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From Women's Rights to Gender Mainstreaming: an Examination of International Gender Norms in the Republic of Ireland[1]

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Introduction

This paper argues that the introduction of 'gender mainstreaming' in the Republic of Ireland represents a concrete step in the implementation of international gender equality norms[2] through national and supranational institutions. Political and institutional support for gender mainstreaming is unprecedented for any equality policy. The Platform for Action, commonly identified as the international agreement launching gender mainstreaming, was produced at the Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, in 1995. It has since been adopted by the European Commission, and by all member states of the European Union (Verloo, 2001: 5). Why governments decided to promote and develop strategies such as gender mainstreaming and the implications of that decision for Irish gender policy are the main questions posed by this paper. 'There's no explanation for why its proliferated the way it has. There's a lot of theories but there's nothing convincing' (AI, 2002).[3] It is argued in this paper that a number of factors, such as pressure from international organisations (IOs), internal political demands and the political cultural status of equality objectives, combine to operationalise international gender norms (Beveridge, Nott and Stephen, 2000: 20). However, there are also arguments that governments only adopt gender mainstreaming as part of an image making exercise, with little or no resources assigned for the implementation of the policy. Is this the case in the Republic of Ireland? Regardless, accession to international commitments changes the face of Irish gender equality policy by involving the nation in an international gender equality movement that transcends national boundaries of gender equality as a policy goal. The phenomenon is global, as gender mainstreaming is being implemented across and within nations, organisations and international institutions (Woodward, 1999; Mazey, 2001; True, 2001).

This paper presents some of the findings of doctoral research questioning the introduction and implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Republic of Ireland. Themes drawn from a set of interviews with gender mainstreaming policy-makers in 1999-2000, and a review of the Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993), were

[2] Ideas commonly referred to as 'gender mainstreaming' have been identified as 'gender norms' in the literature (True & Mintrom, 2001). The idea of norms, defined shared understandings and ultimately knowledge of the social world is integral to the social constructivist approach underpinning the feminist perspective taken throughout the thesis from which this paper is drawn.

[3] In order to ensure anonymity, respondent identities have been concealed. Interviews dated 2002 were part of my doctoral project, while those which took place at other times were part of the government research project (See footnote 11).

developed into precise questions regarding the circumstances surrounding the introduction and implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Republic of Ireland. These questions were put to a second sample of policy-makers in 2002. Firstly, to what extent has the agenda for gender equality become more internationally influenced since accession to the Beijing commitments and the introduction of gender mainstreaming? Secondly, how does the status of the National Plan for Women (2002) as a political priority compare with that of the Report of the Second Commission (1993)? Thirdly, to what extent has confusion over the meaning of gender mainstreaming impeded the implementation process?

The paper begins with a brief introduction to gender mainstreaming as an international policy initiative and concludes that its introduction in the Republic of Ireland in 1996 was part of a global movement towards 'mainstreaming,' which is observable in changes in the discourse amongst global feminist movements, international organisations and national political institutions. A brief profile comparison of the Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) and the National Plan for Women (2002) is then provided in order to establish context and temporal parameters for the research questions posed. The research design for the thesis, methodology employed and a the generation of research hypotheses are presented in order to validate the selection of findings presented in this paper. In terms of analysis I have included a discussion of my contention that the introduction of gender mainstreaming heralds the internationalisation of gender equality policy in the Republic of Ireland in terms of findings from the data. This is followed with an in-depth analysis of policy-makers struggle to access the meaning and method behind the vague articulation of gender mainstreaming presented by IOs and national and supranational institutions. The implications of the policy for groups implicated in the process - national government and women's movements - are discussed in some detail in the conclusion. The paper concludes that there is evidence from the data that the introduction of gender mainstreaming in the Republic of Ireland is the result of an international initiative with collaboration from domestic policy-makers.

A brief introduction to gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is identified as a policy initiative arising from the World Conferences on Women beginning in Mexico City in 1975 and culminating in the Fourth World Conference in Beijing, 1995. The *Platform for Action* agreed at Beijing, to which the Irish government is one of 189 signatories (Platform for Action, 1996:1), articulates gender mainstreaming in the following terms:

> ...governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively (United Nations, 1996: 11).

