing charitable relief', and charity at this time was a well-recognized element of the female sphere of activity.[46] Indeed, female philanthropy tended to be viewed as 'an extension of the maternal role' with the 'charitable woman [...] conventionally seen as offering to the poor and needy a care comparable to that which she gave to her own family within the home'.[47] A description of the housing of evicted tenant farmers that, in its nurturing undertones, is suggestive of relatively straightforward charity work was published in *Sinn Féin* on 16 October 1909. In this article, Jennie Wyse Power, a prominent member of the Ladies' Land League and the first president of Cumann na mBan, tells of a journey she made to Hacketstown, a village on the borders of Wicklow and Carlow, where fifty families were being evicted for non-payment of rent. These families, Power states, 'were to be sheltered and looked after'.[48] The evening before the expected evictions, Power 'went abroad to see what could be done to house the families about to be evicted, and took on myself to hire and repair a large disused house, sufficient to shelter three families'.[49] In *The Tale of a Great Sham*, however, Anna Parnell puts forward an analysis of the erection of Land League huts that draws attention to the strategic and symbolic importance of this activity. Land League shelters, according to Parnell, gave the tenants 'a chance of following the counsels contained in the No Rent manifesto' and functioned as a 'permanent sign and symbol that all power did not lie with the foreign enemy in possession of the country'.[50]

Anna Parnell's reflections on the erection of Land League huts clearly indicates that the 'charity' work performed by the Ladies' Land League, while possibly an extension of the domestic role of its members, differed in one key respect from the benevolent ventures associated with 'charitable women' in England and Ireland. As pointed out by Sara Mills, philanthropy

was designed to alleviate poverty without challenging the status quo.[51] The 'philanthropic' works performed by the Ladies' Land League, by contrast, were primarily designed to challenge the status quo, with the alleviation of poverty of secondary importance. Indeed, an article that was published in the *Freeman's Journal* in December 1881 suggests that the erection of Land League huts were on some occasions transformed into public displays of disaffection with the colonial state. Following the loading of materials for Land League huts on ten carts in Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim, members of the Ladies' Land League are said to have 'decorated the horses with green ribbons'. When these preparations were completed, 'a procession was formed' and the carts were paraded through the town.[52] That the erection of Land League huts was viewed by the authorities as more than the mere alleviation of poverty is clearly evidenced by their concerted efforts to prevent this activity from taking place. Jennie Wyse Power, in the aforementioned article published in *Sinn Féin*, outlined attempts made by the police and military to deny members of the Ladies' Land League access to the site of the eviction.[53] Hannah Reynolds, a member of the Ladies' Land League, was arrested in west Cork at the home of Catherine Murphy, a tenant farmer facing eviction, following a speech in which she urged tenant farmers on the estate of the Earl of Bantry not to pay their rent and reassured them that the Ladies' Land League would build huts for them if they were evicted.[54] Anna Parnell, who in *The Tale of a Great Sham* referred to the arrest and imprisonment of workmen whom the Ladies' Land League had employed to erect such shelters, is reported to have angrily confronted the Lord Lieutenant as he rode down Westmoreland Street in Dublin over the government's decision to prevent the building of Land League huts.[55]

In the aftermath of the Protection of Person and Property Act of 1881, various organizations (the Political Prisoners' Fund, the Ladies' Prisoners' Aid Society, the Political Prisoners' Aid Society, the 'Irish World' Prisoners' Aid Society, the Political Prisoners' Sustentation Fund, the Commercial Men's Political Prisoners' Aid Society and the Suspects' Sustentation Fund) appealed for food and funds for those who were being detained without trial.[56] One of the principal functions served by the Ladies' Land League was the collection of such funds. Among the resolutions passed at a meeting that took place in November 1881 to establish a Rathangan branch of the Ladies' Land League was the following: 'that we should comply with Miss Parnell's request, and place two or three collecting boxes in the town, the total amount to be forwarded to Miss Parnell every month'.[57] In the same month, it was proposed by the secretary of the Maryborough branch of the Ladies' Land League that 'ladies in businesses put boxes in

their shops in order to receive subscriptions in aid of [the] Prisoners' Fund and ladies in country districts get a list of probable subscribers and call on them to aid in the good work'.[58] The Ladies' Land League also collected funds for those who had been evicted for non-payment of rent.

