

IMAGES AND ICONS: FEMALE TEACHERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF SELF AND SELF-CONTROL IN 1920s IRELAND

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Introduction

This article addresses a particular episode that occurred in one of the main female training colleges in Ireland in the late 1920s when students¹ founded the Mary Immaculate Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade (MDDC). Regarded by many scholars as the adoption of a prescribed image, a slavish following by institutionalised Catholic females of Catholic mores, the MDDC is cited by historians as an example of how women internalised the control of the Catholic Church and indeed sought to enhance and perpetuate it by their actions. Historians generally have maintained that Irish women were submissive and accepting of Catholic social teaching particularly in relation to sexuality and have highlighted the lack of organised and unified opposition to the erosion of women's citizenship and employment opportunities during the period 1920-1960.² But the education aspect of Irish women's history is under-researched. Maria Luddy contends that we have 'still almost no insight into how female national schoolteachers were "formed"' and suggests examining the ethos of the training colleges and their impact on the cultural life of Ireland.³ The absence of research in this area leads to an acceptance of an image of female teachers as passive receivers and ultimately transmitters and enforcers of basic moral principles and codes of behaviour which were influenced and regulated by the hierarchical and patriarchal church.

In drawing attention to the MDDC, this article seeks to understand and place the MDDC in the broader social context of 1920s Ireland and examine how women in general were represented. This comprises the first part of this article. More specifically it will explore whether the students in the training college were objects or agents of their own representation. Following Judith Butler's concept of gender as performative, the second part of the article addresses how these female student teachers negotiated their relationship with the patriarchal basis of organised power.⁴ To this end visual and written data from the *Mary Immaculate Training College Annuals 1927-1930* are examined. Written by second year students in the college these annuals circulated within the college and also among past students who were teaching in the primary schools. One of the core founding principles of the *Annual* was to keep the 'big family' of past students in touch with one another and with the college.⁵ The annuals record the college year and contain stories, poems and articles as well as letters from past students. The annuals also contain photographs and images of the college and of students. These images along with archival photographs are scrutinised and analysed based on the premise that representations allow for the exploration of ideology, attitudes and cultural

1 The all-female student body at Mary Immaculate College were following a two-year teacher training programme which prepared them to teach in the primary (elementary) schools in Ireland.

2 C. Beaumont, 'Women, citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922-1948', *Women's History Review*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1997, p. 574.

3 M. Luddy, 'Women's history' in L. M. Geary and M. Kelleher (eds), *Nineteenth Century Ireland – a guide to recent research*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2005, p. 53.

4 See in particular J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, New York, Routledge, 1990; *Bodies That Matter: on the discursive limits of sex*, New York, Routledge, 1993; *Excitable Speech: a politics of the performative*, New York, Routledge, 1997; *The Psychic Life of Power: theories in subjection*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997.

5 *Mary Immaculate Training College Annual*, Foreword, vol.1, 1927, n.p.

principles.⁶ Some images are juxtaposed with the text from the annuals to create a montage in an effort to record not simply the physical presence of these women but also the meaning of the era in which they were created. As Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn and Kate Rousmaniere suggest 'the cut and paste of montage allows what is peculiar, what is unsaid, what is insignificant, what is excluded, what is at the margin ... to become an object of knowledge'.⁷ Both visual and written texts are subjected therefore to what Elizabeth Butler Cullingford describes as a 'strategic and historically informed close reading' not simply to gather and collate information but to focus as R.F. Foster has suggested on 'analysing the moment and [on] trying to reconstruct the terms in which it was first told'.⁸

A Catholic society

By the end of the nineteenth century the terms Irish and Catholic had become synonymous and Catholicism became as Emmet Larkin has shown a collective unifying marker of identity.⁹ In the post - independence era of the 1920s and 1930s¹⁰ the authority of the church was not questioned by the rulers of the new state in matters of education, health or sexual morality and by means of legislation the Catholic moral code became enshrined in the law of the land.¹¹ Catholic rituals represented not a private morality but a 'public ceremonial language which served to define the community and endow various actions with legitimacy and meaning'.¹² Traditional Catholic views in relation to women's position in society were adopted by the new state and the image of the ideal Irishwoman was that of a wife and mother 'pure and good with a particular appreciation for the beautiful, the pleasing'.¹³

