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To cite this article: Erin Geraghty (10 Oct 2024): 'Why, it's like Belgium!': the Women's International League in the Irish War of Independence 1919–1921, Women's History Review, DOI: [10.1080/09612025.2024.2413732](https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2024.2413732)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2024.2413732>



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Published online: 10 Oct 2024.



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'Why, it's like Belgium!': the Women's International League in the Irish War of Independence 1919–1921

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ABSTRACT

This article demonstrates how the Women's International League (WIL) dealt with the changing ideas of nationhood, internationalism, imperialism, and freedom when supporting the cause of Irish independence. Their actions included seeking to protect Britain's good name while simultaneously criticising that very same nation for its war in Ireland. The 'small nations' rhetoric that had emerged during the First World War was used by British feminists to divorce the atrocities of the British Crown force, the Black and Tans, from the wider colonial experience of oppression. Comparing the occupation of Ireland in 1919–1921 to that of Belgium during the First World War enabled British internationalist-feminists to support the sovereignty of Ireland's nationhood, without necessarily having to engage with the colonial dimension or history of the conflict. This entirely changed the parameters within which British feminists could show solidarity with the Irish republicans while still maintaining positive views of British imperialism and the empire.

KEYWORDS

Empire; Ireland; feminism; pacifism; gender; internationalism; solidarity

Introduction

On the evening of 5 October 1920, the *Manchester evening news* announced the following:

With a view to promoting a better understanding of what must be done to bring peace to Ireland, and in response to an invitation from the Irish section of the Women's International League, the British section of the organisation has sent a deputation to Ireland.¹

A group of Women's International League (WIL) representatives, organised by the Manchester branch, planned a trip to Ireland in order to investigate for themselves the alleged atrocities of the 'Black and Tans' during the Irish War of Independence (1919 – 1921). The deputation contained many labour and suffrage veterans from various areas of Britain: Helena Swanwick (chairman of the WIL), Agatha Watts (Honorary Secretary), Catherine Chisholm, Agnes Dolian, Grace Mewhort (vice-president of the Edinburgh Trades

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Council), Ellen Wilkinson, and Annot Robinson.² During their 10-day mission, the women visited areas of Dublin, Belfast, Limerick, West Clare, Cork, and Galway to experience the conflict first hand.³ While on their fact-finding mission they encountered the oppression of the Crown forces: they endured the curfew implemented in many towns and villages, witnessed town halls and farms burnt to the ground and heard gun fights regularly during their stay.⁴ Famous communist and later Labour Party politician, Ellen Wilkinson made it clear: 'it is impossible for anyone who had not seen it for themselves to realise the terrorism which is being exercised by the Black-and-Tans in the South and West of Ireland'.⁵

The WIL delegation urged the government to withdraw their military forces, which they believed would lead to both sides coming to 'some sort of agreement ... during which there should be an opportunity for the exercise of the right of self-determination'.⁶ Yet, despite the criticisms and condemnation of the British military actions in Ireland by the WIL delegation, there was no demand for the end of empire or the imperial project. Anticolonialism seemed to be entirely absent from the call to withdraw British troops from Ireland. Instead, the colonial relationship was elided.⁷ Ireland was seen as more of a contested small European nation, similar to Belgium during the First World War, with sovereign rights to be morally defended. By 1918, it was not viewed in the same way as the former colonies that had achieved Dominion status, and certainly not considered to be under the same imperial rule subjected to colonial territories in Africa and Asia. Ireland was implicitly understood as occupying a type of middle ground between Britain and empire.⁸ Thus, members of the WIL, the British branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) were able to maintain support for the imperial project while simultaneously demanding Irish independence. This contrasted with the perspective of many other internationalist pacifists, especially in Ireland, who viewed British rule in Ireland as similar to the oppressive regimes maintained in other areas of the empire.

The WILPF (initially the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace) had been established in 1915 to urge belligerent countries to end the fighting and begin peace negotiations. It was a broad coalition of women, combining individuals from suffrage movements, social reform and labour backgrounds, as well as the budding communist movement. Historians have pointed to the unique anti-racist and anti-imperialist elements of the WILPF and certainly, there were constant debates over 'colonial imperialism' and its effects within the organisation (women from colonised countries spoke out most forcefully against imperialism).⁹ Yet, as Molly Cochran has argued, despite clear criticism of imperialism and colonialism, the WILPF still perpetuated a hierarchical and racialised international order, thus complicating their attempts of inclusivity and anti-colonialism.¹⁰

The WIL acts as an important conduit for following what could be considered 'mainstream' British feminist thought from the suffrage movement into the interwar internationalist and pacifist movement. As the majority of women who formed the British WIL originated in the suffrage movement, there was an element of an 'imperial' feminism that imbued the movement from the beginning.¹¹ Historians such as Antoinette Burton, Philippa Levine, Laura Beers, and Clare Midgley among others have demonstrated how imperialism was an integral part of first-wave feminism in Britain, emphasising the superiority of Western values and perpetuating a specific 'women's imperial duty' across the colonies.¹² British suffrage campaigners simultaneously legitimised and

informed imperialist arguments when stressing the importance of their own role in the continuation and future of the empire. By the twentieth century, British imperialism was focused on strengthening political and economic control over its colonies, the efficient extraction of wealth and resources, and the 'civilising mission' whereby Christian values were exported across empire.¹³ Imperialism had a fundamental impact on the wider British public; it was an integral part of religion, popular culture, consumerism, and shaped British identity and nationalism.¹⁴ Importantly, feminism was developed in this social context of British support and activities for the various elements of imperialism. Thus, as this article shows, imperial feminism was an integral part of the British women's demand for political freedoms, and it did not simply disappear when the First World War broke out in 1914, nor when partial women's enfranchisement was achieved in 1918. It remained a pervasive part of their politics and impacted how they engaged with the Irish struggle for independence. Just as Emily Baughan has revealed that British humanitarians created a vision of international responsibility based on British imperial power, women of the British WIL likewise premised their internationalism and pacifist duty to other nations on a British global supremacy.¹⁵

This study of the British WIL delegation to Ireland sheds light on the integration of imperial feminism into the liberal internationalist feminism which emerged during the First World War. It examines how and why British women who travelled to Ireland to investigate the Anglo-Irish conflict were able to be so critical of the government's actions in Ireland without contradicting their support for empire and the imperial project more broadly. The WIL has received little direct scholarly attention outside of Sarah Hellawell's pioneering work, and the relationship between the British WIL and empire has never fully been explored, nor have the tensions between the argument for Irish sovereignty and support for empire.¹⁶ However, the significance of Ireland in providing a geographic and political space for British women to carve out a new role for themselves in post-war national and international politics has been identified by historians like Mo Moulton.¹⁷ This article furthers the current historiographic debate to consider how ideas about nationhood changed alongside the language of liberation.