In terms of implementation, gender mainstreaming involves the re-organisation of policy processes as it moves gender equality concerns into everyday policies and into the activities of the actors ordinarily involved in policy-making.[4] Gender mainstreaming bureaucracies, established in over one hundred countries, now represent a significant challenge to traditional policy-making worldwide (True & Mintrom, 2001: 27).[5] Gender mainstreaming is an international policy that originated and was developed within the international women's movement, mainly through feminists working in the area of women in development.[6] The international women's movement arose as part of the 'women's agenda' of the United Nations (Ward, 1999: 216). Gender mainstreaming is a culmination of this process in policy-making terms. It was through its beginnings in development projects that the policy became clearly results focused and specifically designed to redress the inequalities that result from the social construction of gender (Jahan, 1995: 19). An investigation into the theoretical and conceptual origins of the mainstreaming process, undertaken in the thesis proper[7], reveals it as a clearly feminist agenda. This is evident in that mainstreaming seeks not just to emancipate women, but rather to change the existing social structure, which is gendered, to one which does not disadvantage anyone, male or female (True, 2001: 1). As such, the thesis

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[4] http://www.irlgov.ie/justice/Equality/Gender/NDP/Gender1.htm.

[5] The extent of the proliferation of 'gender mainstreaming' is documented in True, J. and Mintrom, M. (2001).

[6] An excellent account of the development of the concepts behind the mainstreaming agenda by those working on 'Women in Development' is offered by Jahan, Roanaq (1995) *The Elusive Agenda: mainstreaming women in development* New York: Zed.

[7] Carney, G. (forthcoming) 'Not Exactly Women's Lib. The Evolution of Gender Mainstreaming policy in the Republic of Ireland' (working title) *Unpublished PhD thesis.* Trinity College, Dublin.

places feminism(s) at the center of the global movement of 'mainstreaming' by identifying feminists as a transnational 'epistemic community' (Haas, 1992: 1) whose efforts culminated in the global adoption of gender equality policy-making machineries.[8] This paper presents a profile review of the Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) and the National Plan for Women (2002), thereby beginning to support some of the contentions of the thesis.

Changing the Status of Gender: Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) v. National Plan for Women (2002)

The review of the Second Commission on the Status of Women, conducted in 1999 for the Galligan et.al. (2000) report, demonstrated that the Second Commission had been extremely useful, but by 1999 was more or less obsolete as a source of inspiration for the development of gender equality policy. The Report does, however, clearly document Irish gender equality policy prior to the advent of gender mainstreaming. As such, its' analysis provides a rich complement to the interview data, especially when combined with a similar review of its 21st century replacement, the National Plan for Women (2002). These documents were analysed with a number of key questions in mind. Firstly, the main aim of this comparison was to determine how official policy surrounding gender, outlined in these two documents had changed since the introduction of gender mainstreaming in 1996. Does the National Plan for Women reflect the UN agenda launched at Beijing in 1995 more clearly than the Second Commission? What is the agenda reflected in the Second Commission and what does it say about the status of gender equality in Irish public policy prior to 1996? This exercise represents the first systematic comparison of the Second Commission on the Status of Women, widely acknowledged as the benchmark of gender equality at its publication in 1993 and the National Plan for Women 2002. It is therefore of interest to policy-makers working on gender equality in its own right. In terms of the thesis, the analysis of these two documents acts as a means of setting clear parameters for the analysis of gender mainstreaming as they provide concrete delimiters of national and supra-national policy agendas. Thus, they operate to contextualise the comments made by policy-makers at interview. For the purposes of this paper, it was not possible to include a comprehensive review, but rather a snapshot of findings and observations are offered.