While this ideology of motherhood and domesticity was certainly not unique to Ireland during this period,¹⁴ the church's control of education and the state's acceptance and support of the church's policy on education was a crucial factor influencing Irish culture. There was no conception of separation between church and state and this led to the expectation of the Catholic hierarchy that Catholic social teaching would not only be upheld but actively fostered in the 'national' (primary) schools. By 1940 these primary schools constituted the only educational experience for nine out of ten Irish people.¹⁵ Women constituted two thirds of the teaching force in these primary schools and the vast majority of trained female teachers were educated at the two largest female-only Catholic

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- 6 Peim states that 'it is when signs are most automatically taken for what they represent that we may be most alert to the presence of ideology or the embedding of meaning within systems of ideas that are taken for natural and naked truth. This is the very condition of representation'. N. Peim, 'Introduction', U. Mietzner, K. Myers, N. Peim (eds), *Visual History - images of education*, New York, Peter Lang, 2005, p. 27.
- 7 I. Grosvenor, M. Lawn and K. Rousmaniere, 'Imaging past schooling: the necessity for montage', *The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural studies*, vol. 22, no.1, 2000, pp. 71-85; See also K. Rousmaniere, 'Questioning the visual in the history of education', *History of Education*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2001, pp. 109-116; J. Perrault and P. Levin, 'The camera made me do it: female identity and troubling archives' in *Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2004, pp.127-147.
- 8 E. Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: ethnicity and gender in Irish literature and popular culture*, Cork, Cork University Press and South Bend, Notre Dame University Press, 2001, p. 5; R.F. Foster, *The Irish Story - telling tales and making it up in Ireland*, London, Allen Lane, 2001, p. xiv; p. 2.
- 9 E. Larkin, 'The devotional revolution in Ireland, 1850-1875' in *Historical Dimensions of Irish Catholicism*, New York, Arno, 1975, p. 649.
- 10 The twenty six southern counties of Ireland became independent following the signing of the Anglo Irish Treaty on 6 December 1921 and became known as the Irish Free State with the adoption of the constitution in 1922. The six northern counties remained part of the United Kingdom.
- 11 L. Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: the undoing of a culture*, Dublin, Gill and McMillan, 2002, p. 6.
- 12 Fuller, *Irish Catholicism*, p. 10.
- 13 M.A. Valiulis, 'Neither feminist nor flapper: the ecclesiastical construction of the ideal Irish woman' in M. O'Dowd and S. Wichert (eds), *Chattel, Servant or Citizen? Women's status in church, state and society*, Belfast, Queen's University Press, 1995, pp. 168-78.
- 14 See Beaumont, 'Women, citizenship and Catholicism', pp. 563-585.
- 15 É. de Valera, *Dáil Debates*, 77, col. 1565, 1940. Cited in Fuller, *Irish Catholicism*, p. 14.

training colleges in Limerick and Dublin.¹⁶ Thus the church had the power to regulate and restrict, to dominate and dictate women teachers' lives not only in the wider community but indeed from within the education system itself.

One of the ways in which the church sought to impose its teaching was by regulating appearances and the presentation of self, especially that of women who, being more 'weak and irrational' than men could easily be won over by frivolity and fashion.¹⁷ In the late 1920s, as Ireland settled after a period of severe political unrest and ultimately civil war, the image of the 'flapper' or 'modern girl' became, as Louise Ryan has noted in her study of the Irish provincial and national press, both prevalent and pervasive throughout the Irish Free State.¹⁸ This 'fashionable flapper with her shingled hair and knee length dress embodied vice, immorality, sexuality and disobedience'.¹⁹ These traits challenged and opposed the modest, chaste and obedient ideal of Catholic womanhood. The flapper was also constructed as foreign and alien and was regarded as posing a threat to Irish identity and possibly even to the fragile new Irish nation. In Irish nationalist literature women are portrayed as 'emblematic mothers and desexualised spiritual maidens'.²⁰ Altogether the flapper was to be feared as disruptive of traditional gender roles and as a symbol of disorder.