Emily Baughan and Leila Rupp have investigated the ways in which imperialism was integrated into the new internationalism of the First World War to uphold national hierarchies.¹⁸ The WIL's delegation to Ireland and subsequent 'small nations' discourse provides a new lens through which to view the intersections of interwar feminism, internationalism, and imperialism. While the views examined in this article reflect the varied ideologies and schools of thought adhered to by the broad coalition of women that formed this movement; they can also be seen as a microcosm of the broader debate occurring on the British left during this period. An examination of how the women of the WIL were able to articulate a nuanced understanding of the unequal power dynamics of imperial warfare while simultaneously denying the colonial implications of that war illustrates the ideological possibilities and limitations of interwar internationalism in Britain. This article looks beyond WIL's organisational sources to contextualise the debate regarding the Irish War of Independence within the wider political landscape of Britain and Ireland. Newspaper coverage especially demonstrates not only the meetings held by WIL members; it also captures the audience response and reaction, providing a broader picture of the movement. The use of memoirs allows the women agency in outlining their positions and experiences in Ireland, and provides a

personal and intimate perspective of how the women engaged with the tumultuous ‘Irish Question’ in this later period of conflict between Ireland and Britain.

In both historic and contemporary discourse, there has been discomfort and disagreement about where Ireland sits/sat in the colonial matrix.¹⁹ As Christine Strotmann noted, prior to the First World War, countries like Germany viewed Ireland as a nation dominated by the British empire, and the ‘Irish question’ as a purely domestic problem and therefore not an issue for political and military elites of other nations.²⁰ However, when great empires clashed, small European nations became a useful propaganda tool for each side. Whereas the British used the German invasion of Belgium to justify their entry into the war, the Germans used the oppression of Ireland to undermine Britain’s moral stance as well as counteract the allied propaganda related to German atrocities in Belgium.²¹ This article builds on the argument made by Lili Zách to demonstrate how the ‘small nations’ rhetoric transformed not only Irish nationalist political discourse, but also the language and frameworks of internationalist feminists in Britain. Zách documented how the First World War transformed the political order across Europe, and why Irish nationalists used this to their advantage when claiming independence for Ireland as a realistic political aim.²² While Irish nationalists had used comparisons with other European states prior to the war to ‘internationalise Irish nationalism’ in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this article demonstrates that the First World War saw this rhetoric become integrated into the goals and language of internationalist organisations like the WILPF.²³

Women’s International League and hierarchies of violence

The Irish War of Independence began in 1919, after a general election in December 1918 had produced a Sinn Féin majority in Ireland, with the exception of Ulster. After this electoral victory, Sinn Féin formed an Irish government (Dáil Éireann) and declared Irish independence from Britain. The ‘Irish Question’ had been brought into sharp relief by the events of Easter Week, 1916, whereby several groups of Irish nationalists, socialists, and feminists sought to free the nation of Ireland from British imperial rule. The Easter Rising was swiftly crushed within six days, and sixteen individuals were executed with thousands more imprisoned.²⁴ While it was militarily a failure, the Rising succeeded in disrupting British parliamentary politics by forcing the Irish question to the top of the political agenda. The Irish Volunteers (one of the paramilitary groups that fought during the Rising) later became the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the main military organisation to fight the British during the Irish War of Independence. The IRA fought a guerrilla campaign against British forces composed of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), regular soldiers, and two paramilitary forces recruited from World War I veterans: the Black and Tans, and the Auxiliaries.²⁵ The conflict was shaped, and has largely been remembered, by the brutal reprisals enacted upon the Irish population by the Crown forces.

Prompted by the news of Crown force violence in 1920, the WIL investigative delegation aimed to obtain ‘a better understanding of what must be done to bring peace to Ireland’.²⁶ This was part of a larger WILPF policy at the time to send delegations on international ‘missions’ to document conditions in countries whose political and economic life was deemed to be ‘abnormal’, for instance, those nations with significant

domestic political strife and violence, or who were suffering famine and starvation as a consequence of the Great War.²⁷ Various other missions from the wider WILPF were sent to Eastern Europe and the Balkans in the late 1920s, however, it seems that the only mission undertaken under the distinct banner of the WIL was the trip to Ireland.²⁸ The Irish branch of the WILPF thought that Ireland was 'very well qualified' to receive one of these commissions from the British WIL due to the 'political abnormality and chaos' of the country in 1920. Honorary Secretary of the Irish International League (IIL), Louie Bennett, said that the nation would 'perhaps welcome such a commission' if only it would investigate in an 'unprejudiced light' and put pressure on the government in Britain to deal with the chaos.²⁹ The decision to send a WIL delegation to Ireland was one that was therefore formed by collaborative discussions between the WIL and IIL – and these conversations shaped the aims of the deputation. Relationships between British and Irish feminists had been built during the pre-war suffrage and labour movement and sustained throughout the First World War. Indeed, the WIL's ability to secure Irish women such as former suffrage activists Louie Bennett and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington for their speaking tours demonstrates the long-standing political relationship and practice of solidarity that had its origins in the suffrage and labour movements of the early twentieth century.³⁰ Additionally, the WIL felt that they had a special international responsibility towards nations within the British empire, and was particularly concerned with the conflict in Ireland as part of this anxiety about the longevity of the imperial project.³¹

The WILPF were not unique in sending a delegation to Ireland to discover the realities of the violence, nor were they alone in their critique of British militarism. In February 1920, the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) sent a Commission of Inquiry to Ireland to firstly, obtain information regarding the government's methods in Ireland, and secondly, ascertain the opinions of the Irish on the question of government in the country.³² The Commission's conclusions produced two possible alternatives for the governance of Ireland – both maintained Westminster control of foreign affairs and defence in Ireland, and both prioritised 'maximum self-government' compatible with the unity of the empire, adequate protection for the people of Ulster, and safety of the UK in a time of war.³³ They stopped short of implementing the 1920 party conference's demand of 'free and absolute self-determination for Ireland'; the PLP never intended to support the concept of a totally independent Irish Republic.³⁴ Irish communist and *Workers' Dreadnought* writer, May O'Callaghan, attacked the Labour Party's political conclusions arguing,

if any member of that Labour deputation doubts, after what he saw and heard in Ireland, that self-determination for Ireland means, first, independence of the said British Empire, and self-government *without* the Empire, then he is beyond hope.³⁵

She asked if these men of British labour wanted to carry on with the 'old game of Imperialism as hitherto, with a few paltry reforms thrown in?' She suggested that programme might satisfy the British public, but the Irish people who had lost all faith in British parties would not change their attitude in favour of an imperialist Labour Party.³⁶ During the war the Labour Party *did* make effective attacks on the Irish policy of the coalition government, but, as Ivan Gibbons notes, they were more interested in, and concerned with, fixing the social and economic issues of the UK.³⁷ They did not necessarily

want to challenge the imperialist order; they saw dominion home rule as sufficient for Ireland.