In 1881, Canon Ulick J. Bourke referred to the Ladies' Land League as an organization through which Irish women dispensed charity to evicted tenant farmers and their families.[59] Bourke, through this description, was perhaps attempting to defend the League's members by equating the work they performed with philanthropy of the sort associated with 'respectable' middle- and upper-class women in England and Ireland. As pointed out by Barbara Corrado Pope, 'fund raising: planning and selling tickets for balls and theatrical events, donating time and needlework to charity bazaars, and soliciting money on the street and in churches' was a principal occupation of 'charitable women' in the nineteenth century.[60] As with the erection of Land League huts, however, fundraising and the dispensing of such funds, as performed by the Ladies' Land League, were not charity work in the conventional sense of the term. A central tenet of female philanthropy was the notion that the potential beneficiaries of charity could be divided into two distinct categories: the deserving poor, who had regular jobs and supposedly self-help attitudes, and the undeserving poor, who were perceived to be lazy, drunk and rowdy. That the Ladies' Land League also divided into categories those who wished to be in receipt of the funds they had collected is evidenced by their shocked response to the discovery that the bulk of the applications for relief they were receiving were coming 'not from those who had obeyed League policy and had suffered eviction for refusing to pay more than a reasonable rent, but from those who had simply been unable to pay any rent at all'.[61] For 'charitable women', the division between the deserving and the undeserving poor was based on adherence to a set of middle-class moral standards that underpinned the status quo. For the Ladies' Land League, this division was based on a willingness to partake in a campaign that threatened the status quo. The reluctance of members of the Ladies' Land League to dispense funds to those who, through poverty, had found themselves unable to pay their rent was at least in part due to a desire to distinguish their acts of 'charity' from the kinds of charity work with which Canon Bourke had sought to associate them.

Furthermore, 'charitable women' were unlikely to be threatened with arrest and imprisonment for their philanthropic activities. In December 1881, Margaret Dineen, secretary of the Ladies' Land League, wrote to E. D. Gray, editor of the *Freeman's Journal*, to inform him that notice had been given to the Ladies' Land League to cease to collect for the Suspects' Sustentation Fund. Failure to comply with this directive, she had been informed, would result in the imprisonment of members of the Ladies' Land League.[62] In her letter to the *Freeman's Journal*, Dineen connects the fundraising activities performed by the Ladies' Land League with public displays of disaffection with official law by going on to state that the police, under the directive of Clifford Lloyd, had warned the publicans of Ballylanders that they would lose their licences if they continued to put up shutters when arrests were made in the neighbourhood and did not 'abstain in future from manifesting the least sign of sympathy for anyone arrested under the Coercion Act'.[63]

Boycotting

Antipathy to an official legal system that many in Ireland associated with the conquest of the country created a space for the establishment of alternative systems of control that monitored and regulated the behaviour of rural communities.[64] Boycotting, which was primarily directed towards 'land-grabbers', was one such system of control.[65] What this tactic amounted to in practice, as the following extract from a speech by Charles Stewart Parnell makes clear, was extreme social ostracism and isolation:

> When a man takes a farm from which another has been evicted, you must show him on the roadside when you meet him, you must show him in the streets of the town, you must show him at the shop-counter, you must show him in the fair and at the marketplace, and even in the house of worship, by leaving him severely alone, by putting him into a sort of moral Coventry, by isolating him from the rest of his kind as if he were a leper of old, you must show him your detestation of the crime he has committed, and you may depend upon it if the population of a county in Ireland carry on this doctrine, that there will be no man so full of avarice, so lost to shame, as to dare the public opinion of all right-thinking men within the county and to transgress your unwritten code of laws.[66]