Although the flapper could be characterised by a number of features – smoking, drinking, driving motor cars, short hair, dancing, going to the cinema – it was her clothes and her fashion sense that attracted the ire of the Catholic church, especially short skirts above or to the knee and sleeveless dresses. In 1926 the Pope urged a crusade against 'immoral fashions and the irreverent manners of modern women' describing the fashions as 'harmful' and bearing the 'seeds of countless catastrophes' and urged Catholic men to attend to this 'very grave question of feminine fashions' and to exert control over 'deviant' women.²¹ His concern and exhortation was echoed by the Council of Irish Bishops who declared that:

'the evil one is ever setting his snares for unwary feet. At the moment his traps for the innocent are chiefly the dance hall, the bad book, the indecent paper, the motion picture, the immodest fashion in female dress – all of which tend to destroy the virtues characteristic of our race'.²²

Notices were posted outside Catholic churches in some towns prohibiting the wearing of 'dresses less than four inches below the knee, dresses cut lower than the collar bone, dresses without sleeves sufficiently long to cover the arm as far as the wrist and dresses of transparent material'.²³

This flapper then appeared to be the antithesis of everything a true Irish Catholic woman should be. While the image of the flapper served as a symbol of modernity and contemporary mores and allowed women freedom in relation to choice of clothing and behaviour, it conjured up an appalling vista of the destabilisation of society, of women losing their sense of place. Inherent in the flapper image was a deep suspicion of women's representation of self. Clothing as Barbara Burman

16 By 1903 the Catholic Church was in charge of the five largest training colleges which produced teachers for the national schools, three of which were exclusively for the training of women teachers – St Mary's Belfast, Our Lady of Mercy College in Carysfort, Dublin and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. The Mercy religious order of nuns ran the colleges in Limerick and Dublin.

17 See Valiulis, 'Neither feminist nor flapper', p. 175; T. Inglis, *Moral Monopoly – the Catholic church in modern Irish society*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 1987, p. 199.

18 L. Ryan, *Gender Identity and the Irish Press, 1922-1937: embodying the nation*, New York, Edwin Mellen Press, 2002, p. 67.

19 Ryan, *Gender Identity*, p. 8.

20 D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1995, p. 406.

21 Ryan, *Gender Identity*, p. 43.

22 B. Broadbent, 'Women, the Church and the law', *Seachanges, the journal of women scholars of religion and theology*, vol. 2, November 2002, <http://www.wsrt.com.au/seachanges/volume2/html/broadbent.html>

23 Ryan, *Gender Identity*, p. 47.

and Carole Turbin have claimed, is 'one of the most consistently gendered aspects of material and visual culture'.²⁴ The clothed and fashioned body is at once marker of taste and class and a signifier of personal identity although clothing can be used to regulate and discipline bodies and act as a marker of social inclusion and exclusion.²⁵ In this instance fashion is constructed as a marker of personal morality and of adherence to a code of conduct that is both feminine and respectable. Operating within Irish society and deferring to the Catholic Church Irish women were faced with a clothing dilemma. One response was the founding by a group of second year students in Mary Immaculate College Limerick,²⁶ of the Mary Immaculate College Modest Dress and Department Crusade.

The Crusade

In the first issue of the *Mary Immaculate Training College Annual* in 1927 an article entitled 'Wanted – A New Woman' set out the reasons for and rules of the MDDC. It stated that while a return to 'ridiculous' Victorian fashions was out of the question describing them as inconvenient and unhygienic, 'modern' fashions were 'mannish' and 'indecent'. What was required according to the students was a 'Crusade in the interests of womanly modesty' which 'while aiming at stamping out what is mannish and immodest, not only allows but encourages girls to dress tastefully and becomingly and thereby win the admiration and respect of all'.²⁷ A number of designs were included in the article which conveyed images of a fashionable but modest woman who was abiding by the rules of the MDDC.



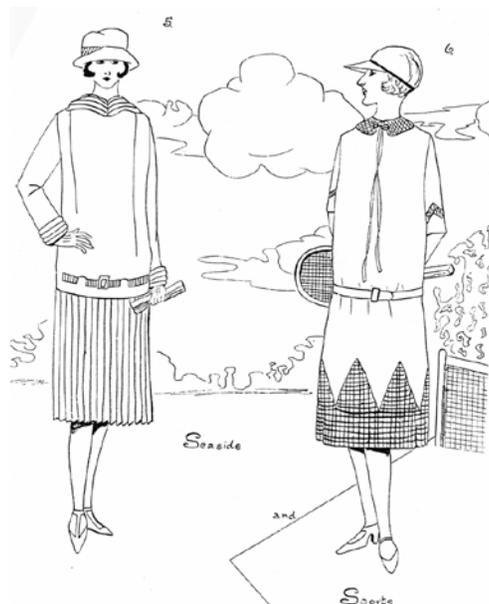
24 B. Burman and C. Turbin, 'Introduction: material strategies engendered', *Gender and History*, vol. 14, no.3, November 2002, pp. 371-381

25 See I. Dussel, 'When appearances are not deceptive: a comparative history of school uniforms in Argentina and the United States (19th- 20th centuries)', *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 41, nos. 1-2, February 2005, pp. 179-195; N. Enstad, 'Fashioning political identities: cultural studies and the historical construction of political subjects', *American Quarterly*, vol. 50, no.4, pp. 745-782.