An American Commission on Conditions in Ireland was set up to similarly investigate what was happening in Ireland. But rather than send a delegation to Ireland, they instead invited a large number of people from Ireland, Britain, and the US who had either figured in, or been affected by the war in Ireland.³⁸ The hearings took place between November 1920 and January 1921, and both British and Irish spokespeople provided testimonies, but the British authorities did not participate. The sole woman elected to the Commission was Jane Addams, President of the WILPF. Annot Robinson and Ellen Wilkinson provided testimonies gathered from their trip as part of the WIL delegation to Ireland, as did Louie Bennett, the secretary of the IIL, who gave her own account of British policy in Ireland. In their statements to the Commission, the members of the WIL and IIL both characterised the conflict as largely economic rather than religious—explaining that much of the ‘Orangeman’ or Unionist opposition to Irish rule was economic rather than based on fear of religious or political persecution.³⁹ Naturally, pacifism also was prevalent in their testimonies, with Ellen Wilkinson stating that the war was a case of ‘power and undiluted militarism’.⁴⁰ Many of the questions regarding pacifism were prompted by Jane Addams. Ultimately, the Commission’s interim report, published in March 1921, and its final *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland* published in May that same year denounced British policy in Ireland in no uncertain terms.⁴¹

The adoption of pacifism by some feminists had occurred before the war; many non-violent suffragists had reflected on the perceived ‘violence’ of the militants against property and concluded that the basis of any civilised political system was not force, but the consent of the governed.⁴² The majority of the leading British women in the WILPF had resided in the non-militant wing of the suffrage movement, and as such had already rejected force as a way to achieve their goals.⁴³ Helena Swanwick was one of those women who resigned from the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) over its refusal to send delegates to the International Women’s Congress in 1915, and believed that by legitimising physical force, it would always benefit the men who ‘controlled’ that force, to the detriment of women who did not.⁴⁴ Her pacifism was therefore intrinsically linked to her suffragism and feminism. Similarly, prior to the war, Irish Women’s Reform League (IWRL) President Louie Bennett had taken an absolutist approach to pacifism, believing that if the suffrage cause was won by militancy, it would taint the final victory.⁴⁵

There were other members of the internationalist pacifist community who combined pacifism with militant suffragism. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington had been a militant suffragette who espoused pacifism before as well as during the war. Her pacifism was at once influenced and shaped by her feminism as well as Irish nationalism. In a letter to Louie Bennett, Skeffington acknowledged that some pacifists were of the opinion that ‘resistance to all violence is wrong’ and all war was equally as hateful. However, while she believed that ‘all war must be ended if civilisation is to reign supreme’, she also understood that there may well still be times when ‘armed aggression ought to be met with armed defence’.⁴⁶ She admitted that if there was a hope of Ireland being freed from British rule by one swift uprising, she would consider that uprising justified, while still being radically opposed to war and militarism.⁴⁷ Sheehy Skeffington saw defensive or liberatory violence as occasionally necessary and good if it was used to rebuke a militarist

foreign power. Margaret Ward has concluded from this that Hanna Sheehy Skeffington was not a pacifist when it came to Ireland.⁴⁸ However, Maurice Casey recently surmised that it is perhaps more accurate to label pacifists like Sheehy Skeffington and Sylvia Pankhurst as 'anti-militarist pacifists' during this period, to account for their opposition to 'imperialist war' while still supporting revolutionary violence.⁴⁹ Sheehy Skeffington was referred to as a 'militant pacifist' by contemporaries, demonstrating that it was indeed possible for pacifists to embody the two paradoxical positions at once.⁵⁰

The WIL and IIL both contained pacifists that varied in their understanding of justified violence, but united at this crucial juncture in British–Irish relations. Certainly, the WIL opposed the war and sought peace, as was their primary aim, but they also actively supported Irish independence, and occasionally even justified the methods to achieve it. Notably, in their report, the WIL wrote that their mission did not 'pretend to have gone to Ireland with minds bare of principles', as they held that 'freedom is the first condition of peace'.⁵¹ While there were marked differences in the various pacifist approaches found within the international women's peace movement in the interwar period, all British and Irish pacifists accepted that there were hierarchies of violence in the war in Ireland. WIL members understood that the British state was the more powerful side in the conflict, and as such, attributed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the British government. On the second anniversary of the First World War's armistice, members of the Birmingham and Cambridge branches of the WIL wrote letters to the press asking the British public, on such a memorable anniversary, to remember the gallant men who went into 'the war to end war' and do all in their power to call a truce to 'the most horrible sort of war' in Ireland.⁵² The WIL were very clear that only the British state had the moral obligation to end the war. In many of the resolutions passed at the WIL delegation meetings, there was a demand for the end of British military rule in Ireland and withdrawal of British troops.⁵³ They also emphasised the power imbalance of the conflict. At a meeting of the WIL held under the auspices of the Sunderland Liberal and Radical Association, a Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy articulated this sentiment; 'murder was murder, whoever committed it' but,

the murders by the Sinn Feiners were done by men in rebellion who were driven underground; whereas the murders on the British side were undertaken 'with all the pomp and majesty of the law and the King's uniform ... that was the difference.'⁵⁴

Annot Robinson, in her report to the American Commission, mentioned how the British public were swayed toward being initially hostile to the Irish militants in 1919. She firstly summarised how in 1917, 'no policeman was killed, but the police and military arrested 394 persons for political opinions, deported 24 persons without charge or trial, and killed several civilians'.⁵⁵ She described how no police were killed in 1918 either, but 110 political arrests took place, 77 deportations, and five civilians were killed, emphasising the longevity of the conflict and the terror that had been enacted upon the Irish population. She explained that this history was not well known to the British public, and so when the 'secret murders' of the IRA began, 'the average Britisher' simply felt very hostile to Ireland, and this feeling had continued into the 1920s.⁵⁶ The origins of the conflict were certainly important to Robinson, and she sought to add them to the official American record. For Robinson, the violence came from the British state. This coincided with the IIL's report to the American Commission where they clarified, in no uncertain terms,

that 'responsibility for the bloodshed and violence' lay with the British government which 'refuses to allow her the indefeasible right of all nations to freedom'.⁵⁷

Liberal internationalism and imperialism

The Third Congress of the WILPF in 1921 put forth a resolution recognising that 'Ireland's struggle for independence is of vital importance to the civilised world'; this resolution was moved by the British section.⁵⁸ Implicitly, Ireland was deemed to have achieved significant 'civilisation' to merit independence, which perhaps meant that the atrocities committed by the Crown forces in Ireland were all the more appalling to the international feminist community. Helena Swanwick, former member of the NUWSS and Chairman of the WIL described the 'appalling policy that was being pursued in Ireland' and considered that 'not in the lifetime of any of us has the condition of Ireland been more deeply disgraceful to British Rule'.⁵⁹ Yet this condemnation from Swanwick and the WIL did not necessarily translate into a wider criticism of the imperial project, or of the British empire.