Boycotting was viewed with horror, not only by those on the receiving end of it but also by members of the Irish administration and British legal experts. William Forster's biographer, T. Wemyss Reid, wrote of the Chief Secretary's conviction that official law had become virtually powerless in Ireland, while the unofficial systems of control that were displacing it had grown in strength.[67] Justice James Stephen, in 'On the suppression of boycotting', argued that participation in a boycott amounted to the 'usurpation of the functions of government' and, consequently, boycotts should 'be

recognized in their true light as acts of social war, as the modern representatives of the old conception of high treason'.[68]

Since women were at the centre of the social networks which bound rural communities together, a boycott's success was largely dependent upon their participation. Women not only took part in the more general forms of social ostracism that comprised boycotting, they reinforced this isolation by refusing to 'walk out' with or marry those who were being boycotted. At a Land League meeting held in Waterford in 1882, a young woman named Margaret Sheehan addressed the crowd as follows: 'We, the young girls of Waterford, Tipperary and Kilkenny, resolve and promise before this vast multitude to reject with scorn and contempt any matrimonial proposals from Michael Hickey as a punishment for his heartlessness to a poor labourer and his young and helpless family of seven'.[69] During the later Plan of Campaign, David Sheehy, member of Parliament, included a reference to the 'marriage boycott' in a speech on 'land-grabbing' that he delivered in Galway, claiming that if social ostracism was enacted in full against a 'land-grabber', not 'a shopkeeper in Portumna, Tynagh, Woodford or Loughrea would sell him as much as a ha'porth of snuff and the ugliest woman in all Tipperary would not marry him'.[70]

In September 1880, James Redpath gave a speech in County Mayo in which he counselled those present not to 'deal with the grocery man that will sell [a 'land-grabber'] provisions'.[71] As women controlled the household economy, their purchasing power was pivotal to the boycott of shopkeepers and merchants. A successfully boycotted grocer, as stated during the later Ranch War, had his flour 'turn musty on the shelf', his lard 'remain on his hands until it rots', and his preserved meat 'well tested by time'.[72] Women's purchasing power also played a role in the 'No Rent' manifesto in that women were urged by Anna Parnell 'to pay for all groceries with cash, so that their husbands would be unable to save the money for rent payment'.[73]

Conclusion

Relocating the 'front' of the Land War from the public sphere of organized politics to the civil domain of everyday life reveals the centrality of women to this episode in Irish history. Moreover, extending the notion of the political 'beyond the activity of a few dazzling personalities or the agreements made by a handful of leaders' establishes the women who participated in the Land War as political subjects.[74] In studies of Irish women's history, these women tend to be divided into two categories: women who transgressed gender boundaries by engaging in formal political activities, such as speaking at Land League meetings, and women whose Land War activities were an extension of their domestic role and, consequently, failed to challenge the 'public/private' dichotomy. If we accept, however, that women were central to the Land War and that, on the whole, their participation remained broadly within a recognizably female sphere of activity, we must also question the application of a conventional notion of the private sphere, based largely on the experiences of British middle-class women, to late nineteenth-century Ireland. The private sphere in 1880s Ireland was a war zone, not a haven from war. In the case of the women who threw mud, stones and manure at the process server near Lough Mask, protecting their homes against those who sought to evict them was undoubtedly an extension of their domestic responsibilities, but it was also intrinsic to the 1880s land agitation. The women who resisted evictions or refused to buy groceries from a boycotted shopkeeper may not have crossed the public/private divide, but the Land War certainly did.

Notes

1 J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985), p. 29.

2 See R. Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in R. Guha and G. Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 37–44.