26 Mary Immaculate College Limerick was founded in 1898 to train female Catholic teachers for the primary schools in Ireland. It was run by the Mercy religious order.

27 *Mary Immaculate Training College Annual*, vol. 1, 1927, pp. 35-6.

These rules included never wearing dresses more than four inches below the knee; dresses cut in a suggestive style or so loosely about the neck as to allow the collar-bone to appear or cut equally low at the back; dresses with sleeves less than two inches below the elbow for daywear or more than one inch above the elbow for evening wear, or without sleeves to the wrist for church wear; dresses of transparent material, unless a slip complying with the above regulations be worn underneath; not wearing shades in stockings that suggested the nude.²⁸ Women, according to the *Annual* were not required to be dowdy and nun-like but should by their choice of clothing display their private morality, purity and chastity literally on their sleeves. This attitude is evident in letters from teachers who were teaching in the primary schools to the MDDC and which were printed in the *Annual*:



I am so glad the Crusade has prospered so. It is needed in this town. Miss---
-and I have been to entertainments where we were the only two in the room
with sleeves. We wear our sleeves to the wrist at all times – in day and evening
frocks.²⁹

This town though small, can boast of its share of so-called 'smart folk'. It
is no unusual sight to see girls in sleeveless dresses which just reach the
knee in Church. And these are Convent educated girls, Doctor's and Banker's
daughters, the leaders of fashion here.³⁰

Even a child who appeared in a practically sleeveless frock the first day is now
rather modestly attired. She is a good earnest girl but of course she must
please her 'smart' mother. I think, however, that very soon, she will know the
real Mother to follow.³¹

There is a clearly discernible disdain and contempt in these letters for those women who were not 'Crusaders' and who were scornfully dismissed as 'smart'. The students writing the *Annual* suggest that women who don't abide by the rules of the Crusade do so out of 'weakness' or 'thoughtlessness' and that some when remonstrated with 'merely smile...as if it were merely a trifle and a matter of personal taste'.³² It was, however, according to the writers 'a thing which may affect the eternal destiny of souls' not only of the careless woman but also of those whom she led into temptation. Quoting from a booklet entitled *Women's Dress* the students likened the thoughtless women to Eve:

I wonder whether women who come to Church in sleeveless frocks or skirts that
barely brush the bench on which they kneel have the dimmest realization of the

28 *Annual*, vol. 1, 1927, p. 36.

29 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, p.15.

30 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, p.15.

31 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, p.15.

32 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, p.13.

terrible struggle that a young man must incessantly wage against himself if he is to walk straight in the eyes of God. One may shun the innumerable occasions which hedge him about on all sides beckoning him to his fall. One may avoid these places and things that are fraught with danger to the soul. But what is he to do when assailed by temptation at the foot of the altar?³³

This particular problem was addressed by the Crusaders by including an additional qualifier to the rule on the length of dresses – four inches below the knee (measured when kneeling) – and on the depth of necklines – not lower than the collar-bone for church wear and not more than an inch below it at any time. But it was not only in church that women needed to be aware of their appearance:

I was at a bazaar last week and a Doctor's daughter of about eighteen years of age approached a Priest with a cigarette in her mouth and wearing a sleeveless frock. My thoughts flew back to College and to the advice we received as to how a girl should behave and the respect that should be shown to priests.³⁴

The propriety and seemliness of this woman's approach was called into question by the teacher not only because of her dress but also because of her deportment. Cigarette smoking was 'mannish', 'opposed to womanly delicacy' and 'harmful to health' and while it was acknowledged by the Crusaders as a hard habit to break once acquired no teacher should ever smoke in public.³⁵ Neither should she adopt immodest poses, talk loudly or laugh boisterously in public, utter coarse or irreverent exclamations, drink alcohol at dances or entertainments, attend improper cinema shows, plays or all night dances or partake in immodest or suggestive dances or sea-bathing.³⁶ Thus the public teacher persona was one of refinement and poise, of composure and self control, a woman whose person and character could not be questioned as it was so clearly and obviously beyond reproach. This persona was not that of Eve but of Mary, the binary opposite of the Catholic Mary/Eve dualism.³⁷



NOTE - (a) The clause in the Rules of the Crusade relative to stockings is directed against the introduction of the fashion of dispensing with stockings by gradually accustoming the eye to the appearance of it, as is the case when an absolute *flesh*-tint is worn. The clause does *not* exclude other pink shades, creams, etc., provided the above effect is not produced.