During the pre-war suffrage movement Swanwick often specified 'responsibilities in India' as part of the imperative for women's franchise, explicitly linking colonialism to the civilising mission.⁶⁰ Antoinette Burton considers Helena Swanwick to have been the author of the article, 'The New Imperialism' published in 1913 as she was the editor of the *Common Cause* that year.⁶¹ This article projected a 'new and sane' imperialism which repudiated the 'old brutal conception of an empire based on conquest and coercion' and linked it to the movement that would emancipate British women.⁶² Swanwick took issue with the idea that millions of Indians were coerced into colonial status 'at the point of the bayonet', insisting that this notion was 'as absurd as it is disgusting'.⁶³ She believed that an empire could not be maintained through brute force, and actually denied the possibility of the British empire doing so, for it would be 'absurd' to maintain an imperial project in this way. This was not a unique perspective within British suffrage rhetoric. It was considered that women's role in empire could counteract the violence and 'warmongering' of a masculine empire and play a civilising role in the domestic life of colonial rule.⁶⁴ Certainly, far from condemning the British empire, feminists created their own ideal of empire that prioritised 'civilisation', 'peace', and high ideals. As Leila Rupp has demonstrated, this feminist view of imperialism merged with the internationalism of the British WIL. There were several cases in the 1920s and 1930s of the British WIL denying the brutality of British imperial rule, in Egypt in 1924, and again in India in 1930.⁶⁵ While accepting that imperialism was wrong, they considered it not particularly cruel. The disparity between the perception of colonial violence across the colonised nations at a time when Britain was at its imperial zenith indicates the role of whiteness and geography in acceptability of violence within the feminist-internationalist organisation.

While the WIL often avoided engaging directly with the question of Ireland's future beyond its articulated support for 'self-determination', it is clear that its ideas chimed with a vision of Ireland as a white part of empire, and future dominion along the lines of Canada. Ellen Wilkinson explained to the American Commission that there was a large section of international opinion that believed that the large number of 'little nations' in Europe, 'none of whom are strong enough to maintain their independence,

is simply an invitation for a stronger power to be their master'. She explained that, within this framework, Ireland was seen as safer within the empire. Her phrasing was opaque, and so it is unclear if she was implying that her specific organisation held this view, or indeed if she adhered to this perspective herself. She continued, explaining that Britain did not hold Canada or Australia by force, they were part of the empire because they chose to be. She lamented the fact that the policy of 'militarists' and 'Ulsterites' in Ireland was driving the Irish people to want to get out of the British empire all together.⁶⁶ Annot Robinson similarly explained that the WIL were in favour of self-determination for the Irish, but when questioned on whether this meant within or outside the empire, she claimed that 'a very great number of people agree with Mr Asquith who has stood for the dominion form of government', and this was held by many British bodies, including her own organisation. When pushed, she accepted this would mean the same kind of government that had been given to Canada.⁶⁷

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, white settler regimes throughout the empire demanded the right to self-determination for themselves and had slowly achieved dominion status. This was accompanied by a new imperial discourse of the British as an 'imperial race' and these white populations of the Dominions as 'overseas Britons'.⁶⁸ Ireland was slightly different to these colonies due to the fact that the majority of the country was inhabited by a 'native race' rather than settled Britons. Some Irish nationalists identified their colonial struggle with that of the Afghans, Indians, and Egyptians, but others used the strategy of insisting that like Canadians and Australians, Irish people were a white, European race.⁶⁹ Ireland featured in a hierarchy of civilisation. They still constituted a racialised other, but one that, by virtue of religion and whiteness, was higher on the hierarchy than other corners of empire, thus enabling access to dominion status in empire.⁷⁰

Clearly, by 1920 at least, Ireland was not seen to be a necessary recipient of the civilising mission or benevolent imperial rule by British feminists or the international community due to its purported similarities to European nations. However, the notion of a specifically *female* imperial duty continued to shape the pacifism of the WIL, and the British women still viewed themselves as having a particular role to play in Ireland. So, while the WIL did not place the Irish War of Independence within a colonial context, colonial frameworks were still used when considering their own duty as a British woman involved in the political questions of the day. The language Swanwick used to discuss the destruction of Ireland and her time there as a member of the delegation was imbued with a sense of imperial duty.⁷¹ When writing of her experiences investigating the destruction of Cork, Swanwick identified a 'sort of dismal joke' that haunted her time there. She elaborated, explaining that two republican women followed her to all her interviews, 'dogged' her comings and goings, and when she spoke to one of the male Sinn Feiners in Cork about it, he said that 'they mean well' but that they were just 'mad women'.⁷² Swanwick did not speculate on why she was followed during her time in Cork, but it is clear that these republican women did not trust her – and perhaps viewed her as a British interloper, as a representative of the nation state from which they sought to disentangle themselves. Indeed, Swanwick noted how these 'ardent and indiscriminating patriots' tried to 'pump' her, meaning they pressed her for information, again implying they thought she was spying on behalf of Britain. The idea that the WIL could have been sent by the British state is not out of the realms of

possibility, for the British war office had sent a similar type of women's mission to South Africa in 1901 to investigate the concentration camps housing Boer women and children.⁷³ The Ladies' Committee, headed by Millicent Fawcett, wrote a report that was subsequently dubbed a whitewash, blaming the Boers for much of their suffering.⁷⁴ Thus, it was perhaps reasonable for Swanwick to be viewed by the republican women with such suspicion.

Whatever their reasoning, the reconnaissance upset Swanwick who argued that, while being followed by the police was unpleasant, 'being shadowed by half-mad revolutionaries from the side one is trying to help is worse'. At this point in her memoir, Swanwick, expressing frustration that she was treated so suspiciously by these republican women, attempted to explain herself. She claimed:

I was trying to help the Irish in the sense that I wanted to put their case and what we British were making of it before my own people, in the conviction that if they only knew what was being done in our name, they wouldn't stand it. But I was no friend of the horrible methods of some of the revolutionaries.⁷⁵

Swanwick felt irritated that she was being harassed by the same people she was trying to help. It is illuminating that she spent time deconstructing this experience in her memoir, and more notable still that she used this point to explain her intentions for visiting Ireland in the first place. This section focused on particularly hostile republican women who followed her in Cork, and the irritation with this hostility from women she was trying to help echoed how British suffragists used the plight of Indian women to assert and legitimise their role in imperial matters.⁷⁶ Swanwick emphasised the role of British women in helping the Irish, not necessarily as imperialists, but—as Mo Moulton alluded to—as participants in British international relations of the post-war world.⁷⁷ However, to legitimise this new role in international relations and politics, Swanwick returned to tried and tested imperial assumptions and implications, notably utilising the 'them' and 'us' dichotomy to denote hierarchical difference. Once more, there was a specific responsibility of British women to help their colonised 'sisters'—and those 'sisters' were expected to be grateful for that assistance.

Swanwick's own perspective on empire and her recorded experience of Ireland was not necessarily representative of the wider WIL delegation or WIL branches. Like many feminist organisations of this era, the WIL was formed by a broad coalition of women who held varying political ideologies. For example, Ellen Wilkinson's record of her experience in Ireland, published in *The Communist*, contained no British exceptionalism, but also did not consider the Irish war as overtly anti-imperial. Instead, Wilkinson's article urged British communists who were considering the possibility of an armed revolution in Britain to view Ireland, rather than Russia, as an example of 'what they will be up against'.⁷⁸ She argued that Sinn Fein was faced with the problems that the communists would meet in the conditions of a western parliamentary democracy. Her words were a warning to 'those people who still retain a touching faith in the power of majorities and the impossibility of armed repression in a land of universal suffrage'.⁷⁹ She did not actually argue against the need for an armed uprising, she was just concerned that many within her ranks were not seeing the lesson of the Irish war for how the government would respond when they did eventually revolt. Matt Perry has argued that Wilkinson was critical of a feminist pacifism that was premised on the argument that

women's maternal natures made them innately opposed to war and violence.⁸⁰ Clearly, her communism made space for class war within pacifism, and Perry notes that she acted as a revolutionary within the WILPF; attempting to shift it from a 'bourgeois' to a more radical terrain.⁸¹ However, the lesson she drew from the conflict in Ireland was one of class and communist internationalism rather than of anti-imperialism.