3 See, for example, A. Haverty, *Constance Markievicz: An Independent Life* (London, 1988); M. O'Neill, *From Parnell to De Valera: A Biography of Jennie Wyse Power, 1858–1941* (Dublin, 1991); J. Côté McL., *Fanny and Anna Parnell: Ireland's Patriot Sisters* (Dublin, 1991); M. O'Neill, *Grace Gifford Plunkett and Irish Freedom* (Dublin, 2000); S. McCoole, *No Ordinary Women* (Dublin, 2003).

4 G. Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 145, xiv. See also M. Cullen, 'Foreword', in M. Kelleher and J. H. Murphy (eds), *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin, 1997), p. 5.

5 Irish revisionist histories, such as F. S. L. Lyons' *Ireland since the Famine* (1971), R. Foster's *Modern Ireland: 1600–1972* (1989) and M. Elliott's *The Catholics of Ulster* (2000), which present British rule as extending modern institutions into a 'backward' Irish society, could be categorized, with reference to Ranajit Guha, as 'neocolonialist' historiography. This is the term applied by Guha to a historiography that depicts the colonial regime as a civilizing force which, through the introduction of liberal Western values, helped 'promote social reform, combat superstition and generally raise the level of the indigenous culture'. R. Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), p. 80.

6 M. Ward, 'The Ladies' Land League and the Irish Land War 1881/1882: Defining the Relationship between Women and Nation', in I. Bloom, K. Hagemann and C. Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2000), p. 241. Ward is right, of course, to draw attention to the attempted exclusion of members of the Ladies' Land League from formal political culture.

7 Refusal to pay rent could result in a civil bill process, signed by the landlord, being served on the tenant farmer requiring him/her to appear before the county court judge. If the county court judge found in favour of the landlord, he would direct the sheriff to execute the civil bill decree to obtain the debt owed. Under this decree, the sheriff was entitled to seize goods belonging to the tenant farmer and auction them to the highest bidder.

8 '"No Rent", in Carlow', *Leinster Leader* (12 November 1881), p. 2.

9 V. Crossman, *Politics, Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), p. 140.

10 C. Lloyd, *Ireland under the Land League: A Narrative of Personal Experiences* (London, 1892), p. 163.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

13 'Sheriff's Sales Near Edenderry – Seizure of Cars', *Freeman's Journal* (6 January 1882), p. 5.

14 'Sheriff's Sale', *Freeman's Journal* (24 December 1881), p. 7.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

16 'Sheriff's Sale in Trimblestown', *Freeman's Journal* (21 December 1881), p. 7.

17 The employment of British army units in policing duties was a cause of considerable concern for military authorities and the War Office as it was seen to breach the legal status of the soldier. See R. Hawkins, 'An Army on Police Work, 1881–2', *Irish Sword*, 11:43 (1973), pp. 75–117; Crossman, *Politics, Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, p. 140.

18 D. J. O'Sullivan, *The Irish Constabulary, 1822–1922: A Century of Policing in Ireland* (Kerry, 1999), p. 160.

19 J. Redpath, *Talks about Ireland* (New York, 1881), p. 87.

20 'Serving Processes in Clogher Lynch', *Connaught Telegraph* (21 June 1879), p. 4.

21 'Scalding a Land Agent', *Connaught Telegraph* (21 June 1879), p. 5.

22 M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland; or the Story of the Land League Revolution* (London, 1904), p. 217.

23 J. Marlow, *Captain Boycott and the Irish* (New York, 1973), p. 137.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

25 Redpath, *Talks about Ireland*, p. 80.

26 For an overview of the 'Boycott Affair', see G. Moran, 'The Origins and Development of Boycotting', *Galway Archaeological and Historical Society Journal*, 30 (1985–86), 51–60.

27 Redpath, *Talks about Ireland*, pp. 79–80. For further information on James Redpath, see J. R. McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making* [illegible] (Ithaca, 2008).