(b) The clause relating to the neck of dresses is not violated by the wearing of V or U shaped necks provided that a "modesty vest" be worn if the neck is cut low.

(c) Those who would willingly join the Crusade if it did not exclude smoking, of which they have *contracted a habit*, may do so provided they endeavour gradually to *overcome* the habit, and that they never smoke in *public*.

33 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, p.13.

34 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, p.15.

35 *Annual*, vol. 1, 1927, p. 41; vol. 2, 1928, p. 17.

36 *Annual*, vol. 1, 1927, p.36 ; vol. 2, 1928, pp. 17-18.

37 See Valiulis, 'Neither feminist nor flapper', pp. 172-3.

The Crusade was 'led by Mary Immaculate, "the woman clothed with the sun."³⁸ Its members constituted a spiritual militia pledged to defend the interests of our Blessed Lady against the machinations of the evil one, whose first aim and object, in their Irish campaign, is to turn girls away from the Model on which Irish womanhood was formed since the time of St. Patrick.

Thus Mariology – the veneration of Mary – is central to the Crusade led by the students and continued by teachers. Mary Immaculate was already the patron of the training college and the *Annual* carried an image and a poem dedicated to her at the beginning of every issue. The poem highlighted the purity and chastity of the 'Virgin mother undefiled' and also put forward Mary as the model for students:

All day long and everywhere
 Mary is our model fair:
 Mirror bright of all that's good
 Perfect type of womanhood.³⁹

This idealisation of Mary, quite apart from being a Catholic 'God-given code',⁴⁰ was linked by the students to patriotic nationalism and the ideal of a specifically Irish Catholic womanhood in the annuals. Mary is the 'Queen of Ireland' and any Irishwoman who was 'ashamed to be a true child of Mary is a sham Irishwoman. How can she claim to be of the blood when she lacks one of the most marked characteristics of the race?'⁴¹ Again and again in the annuals the national ideal is linked with the spiritual and the threat that the outside world poses for both nation and religion is amplified:

The day we rejected Him [Christ] we should cease to be Irish. We, Irish, therefore cannot neglect Christian conventions. We must openly profess our adherence to them and be governed by a social code completely different to that which hold across the water...Catholic Ireland ought to take its hearings, not from London, or Paris, or New York, but from Rome.⁴²

The Crusade aimed to put this into practice, to develop in Irish girls 'that noble independence of character which will free them from the tendency to follow a foreign lead rather than to establish a code of etiquette for Ireland, based on the religious belief of its people and the traditional traits of the nation'.⁴³ Preserving the nation and preserving 'the beautiful ornament of modesty for which the women of our race have been ever proverbial' was one and the same.⁴⁴

This image of Mary herself therefore offers a dual persona to students and teachers of the era. On the one hand as Eleanor Heartney points out Mary represents virginity, passivity and submissiveness while at the same time as intercessor and Queen of Heaven she offers a model of female strength and power.⁴⁵ This duality corresponded with the role of female primary teachers in Ireland during this period. They saw themselves as having a vocation which was second only to that of the religious and this ideal was displayed in a badge they wore in the form of a star.⁴⁶ They were cognisant of their status as teachers not only as members of the middle class on a par with 'doctor's

38 *Annual*, vol. 1, 1927, p. 41; vol. 2, 1928, p. 16.

39 *Annual*, vol. 1, 1927, n.p.

40 M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: the myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary*, New York, Vintage, 1983, p. 335.

41 *Annual*, vol. 1, 1927, p. 53.

42 *Annual*, vol. 4, 1930, p. 21.

43 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, p. 14.

44 *Annual*, vol. 3, 1929, p. 11.

45 E. Heartney, 'Thinking through the body: women artists and the Catholic imagination', *Hypatia*, vol. 18, no.4, Fall, 2003, pp. 3-22.

46 *Annual*, vol. 1, 1927, p. 31.

and banker's daughters' in society⁴⁷ but as leaders: 'teachers in Ireland today claim as their just right a certain social status; their training and education fit them to be leaders in the movements of the day'.⁴⁸ But they were also female and as such in post independence Ireland while not excluded from the franchise were not expected to be active participants in political or social activities outside the home. The inherent conflicts in these female teachers' perceptions of themselves are an issue to which I will now turn.