Wilkinson framed the War of Independence as a test-run for what would occur if the British workers launched an armed rebellion of their own. This obscured the imperialist power dynamics of the war—instead reducing the conflict to a struggle between workers and the state. While it is difficult to draw firm distinctions between socialist revolutionary and anti-imperialist politics, as there was plenty of implicit overlap, there were other socialists and communists who were at this time, framing the Irish war of independence as an anti-imperialist war. For example, George Lansbury, socialist editor of the *Daily Herald* newspaper and former suffragist, noted that the British government sought to 'break the spirit of the Irish race'.⁸² Additionally, communist and feminist member of the WIL, Sylvia Pankhurst, contextualised the brutalities within wider colonial atrocities in India and other parts of empire.⁸³ While Wilkinson had criticised the ways British feminists constructed the Indian woman 'other' to argue against Indian self-rule, in this case, she did not link imperialism with the Irish War of Independence.⁸⁴ Indeed, Wilkinson's view of the Irish war erased the ways race and empire had autonomous power in Ireland, separate to that of class.

'Small Nations'

Instead of being seen as a colonial nation brought to heel by an imperial power, the WIL leadership and wider membership broadly viewed the Irish War of Independence through the European lens of the First World War. Throughout the war there had been severe criticism of Germany's aggression toward Belgium by British patriots, the press, and the state. Germany was the aggressor, preying on easy targets, whereas Britain presented itself as the defender of the rights of small nations. However, where the war's promoters insisted on Britain's radical difference from Germany, pacifist critics pointed to their similarities.⁸⁵ Ireland provided the perfect example for a direct comparison. Ireland's inclusion in the 'small nations' debate by German propagandists as well as Irish nationalists transformed Ireland from being perceived as a colonial nation to one who deserved the same rights as the other small European nations. Women of the international community who had united during the war, such as those who comprised the WILPF, felt very strongly about the rights of these nations. The Zurich Peace Congress, the second international congress of women, held in 1919, for example, passed a resolution supporting the right of Ireland, 'the nation whose struggle to regain her lost liberty has been the longest in Europe', to self-determination.⁸⁶ Within this context, the WILPF identified Ireland with the other nations in Europe who had lost their liberty and ability to self-govern during the First World War, rather than colonised nations who were also struggling to free themselves from British colonialism. The British WIL followed suit and made a similar characterisation.

The comparison between Belgium and Ireland was used frequently by the WIL at meetings across Britain. The most common comparison was regarding the destruction of the towns and villages. The official report published by the delegation on their

return clearly stated that the devastated areas they witnessed in Ireland resembled those of Belgium.⁸⁷ At a meeting of the WIL, held under the auspices of the Newcastle Labour Party, the 'present invasion of Ireland by British troops' was contrasted with the nation's situation in 1914, when Britain went to war *against* the invasion of little Belgium.⁸⁸ Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, as their Irish republican guest speaker, pressed this point, arguing that there was 'no crime in Belgium, France, or even in Armenia that did not pale before the crimes of British soldiers in Ireland'.⁸⁹ At meetings where the delegation exhibited their photographs of the devastation, the audience would cry 'shame' and 'worse than the Germans'. Indeed, this was the purpose of the photographs, to evoke parallels and thus enable criticism of the British military activities in Ireland. Helena Swanwick noted that the most common of remarks was 'Why, it's like Belgium!'⁹⁰

Another member of the WIL, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, conducted her own investigations into the Irish War of Independence in 1921 independent of the organisation. It is not clear why she sought to do this in an individual capacity, rather than as part of the WIL delegation or even as a WIL representative. In her memoir, Pethick Lawrence simply explained that she wished to publicise the violence enacted on the Irish population. Her intention was to find victims who would be willing to make official statements to be used as 'definite evidence' of crimes, and consequently seek compensation.⁹¹ She credited her friend Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and officials of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) for her successful operations in Ireland, noting that they were able to put her in personal contact with many victims.⁹² She recalled being 'handed on, secretly, from one centre to another and introduced in cities besides Dublin to many people who were able to help'.⁹³ Perhaps this method of investigation based on pre-war Irish suffrage and labour contacts worked better outside the confines of an official organisation. On her return to England, she condemned the 'military occupation of any country, large or small', indicative of the 'small nations' discourse so prevalent within the WIL.⁹⁴ At a meeting held in Street, Somerset, Pethick Lawrence explained that the question, 'What had we to do with Ireland?' was reminiscent of the question that dominated Britain only a few years prior; 'What have we to do with Belgium?'⁹⁵ She declared that although the 'great majority' of English people were 'liberty-loving, justice-loving, peace-loving, kind and well-meaning', atrocities that were similar and equally as bad as those perpetrated in Belgium were being committed in Ireland. At that meeting Roger Clark argued, 'it was just as immoral for Britain to hold down Ireland for 'strategic reasons' as it was for Germany to over-run Belgium for the same reason.'⁹⁶ 'What had been done in Belgium by the German armies could be equalled by what had happened in Ireland'.⁹⁷ The violence was seen purely through the prism of the First World War, there was no consideration of how the gendered violence of the Crown forces fitted into the long history of colonial brutality, or even of the longer history between Britain and Ireland. Pethick Lawrence argued that due to these atrocities, Britain was losing their reputation, and their good name was being 'dragged in the mud'.⁹⁸

During her trip to Ireland, Pethick Lawrence *only* gathered stories from female victims of violence perpetuated by the Crown forces, recording serious allegations of sexual violence. She sought to force the Dublin Castle administration to investigate the stories she chronicled. Just as critics of the German invasion of Belgium used brutal atrocities of women and the family to evoke public condemnation, so too did Emmeline Pethick

Lawrence expose the sexual incidents of violence committed by the Crown forces to mobilise public opinion against the British campaign in Ireland.⁹⁹ The controversial article she published in the *Daily News* on her return to Britain detailed, explicitly so, the ways the Black and Tans and occasionally the RIC sexually humiliated, demeaned, harassed, and assaulted Irish women. Pethick Lawrence recorded the terrifying experiences of 'men with white handkerchiefs covering their faces' raiding young girls' bedrooms in the dead of night to 'terrify and insult them'. She wrote of a heavily pregnant woman, 'down on her knees' in her nightclothes begging officers to not burn her small bundle of baby clothes, who was subsequently beaten 'with the butt end of their rifles'.¹⁰⁰ She described various incidents of sexual assault occurring while women protected their babies and suffering retaliations when they reported the crimes to the British authorities.¹⁰¹ Similar stories from Belgium were reported to have stirred the passion of British working men in 1915, who wished to fight against the 'outraging of young girls and married women'.¹⁰² Newspaper editors sought to 'speak plainly' about the horrors faced by Belgian women in order to provide a warning for what the British women would face. The *Belfast Weekly Telegraph* wrote in April 1915, 'let each man who has a daughter, a wife, a sweetheart, a sister, picture in sympathetic imagination the unspeakable horrors perpetrated on the women of Belgium'.¹⁰³ Using the same rhetoric boosted the comparison between Belgium and Ireland, exposing the hypocrisy of the British government and media in perpetuating and legitimising the same horrors that were conducted in Belgium in Ireland.