28 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

29 See J. K. TeBrake, 'Irish Peasant Women in Revolt: The Land League Years', *Irish Historical Studies*, 28 (1992), 76.

30 *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Irish Jury Laws*, House of Lords, 1881 (117), viii. Cited in M. Luddy, *Women in Ireland, 1800–1918: A Documentary History* (Cork, 1995), p. 250. At this time, Adam Mitchell was the sessional crown solicitor for King's County (now County Offaly).

31 See L. M. Geary, *The Plan of Campaign, 1886–1891* (Cork, 1986), pp. 73–4; see also *Freeman's Journal* (2–18 June 1887).

32 F. J. Higginbottom, *The Vivid Life: A Journalist's Career* (London, 1934), p. 79.

33 'The Jubilee Eviction Campaign: The Bodyke Tenantry', *Freeman's Journal* (4 June 1887), p. 5; 'The Jubilee Eviction Campaign: The Bodyke Tenantry', *Freeman's Journal* (8 June 1887), p. 7.

34 M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, p. 217.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

36 'Process Serving in the West', *Connaught Telegraph* (17 January 1880), p. 2.

37 'Process Serving on Mr Moore's Estate – Resistance by the Women', *Connaught Telegraph* (25 September 1880), p. 5.

38 See TeBrake, 'Irish Peasant Women in Revolt', pp. 76–7.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

40 Ward, 'The Ladies' Land League and the Irish Land War 1881/1882', p. 233.

41 N. O'Sullivan, 'The Iron Cage of Femininity: Visual Representation of Women in the 1880s Land Agitation', in T. Foley and S. Ryder (eds), *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 190, 184.

42 Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, p. 299.

43 Ward, 'The Ladies' Land League and the Irish Land War 1881/1882', p. 233. Niamh O'Sullivan takes a somewhat different approach, arguing that the rural women who engaged in confrontational behaviour when resisting evictions were crossing a 'threshold', a 'social borderland' (O'Sullivan, 'The Iron Cage of Femininity', p. 196).

44 Partha Chatterjee, in his writings on India, and Carol Coulter, in her writings on Ireland, indicate that the private sphere itself may need to be rethought in the colonial context. Both suggest that the private sphere functioned quite differently in colonized locations than it did in metropolitan centres in that the home, as a bulwark against colonial culture and values, had a significance that it lacked in metropolitan patriarchy. See P. Chatterjee, 'The Nation and Its Women', *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* (Oxford, 1999); C. Coulter, 'Feminism, Nationalism and the Heritage of the Enlightenment', in T. P. Foley, L. Pilkington, S. Ryder and E. Tilley (eds), *Gender and Colonialism* (Galway, 1995); C. Coulter, 'Nationalism, Religion and the Family', *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationalism in Ireland* (Cork, 1993). See also S. Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 31–4.