A question of agency

Thus far it could be argued that the college students and the teachers who wrote to them were receivers of the dominant discourses of the day, religious, national and gendered and that they replicated the representations of self in what Ines Dussel terms a 'regime of appearances' and collective practices that had political, social, economic and cultural overtones.⁴⁹ This reading however robs these women who clearly regarded themselves as educated and aware of a reasoned voice, of an opinion, of a sense of direction that was mediated at the very least by themselves. I draw here on work that has been done by Nan Enstad in relation to the striking shirtwaisters⁵⁰ in New York in 1909 for a model on which to base the concept of the agency of these women albeit within a limited discourse and world.⁵¹

Enstad uses Louis Althusser's notion of *interpellation* as a basis on which to posit the concept of agency. He argues that individuals become subjects with a particular culture or ideological system once they are addressed or 'hailed' in a particular way and once the subject recognises herself in that 'hail' she becomes interpellated. The interpellated subject becomes in turn recognisable to others within the same ideological system or culture.⁵² This concept fits with the idea of the students and teachers as subjects. Butler however revised Althusser's notion of interpellation arguing that it is when interpellation occurs that a subject gains an ability to act in an intelligible way within a particular culture even though the interpellation in itself might be limited and oppressive. Butler's concept of gender performativity relies on sustained social performances which take place in the context of the regulatory conventions and norms dominant in society and within a specific social and historical context.⁵³ It is in the repetition of these norms however that Butler locates agency and the possible subversion or contestation of these norms. Possibilities for 'agency' and therefore change or transformation lie in the act of repetition and identification.

Butler sees this ritual of repetition as a chain of signification and does not argue that agency requires an assertion of mind or will outside ideology but sees it as an effect of power within culture.⁵⁴ In fact in rejecting a modernist version of self in which a person is self-determining and autonomous Butler instead argues that what the person "is"... is always relative to the constructed relations in

47 Middle class women did not necessarily form the body of entrants into the college. While the social backgrounds of the women in the Teaching Practice reports are unclear, the majority of them in the period studied were aged twenty and had some experience either as pupil-teachers or as monitresses in the schools. There were some older women aged twenty five and twenty nine who had been Junior Assistant Mistresses before commencing their course of training. The fact that they were mature females with experience suggests that these women belonged for the most part to the lower middle class, as well as the daughters of small and middling farmers in rural areas.

48 *Annual*, vol. 1, 1927, p. 36.

49 Dussel, 'When appearances are not deceptive', p. 180.

50 Female garment workers who made tailored shirts or blouses for women.

51 Enstad, 'Fashioning political identities', pp. 762-3.

52 Enstad, 'Fashioning political identities', pp. 762-3.

53 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 33. See also F. Webster, 'The politics of sex and gender: Benhabib and Butler debate subjectivity', *Hypatia*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2000, pp. 1-22.

54 Enstad, 'Fashioning political identities', pp. 762-3.

which it is determined'.⁵⁵ The self is therefore a 'site' of often competing power discourses and is inherently unstable. Even defining or naming a category or subject does not guarantee stability as the meaning and content of categories and subjectivities is constantly shifting and changing.⁵⁶ The limitations of language ensure that subjects exceed the boundaries of their definition and therefore interpellation must be repeated and may vary. Thus the failure of each interpellation results in a new and possibly different interpellation by which subjects continue to be shaped and affected. She suggests therefore that 'agency is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed'.⁵⁷

Using this model Enstad argues that the 'ladyhood' of the shirtwaisters emerged as a result not just because of the failures of repeated interpellations but also because of the conflicts between interpellations. The women gained agency by 'creatively building upon the contradictions between interpellations and fashioned a subjectivity out of the very language and tropes which had been marshaled to control them'.⁵⁸ This subjectivity was therefore multiple not unified and agency is therefore defined as 'the contingent creative force that arises from the history of the subject'.⁵⁹ This agency, as Enstad argues, may be limited but it is powerful.