Historians such as Marie Coleman, Linda Connolly, and Louise Ryan have pointed to the fact that rates of sexual violence during the Irish War of Independence were in reality, quite low.¹⁰⁴ Coleman has suggested that, from the British viewpoint, the avoidance of sexual violence allowed them to draw a clear contrast with the German army who had committed atrocities that had horrified the European public.¹⁰⁵ While violence against women occurred, it was limited in nature and scope. However, it should be mentioned that having read other testimonies of Irish and British observers in the Labour and American Commissions, as well as the WIL testimonies, it seems that scholars may have missed the cases that Pethick Lawrence was able to uncover.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the publication of the violence that occurred against Irish women, still formed a useful piece of propaganda to be used by the Dáil and supporters of Irish independence. In reality, it did not necessarily matter that the rates of violence against women in Ireland during the War of Independence were far below that experienced in Belgium during the First World War; this was about rhetorical strategies to unite the two in the minds of the public.

Many Irish republican women often conflated the language of 'small nations' and imperialism to identify Ireland as a nation that was both European *and* a resisting colonial possession. This was different to the way the British women compared Ireland to Belgium. When giving a lecture to an American audience, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington noted that 'the most popular Small Nation in the eyes of the United States is still, as it always has been, Ireland' drawing on the historic links between the two nations.¹⁰⁷ She viewed this as only natural as America was the 'only one of the British colonies that has been fortunate enough to throw over the yoke of the Empire', and thus set an important precedent. She explained that many British individuals, including former fellow suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, had been sent on speaking tours to defend the reach and interests of the British empire, and argued that they had gone to 'vilify

those nations that did not agree with her imperialistic ambitions'.¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth McKillen noted how Sheehy Skeffington believed it would be hypocritical for the United States to champion democracy for some small nationalities controlled by Germany while not also insisting on freedom for the British colonies.¹⁰⁹ Sheehy Skeffington presented Britain's imperial ambitions as the biggest threat to Ireland in her speeches in order to put public pressure on the Wilson administration to avoid such hypocrisy. In parallel, Louie Bennett called for an 'Alliance of non-imperialistic peoples' to unite the small nations 'in protecting one another from imperialisms of the Great Powers'.¹¹⁰ She argued that 'imperialism seems to have entrenched itself behind a travesty of the original conception of the League of Nations', and argued that all those small nations that ignored the struggle of Ireland weakened their own national security against the same imperialisms.¹¹¹ Overall, the IIL believed that small nations would 'never be safe under the old system of imperialism, balance of power, and great armaments'.¹¹² Thus, imperialism—or rather, anti-imperialism—was much more central to the (inter)nationalist rhetoric of Irish women, but was bound up in the contemporary language of small nationhood.

By comparison, the WIL delegation did not use language of anti-colonialism to describe the suffering and harm caused by the Crown forces in Ireland. In fact, empire was strikingly absent from their descriptions, reports, and conclusions on the Irish situation. Instead, they used language recognisable from the descriptions of the Germans in Belgium and France, such as identifying the German actions as those of 'terrorism' or as a 'reign of terror'.¹¹³ In a similar way, the actions of the Crown forces in Ireland were characterised as 'terrorism' in WIL delegation meetings.¹¹⁴ There was a focus on the lawlessness of the soldiers in particular by Helena Swanwick. In her memoirs, she noticed during her trip that, 'law no longer obtained'.¹¹⁵ She emphasised that the Black and Tans were comprised of the 'less desirable' elements of the British army who carried out reprisals. This implied that it was not the laws, or even the implementation of law that was at fault, but rather the fact that there was a lawlessness amongst the 'less desirable' British forces in Ireland that was to blame for the destruction. This made the issue one of legality, which ensured the political conversation would avoid outward criticism of the imperial project.

The WIL were particularly worried about Britain's international reputation. The Cambridge branch wrote to the *Cambridge Daily News* publicising their conclusions on the situation in Ireland, and argued that 'the present condition of Ireland affects our reputation and consequently our influence among all the other nations of the world, notably of course, America'.¹¹⁶ They lamented the fact that Britain could never take her place in the Council of the League of Nations while the situation in Ireland continued, reasoning that a nation could never lead the League while at war.¹¹⁷ The WIL hoped that Britain could be a leading nation in progressing toward a global peace and their position in the League of Nations was integral to that vision. They were concerned with Britain's international reputation and market interests, arguing that the conflict could inflict a 'great economic injury to Great Britain'.¹¹⁸ In particular, they were worried that the war would damage Britain's close relationship with the United States, and so wished to end the war to prevent a rupture in international relations. This was contrary to the outlook of Irish republicans like Hanna Sheehy Skeffington who actively sought to highlight those cracks in the UK-US relationship and exploit the damage for the benefit of Ireland.¹¹⁹

More significantly, Britain's international standing and influence was important to British women's own reconceptualisation of their political role. This maintained an implicit connection to the British civilising mission—viewing Britain's interventions around the world as beneficial and moral, and their own role within it as necessary and important. British rule was purported to bring about the end of supposedly 'chronic' warfare, violence, disorder, and chaotic rule in countries like India, and institute peace and order through their 'civilising mission'.¹²⁰ For this reason, many internationalists believed that Britain would, and indeed, must, take a leading role in the new global co-operation in order to continue their work of creating order out of global disorder.¹²¹ Thus, the WIL were worried about the 'disastrous moral injury to Great Britain and her reputation' that would result if the war in Ireland continued.¹²² Whether these fears about Britain's reputation was simply a rhetorical strategy aimed at bringing the British audience onside or a genuine concern is difficult to determine. It is likely that it was both. Appealing to the good nature of the British public was a strategy frequently deployed by feminists in the suffrage movement and beyond. However, there was also a sense that the British campaigners certainly believed that Britain was sullyng its reputation, and worried about the potential implications this had for Britain's role on the global stage. Liberal internationalism borrowed from and reproduced imperialism, so it is not surprising that Britain's international reputation was still crucially important to these British feminists.