45 For a more detailed discussion of the class backgrounds of the members of the Ladies' Land League, see D. E. Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland: County Mayo from the Plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 297–300.
46 Ward, 'The Ladies' Land League and the Irish Land War 1881/1882', p. 234.
47 Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space*, p. 129; R. Raughter, 'A Natural Tenderness: The Ideal and the Reality of Eighteenth-Century Female Philanthropy', in M. G. Valiulis and M. O'Dowd (eds), *Women and Irish History: Essays in Honour of Margaret MacCurtain* (Dublin, 1997), p. 76.
48 'Jennie Wyse Power Describes the Activities of the Ladies' Land League', in Luddy (ed.), *Women in Ireland, 1800–1918*, pp. 265–8, 266.
49 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
50 A. Parnell, *The Tale of a Great Sham* (Dublin, 1986), pp. 116, 151. Indeed, Anna Parnell's account of the activities of the Ladies' Land League during the period of the Land League suppression clearly demonstrates where power in Ireland, as conventionally defined, actually lay at this point in time in that, for the most part, it is a description of the mundane tasks of government. Collecting information on every region in the country, administering relief where necessary and suffering 'from one of the inconveniences all governments are supposed to be afflicted with, in being charged higher prices than anyone else', Anna Parnell found herself in the frustrating situation of providing a provisional government for an imprisoned Land League she ultimately disapproved of but firmly believed to be a 'government *de facto*' (pp. 115, 57).
51 See Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space*, p. 130. See also B. C. Pope, 'Angels in the Devil's Workshop: Leisured and Charitable Women in Nineteenth-Century England and France', in R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz (eds), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston, 1977), pp. 296–324, 321.
52 'Erecting Houses for Evicted Tenants', *Freeman's Journal* (1 December 1881), p. 5.
53 'Jennie Wyse Power Describes the Activities of the Ladies' Land League', in Luddy (ed.), *Women in Ireland, 1800–1918*, p. 267.
54 See TeBrake, 'Irish Peasant Women in Revolt', pp. 71–2. See also, 'A Lady Sentenced to Imprisonment', *Freeman's Journal* (24 December 1881), p. 5.
55 Parnell, *The Tale of a Great Sham*, p. 121; M. Ward, 'The Ladies' Land League, 1881–82', *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London, 1983), pp. 29–30.
56 See *Freeman's Journal* (1 December 1881), p. 5.
57 'Rathangan Ladies' Land League', *Leinster Leader* (12 November 1881), p. 7.
58 'Minute Book of the Maryborough Branch of the Ladies' Land League', National Library of Ireland, Lalor papers, MS 2070. At the inaugural meeting of that branch in February 1881, the Ladies' Land League was referred to as the Irish National Ladies' Land Relief League.
59 *Connaught Telegraph* (19 February 1881). That such a defence was necessary is evidenced by editorials published in the same paper in December 1881 in which the Ladies' Land League is referred to as a group of 'childless women' and the Land League huts they were erecting as a 'class of overgrown mousetraps' (24 December 1881), p. 4; (5 December 1881), p. 4.

60 Pope, 'Angels in the Devil's Workshop', p. 319.
61 Ward, 'The Ladies' Land League, 1881–82', p. 19.
62 'The Police and the Ladies' Land League', *Freeman's Journal* (17 December 1881), p. 5.
63 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
64 For a detailed analysis of alternative legal concepts and structures in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland, see H. Laird, *Subversive Law in Ireland: From 'Unwritten Law' to the Dáil Courts* (Dublin, 2005).
65 Those who took over land from which a previous tenant had been evicted were commonly referred to as 'grabbers' and were widely considered to be the most significant violators of the 'unwritten agrarian code'.
66 Cited in F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1977), p. 134.
67 T. W. Reid, *The Life of Rt. Hon. W. E. Forster*, vol. 2 (London, 1888), pp. 294–5. According to Michael Davitt, the emergence of the Ladies' Land League facilitated this legal crisis: 'under the very nose of Mr Forster, and in utter defiance of his most strenuous application of the arbitrary powers at his disposal, everything recommended, attempted, or done, in the way of defeating the ordinary law and asserting the unwritten law of the league [...] was more systematically carried out under the direction of the ladies' executive than by its predecessor'. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, p. 341.
68 J. F. Stephen, 'On the Suppression of Boycotting', *Nineteenth Century*, 118 (December 1886), p. 769.
69 State Paper Office, Irish National League papers, 1/414, 1882. Cited in TeBrake, 'Irish Peasant Women in Revolt', p. 72.
70 *Wilfred Scawen Blunt* v. *John Byrne* in the High Court of Justice in Ireland [c. 5401], House of Commons, 1888, LXXXIII.11, 21–2. Cited in Geary, *The Plan of Campaign*, p. 40.
71 Cited in Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, p. 268.
72 'United League in County Leitrim: Wholesale Intimidation', *Irish Times* (17 November 1906).
73 Ward, 'The Ladies' Land League, 1881–82', p. 16.
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