These contradictions of interpellation were present both within the college and for teachers outside. Female students and teachers were addressed by the church as submissive, pure models of Mary and as influential moulders of young minds and lives. They were addressed by politicians as the primary transmitters of culture and patriotism required for citizenship but as second-class citizens in matters of employment and pay. As teachers they were authoritative in their communities but as women they were not expected to take on public roles. They were working women in a culture that valued motherhood and the home above all other varieties of womanhood. And although dealing with small children they took on many of the characteristics of motherhood, upon marriage they were expected to retire from the profession.⁶⁰ These conflicts of interpellation were augmented by the address of the profession and the setting of the college itself. The profession of teaching was becoming increasingly feminised at primary level and the primary schools were a feminised world. So too was the training college. Run by nuns with a hierarchical powerful structure which gave them practical power and authority not just over the students but over their own lives the students were inducted into a prevailing female space that was nonetheless situated in a patriarchal society. The Crusade the students inaugurated was therefore what Enstad terms 'an arena of agency'.⁶¹ It allowed the students initially to collectively create and fashion the ideal of the female teacher and as the practices associated with the MDDC became established, teachers working in the schools interpellated other women into the Crusade. This was not just a question of recruitment although this was an intrinsic part of the Crusader's mission:

The Crusade is not a conscripted army. All who join do so willingly, and wear the badge as a sign that they have pledged themselves to militate against immodesty. This is the only active measure that they are *bound* to take beyond

55 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 10.

56 See also J. Beste, 'The limits of post structuralism for feminist theology', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2006, pp. 5-19.

57 J. Butler, 'For a careful reading'; S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornen and N. Fraser (eds) *Feminist Contentions: a philosophical exchange*, New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 135. This quote is cited in Beste, 'The limits of post structuralism', pp. 9-10.

58 Enstad, 'Fashioning political identities', pp. 762-3.

59 Enstad, 'Fashioning political identities', p. 764.

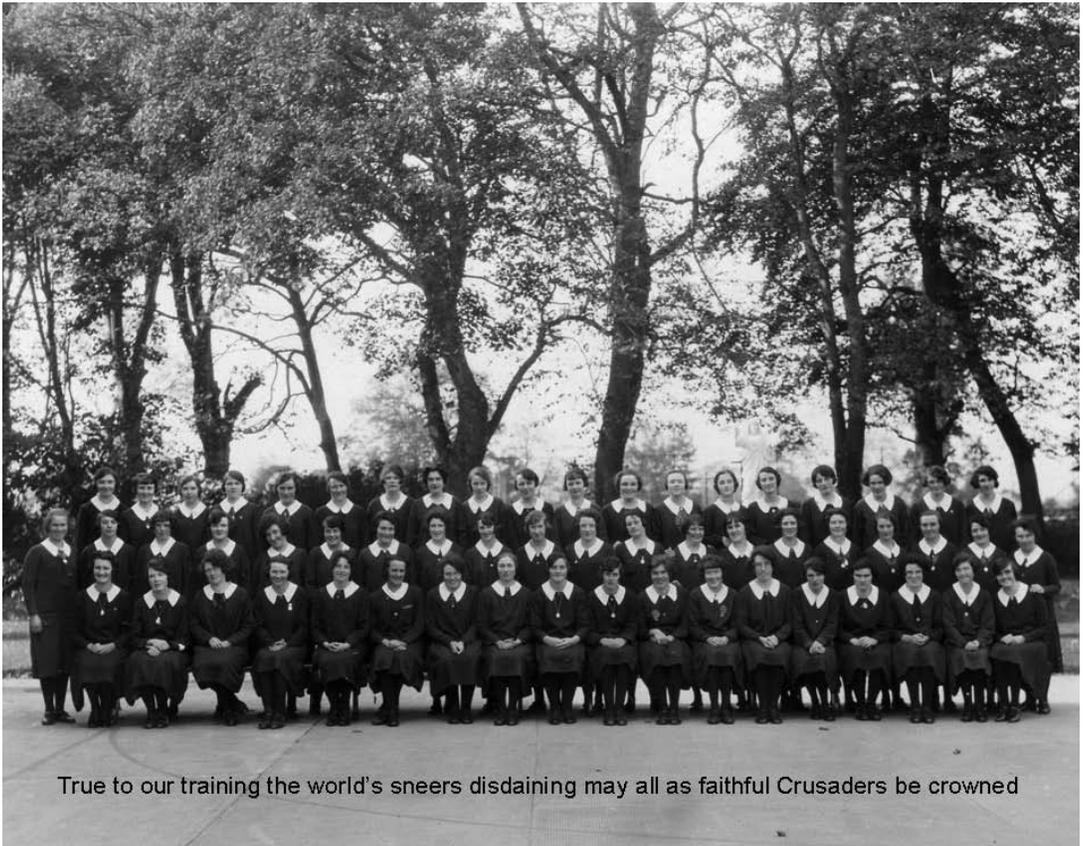
60 This expectation was enshrined in legislation in 1932 and was not completely repealed until 1972.