There was an understanding that it was Britain's atrocities in Ireland that would repulse the international community, rather than their general maintenance of the empire or atrocities (such as the 1919 Indian Amritsar Massacre) in other colonial nations such as India or Egypt at this time.¹²³ While the WIL consistently urged the British government to grant India and Egypt dominion status throughout the 1920s, the colonial atrocities were not deemed so threatening to Britain's international image as those in Ireland.¹²⁴ As Sylvia Pankhurst explained, 'when perpetrated against Indian and coloured people [*sic*], outrages like those being committed by British forces in Ireland, have always been regarded as legitimated [*sic*], by the mass of the British public'.¹²⁵ Pankhurst understood that race and geography played a significant role in determining the type of imperialism that the British people supported. She emphasised the role of British government policy in these atrocities, resisting the narrative that the Crown forces were comprised of abnormal members of the British military who were acting outside the boundaries of legitimate military operations. Furthermore, she drew links with other colonial nations agitating for independence to contextualise imperial policy in Ireland. It is notable that Pankhurst identified this, but other internationalist-socialists did not. During this period, there was conflict between some internationalist-socialists who believed that race issues were used to divide workers in the interests of capitalists, and those who supported the more mainstream labour parties who often perpetuated race-based divisions.¹²⁶ Pankhurst was in the minority of internationalists and Irish nationalists who understood that race often influenced how imperialism and imperial violence was interpreted by the British public. According to Martyn Frampton, Sinn Feiners were drawn to Egyptian and Indian nationalist activists, believing they had found kindred spirits who saw the oppressive British empire in the same light.¹²⁷ While there was no linear diffusion of ideas from Ireland to India, the resulting movements were, and should still be

recognisable as part of a shared, global phenomenon.¹²⁸ Those women who still saw value in the imperial project, were ultimately unable to see these larger networks of solidarity, shared experiences, and common goals.

Conclusion

The women of the WIL who travelled to Ireland during the War of Independence were unanimous in their condemnation of the British government's policy in Ireland. Their experiences in Ireland shaped their developing pacifisms; they understood that there was a hierarchy of violence at play in Ireland, whereby Britain's war was that of a larger power seeking to dominate the small nation, and Ireland's participation was defensive, seeking to protect the newly accepted sovereignty of that small nation. The occupation of Ireland was seen as a direct imitation of the German invasion and occupation of Belgium only a few years prior, and the moral argument that had legitimised Britain's intervention in that war was utilised against the British during the War of Independence.

The 'small nations' discourse that had emerged out of the First World War, as well as the comparisons to Belgium obscured the colonial dimension and history to this conflict for British feminists and allowed individuals to criticise governmental policy in Ireland without needing to call for the systemic destruction of empire. This was different to the way Irish feminist internationalists of the IIL conceived of the conflict; they used both the new language of 'small nations' and parallels with the German occupation of Belgium to bring contemporary political relevance and legitimacy to a long-standing colonial issue. However, while Ireland was no longer seen as a colonial nation in the eyes of the British members of the WIL, imperial feminism and the priorities of British global power that had dominated the mindset of British women with regard to Ireland and other colonial states during the pre-war suffrage movement had not simply disappeared. While they were no longer motivated by a sense of imperial duty, Britain's 'good name' and reputation was still at the forefront of their minds when considering the international reaction to the war in Ireland, demonstrating how liberal internationalism reproduced ideas from imperialism. It could also be found in individual women's inability to shed imperial assumptions about their own role within geopolitical conflicts, and their desire to see Ireland incorporated into a dominion of the British empire. The WIL's engagement with the Irish War of Independence thus demonstrates how British individuals, largely on the left of British politics, dealt with changing ideas of nationhood, internationalism, imperialism, and liberation.

Notes

1. 'Women Try to Help: Hope of Bringing Peace to Ireland', *Manchester Evening News*, October 5, 1920.
2. 'Stifling the South', *Daily Herald*, October 16, 1920.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*; Helena Swanwick, *I Have Been Young* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935), 328–34.
5. 'Stifling the South', *Daily Herald*, October 16, 1920.
6. 'Conditions in Ireland', *Western Daily Press*, November 4, 1920.

7. Here, I am considering the 'colonial relationship' to refer to the subjugation of one people by another. Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 15.
8. Christine Kinealy, 'At Home with the Empire: The Example of Ireland' in *At Home with Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77–84.
9. While some WILPF national branches were considered quite radical in their interest in fighting imperialism (the French section in particular organised a summer school on the interracial problems of imperialism and called for an end to the military repression in the French colonies), the British section was more ambivalent on the question of empire. Leila J. Rupp, 'Challenging Imperialism in International Women's Organizations, 1888–1945', *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 8, no. 1 (1996): 16–17; Miguel Bandedeira Jerónimo, "'Imperial Internationalisms" in the 1920s: The Shaping of Colonial Affairs at the League of Nations', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48, no. 5 (2020): 883.
10. Molly Cochran, 'Activism and International Thought: The Women's International League of Peace and Freedom and the Problem of Statelessness in the Interwar Period', *Global Studies Quarterly* 3 (2023): 1–12.
11. The British branch of the WILPF had approximately 4000 members in fifty local branches by the end of 1919. Similar to other national branches of the WILPF, many of the women of the British WIL had been active in the pre-war suffrage movement, both from militant and constitutionalist organisations, and encompassed a range of politics from communism to liberalism. Sarah Hellowell, 'Antimilitarism, Citizenship and Motherhood: The Formation and Early Years of the Women's International League (WIL) 1915–1919', *Women's History Review* 27, no. 4 (2017): 551.
12. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation, and Race*, ed. Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine (Oxon: Routledge, 2000); Christine Bolt, *Sisterhood Questioned: Race, Class, and Internationalism in the American and British Women's Movements c. 1880s–1970s* (Oxon: Routledge, 2005); Maurice Casey, 'From Votes for Women to World Revolution: British and Irish Suffragettes and International Communism, 1919–1939', in *The Politics of Women's Suffrage: Local, National, and International Dimensions*, ed. Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Lyndsey Jenkins (London: University of London Press, 2021); Laura Beers, 'Bridging the Ideological Divide: Liberal and Socialist Collaboration in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1919–1945', *Journal of Women's History* 33, no. 2 (2021): 111–35; Zaib un Nisa Aziz, 'Songs of Sisterhood: Feminist Political Practice between Empire and Internationalism 1910–1920', *Gender and History* 35, no. 2 (2021): 155–71.
13. W.M. Roger Lewis, Introduction to *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Judith M. Brown and W.M. Roger Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.
14. John M. MacKenzie, 'The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain', *The Oxford History of the British Empire* 212–14.
15. Emily Baughan, *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 11.
16. Sarah Hellowell, 'Feminism, Pacifism, and Internationalism: The Women's International League 1915–1935', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Northumbria, 2017); Hellowell, 'Antimilitarism, Citizenship and Motherhood': 551–64.
17. Mo Moulton, "'You have Votes and Power": Women's Political Engagement with the Irish Question in Britain, 1919–23', *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 1 (2013): 180.
18. Emily Baughan, "'Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!' Empire, Internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in Inter-war Britain', *Historical Research* 86, no.