61 Enstad, 'Fashioning political identities', p. 764.

observing the rules faithfully; but each zealous Crusader endeavours to bring in at least three members, her own example being her chief persuasive force.⁶²

More significantly crusaders were expected to exclude women by 'showing disapproval in no uncertain way' should they breach the Crusade's codes of modesty even if these women were not members of the MDDC. If a Crusader was found to be persistently breaking the rules of the Crusade she should be expelled. Even those who neglected to wear the badge of the Crusade could not be 'regarded as members of Mary's militia' and thus would be shunned as 'sham Irishwomen' by the Crusaders.⁶³ This surveillance and policing was instigated and undertaken by the women themselves and the markers of inclusion and exclusion were clearly defined by them. Even the College Song printed for the first time in the 1929 *Annual* conveys the strength and the stridency of these Crusaders and gives an indication of their collective group mentality:

Mary Immaculate, pray no defaulter
 May in our ranks at the roll-call be found:
 True to our training,
 The world's sneers disdain,
 May as all faithful Crusaders be crowned.⁶⁴



62 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, p. 14.

63 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, pp. 15; 17.

64 *Annual*, vol. 3, 1929, n.p.

Resistance to the dominant hegemonic power is not necessarily the outcome of this interpellation therefore but the re-appropriation of power by the subjects. To have agency this re-appropriation of power did not have to be a conscious act. As Butler contends:

Agency is the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power, one that could not have been derived logically or historically, that operates the relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible to which it nevertheless belongs.⁶⁵

I would argue therefore that the interpellation of these women as compliant subjects receiving and transmitting the mores of the patriarchal church becomes in fact an image of confident crusaders at the vanguard of the church. Claiming ownership over the language of modesty and morality these women reshaped their subordination not by challenging their situatedness but by performing it.

There was one other dimension to the agency of these women. As teachers it was in their power to induct and initiate girls into the Crusade and this they did by establishing children's branches of the crusade under the name of the Children's Guild for the Promotion of Modesty in girls' schools with the principal as President and her assistants as promoters. Girls aged between six and twelve were known as Flowers and girls between twelve and fourteen as Aspirants. A wall chart was kept with the names of the girls in the school 'to be regarded as the school's roll of honour' and should any girl be in persistent breach of the rules her name would be struck off this chart. The aim of these children was to 'strive always to be Mary-like and ladylike and to maintain the proverbial delicacy of the daughters of Erin'.⁶⁶ Thus the addresses of church, nation and society were transmitted to girl pupils in the primary schools as their teachers interpellated them into Irish, Catholic womanhood.

Conclusion

What these women possessed therefore is what Dietlind Huchtke terms 'a competency to act'.⁶⁷ They positioned themselves in a space where they had the ability to make decisions, to speak and to exert influence. Although situated within a system of power the students who inaugurated the MDDC and the teachers who joined the Crusade had a very lucid sense of themselves as leaders. They constructed a subjectivity for themselves that incorporated how they were seen by others but which was also determined by their own interpretation and performance of the contradictions contained within these views. The agency of these women, while limited in discourse and confined within a particular sphere, was nonetheless considerable and it was an agency that was extended and built upon as the Crusade became more established.⁶⁸ It is probably no accident that the MDDC focused primarily on dress during this period. Dress, as Carole Turbin points out, is 'inherently and simultaneously both public and private because an individual's outwardly presented signs of internal and private meaning are significant only when they are also social, that is comprehensible on some level to observers'.⁶⁹ This was the very essence of the profession of these women – at once public and private, passive and active, subjects and agents.

65 Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 15.

66 *Annual*, vol. 2, 1928, p. 18.

67 D. Huchtke, 'Deconstruction of gender and women's agency: a proposal for incorporating concepts of feminist theory into historical research, exemplified through changes in Berlin's Poor Relief Policy, 1770-1850', *Feminist Theory*, vol. 2, 2001, pp. 328-348

68 By 1929 12,000 women were enrolled in the MDDC. See *Annual*, vol. 3, 1929, p. 11

69 C. Turbin, 'Refashioning the concept of public/private: Lessons from dress studies', *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 15, no.1, Spring 2003, pp. 43-51

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