- 231 (2013): 116–37; Rupp, ‘Challenging Imperialism in International Women’s Organizations’: 8–27.
19. For texts that showcase the breadth and variety of the debate around Ireland’s colonial history see: Liam Kennedy, ‘Modern Ireland: Post-Colonial Society or Post-Colonial Pretensions?’, *The Irish Review* 13 (1992/3): 107–21; Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Stephen Howe, ‘Colonised and Colonisers: Ireland in the British Empire’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History*, ed. Alvin Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Kevin Kenny, ‘Ireland and the British Empire: An Introduction’, in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Robbie McVeigh and Bill Rolson, ‘*Anois ar theact an tSamhraidh*: Ireland, Colonialism and the Unfinished Revolution’ (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Books, 2021).
 20. Christine Strotmann, ‘The Revolutionary Program of the German Empire: The Case of Ireland’, in *Small Nations and Colonial Peripheries in World War I*, ed. Gearóid Barry, Enrico Dal Lago, and Róisín Healy (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2016), 20.
 21. Strotmann, ‘The Revolutionary Program of the German Empire’, 24; Christopher John Bartlett, *Defence and Diplomacy: Britain and the Great Powers 1815–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 116.
 22. Lili Zách, ‘“The First of the Small Nations”: The Significance of Central European Small States in Irish Nationalist Political Rhetoric, 1918–1922’, *Irish Historical Studies* 44, no. 165 (2020): 27–34.
 23. Thomas Kettle was an Irish nationalist who looked to Europe in an effort to ‘internationalise Irish nationalism’ in the decades prior to the First World War. Senia Pašeta, ‘Thomas Kettle: “An Irish Soldier in the Army of Europe?”’, in *Ireland and the Great War: ‘A War to Unite us all?’*, ed. Adrian Gregory and Senia Pašeta (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 13–14.
 24. Note: figure includes Roger Casement who was executed several months after the Rising. Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 274.
 25. William Sheehan, *British Voices from the Irish War of Independence 1918–1921* (Dublin: The Collins Press, 2007), 1.
 26. ‘Women Try to Help: Hope of Bringing Peace to Ireland’, *Manchester Evening News*, October 5, 1920.
 27. ‘Women’s International Executive’, *Irish Citizen*, August 2, 1920.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. *Ibid.*
 30. For the history of the relationship between British and Irish suffragists and labour activists between 1900–1921, see Margaret Ward, ‘Conflicting Interests: The British and Irish Suffrage Movements’, *Feminist Review* 50 (1995): 127–47; Sharon Crozier de Rosa, ‘Divided Sisterhood? Nationalist Feminism and Feminist Militancy in England and Ireland’, *Contemporary British History* 32, no. 4 (2018): 448–69; Erin Geraghty, ‘British Feminists in Ireland: Internationalist Solidarity or Imperial “Sisterhood?” 1900–1921’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2022).
 31. Hellowell, ‘Feminism, Pacifism, and Internationalism’, 147.
 32. Bell, *Hesitant Comrades*, 68.
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. Ivan Gibbons, ‘The British Parliamentary Labour Party and the Government of Ireland Act 1920’, *Parliamentary History* 32, no. 3 (2013): 507.
 35. ‘Ireland’, *Workers’ Dreadnought*, February 7, 1920.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. Ivan Gibbons, ‘Labour and Irish Revolution: from Investigation to Deportation’, in *The British Labour Party and Twentieth Century Ireland: The Cause of Ireland, the Cause of Labour*, ed. Laurence Marley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 71–72.
 38. Francis M. Carroll, *America and the Making of an Independent Ireland* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 100.

39. Annot Robinson, Ellen Wilkinson, and Louie Bennett Testimonies, in *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland* ed. Albert Coyle (Washington D.C: May 1921), 561, 606, 613, 984.
40. Ellen Wilkinson Testimony, *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, 598.
41. Carroll, *America and the Making of an Independent Ireland*, 108–9.
42. Jo Vellacott, 'Feminism as if All People Matters: Working to Remove the Causes of War 1919–1929', *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 3 (2001): 376.
43. Jo Vellacott, 'A Place for Pacifism and Transnationalism in Feminist Theory: The Early Work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom', *Women's History Review* 2, no. 1 (1993): 27.
44. Lucian Ashworth, 'Feminism, War, and the Prospects of International Government – Helena Swanwick and the Lost Feminists of Interwar International Relations', *Limerick Papers in Politics and Public Administration* 2 (2008), 6.
45. Margaret Ward, 'Nationalism, Pacifism, Internationalism: Louie Bennett, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, and the Problems of "Defining Feminism"', in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, ed. Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 64.
46. 'Hanna Sheehy Skeffington to Louie Bennett, 1915', in *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington: Suffragette and Sinn Feiner*, ed. Margaret Ward (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2017), 120.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Ward, 'Nationalism, Pacifism, Internationalism', 70.
49. Maurice Casey, 'Irish Women and Radical Internationalism: From Suffrage to Antifascism, 1916–1939', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2019), 93–4.
50. 'The Stockholm Conference Meeting', *Irish Citizen*, July 7, 1917.
51. 'Report of Conditions in Ireland Made by the Women's International League', *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, 621.
52. 'Today's Thought for Erin', *Birmingham Gazette*, November 11, 1920; 'Armistice Day: An Appeal', *Cambridge Daily News*, November 10, 1920.
53. 'Tynesiders Demand', *Daily Herald*, November 15, 1920; 'The State of Ireland', *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, November 15, 1920; 'Irish "No Man's Land"', *Daily Herald*, November 16, 1920.
54. 'Irish Policy', *Sunderland Daily Echo*, November 20, 1920.
55. Annot Robinson Testimony, *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, 543.
56. *Ibid.*, 547.
57. ILL Statement to the American Commission, *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, 1051.
58. Third Congress of WILPF, Vienna, 10–17 July 1921, WILPF/5/8, Women's Library, London School of Economics.
59. 'Spreading the Light', *Weekly Freeman's Journal* November 20, 1920; Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, 335.
60. Burton, *Burdens of History*, 10.
61. *Ibid.*, 186.
62. 'The New Imperialism', *Common Cause*, May 30, 1913.
63. *Ibid.*
64. See: Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop* 5 (1978): 9–65; Patricia Grimshaw, 'Faith, Missionary Life, and the Family', in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Phillipa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 260–80.
65. Rupp, 'Challenging Imperialism', 18.
66. Ellen Wilkinson Testimony, *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, 609.
67. Annot Robinson Testimony, *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, 539–40.
68. Bruce Nelson, *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 122.
69. *Ibid.*, 125.
70. For work on the racialisation of the Irish; Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798–1882* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class, and the Racialised Outsider* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

71. Gerda Lerner argues that women used the concept of motherhood to advance their claims for equality much earlier than they used the concept of sisterhood – this was used to unite women through common experience. But in imperial contexts, motherhood came to be a racial necessity as well as a way to conceptualise a civilised ideal for colonial peoples. Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 122; Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', 9–65.
72. Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, 334.
73. Jo Vellacott, *Pacifists, Patriots and the Vote: The Erosion of Democratic Suffragism in Britain during the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 62.
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92. Letters between Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington show that Irish contacts were integral in assisting and directing Pethick Lawrence's work in Ireland. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, 27 April 1921, SSP, MS 33, 606 (6) National Library of Ireland.
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Acknowledgements

I thank Dr Laura Schwartz and Dr Liz Egan for their generous contributions and feedback to drafts of this article. I am also grateful to the attendees of the Nottingham History Departmental Seminar Series for their feedback and thoughtful questions following a presentation of this research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This research was funded by the Wolfson Foundation and carried out as part of the PhD project; 'British Feminists in Ireland: Internationalist Solidarity or Imperial 'Sisterhood'? 1900–1921'.

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