Firstly, the fundamental difference between the Second Commission Report and the National Plan are evidenced in their divergent status as much as the content of the reports. The fact that the National Plan

[8] These research themes are explored in more detail in the thesis proper.

is presented as coherent and concise government policy as opposed to an all-encompassing ramble through the ills and injustices of Irish women's lives suggests that gender equality has become a legitimate area of concern for current governments. This shift in status can at least in part be attributed to the status of the national plan as a UN sponsored policy exercise, reflected in the official title for the plan *Report to the United Nations on the National Plan for Women 2002 on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2002).*To begin, I will offer some insights into the First (1972) and Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993)

Commission on the Status of Women (1993)

There have been two Commissions on the Status of Women since the foundation of the State. The political impetus came from women's organisations and feminist activists, who successfully lobbied government on both occasions. The First Commission was appointed by the Minister for Finance in 1971.[9] Ministerial appointed non-governmental organisations, political parties and trade union members were requested to make recommendations to improve the status of women, particularly those in a situation of disadvantage. The recommendations of the Commission Report reflected the subordinate and dependent social and economic position of Irish women at the time. The Commission report 'led to the introduction of a range of welfare measures to assist 'deserted wives,' prisoner's wives and elderly 'spinsters'' (Donnelly, Mulally and Smith, 2000: 41). Despite the obvious failure of the Commission to conceptualise gender relations beyond stereotypical sex roles, the First Commission represented a landmark beginning for second-wave feminists in the Republic. 'I suppose the key events would have been the establishment of the First Commission and joining the EU' (AI, 2002).[10]

The Second Commission, established in 1990 was drawn together by the Taoiseach with terms of reference to report on the implementation of recommendations of the First Commission and to recommend legislative and administrative procedures through which Irish women could participate equally at all levels in society. Special attention was to be given to women working in the home (Donnelly, Mulally and Smith, 2000: 41). The Commission reported with 210 recommendations in 12 chapters relating to the following issue areas: constitutional and legal issues; women in the home; women and work; women and childcare; women in situations of disadvantage; rural women; participation, politics and policies; culture and sport; education; training and labour market initiatives; health; review of recommendations and suggestions in 1972 Report of the First Commission

[9] First Commission on the Status of Women. (1972), *Report to the Minister for Finance,* Dublin: Government Stationary Office.

[10] AI (Author Interview).

on the Status of Women (Second Commission, 1993: 7). Many of the recommendations were potentially transformative of existing gender relations, particularly those relating to constitutional and legal issues, as reflected in the response of one policy-maker when asked to assess the recommendations of the Second Commission:

> Some of them were very important, for example the recommendations of constitutional reform. Some of course have been legislated for, these were very important (AI, 2000).

However, most of the recommendations did not question the prevailing liberal rights framework for equality, preferring to recommend methods for adding women to established structures than proposing re-structuring of Irish political and social life. While a gender equality monitoring committee with a remit to report on progress regarding implementation on an annual basis was established, the overall outcome of the Second Commission was a list of often incoherent or mutually exclusive priorities with no systematic strategy of implementation. 'The recommendations of the Second Commission were very aspirational and unfocussed' (AI, 2000). The Gender Equality Monitoring Committee produced only three reports over a ten-year period. The quality of these reports was questioned on two grounds. Firstly, the reports were criticised for failing to provide a substantive critical analysis of progress on recommendations. Secondly, effective targets and timetables for action were never clearly established (Donnelly, Mulally and Smith, 2000: 41). However, the Second Commission did make a small number of very significant recommendations, not least the recommendation that each Memorandum for Government, the official channel for setting out general strategies and proposals on a specific policy issue, should be examined for the impact it may have on women (Donnelly, Mulally and Smith, 2000: 45).

While there are some doubts as to the seriousness with which policy proposals are examined for gender at cabinet level (AI, 2002), the introduction of this gender-proofing practice may have provided some level of openness to the widespread proofing requirements necessitated by a commitment to 'mainstream gender.' The final progress report on the Second Commission was published in 1999. By this time the Gender Equality Monitoring Committee, under the leadership of equality policy-makers at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform had decided that indicators of progress on gender equality were necessary in order to make the transition from a woman-centred equal rights to a gender mainstreaming agenda. The terms of reference of this research was to establish the status of the 210 recommendations of the Second Commission Report and to develop performance indicators for gender equality that could

be used to develop a national plan for women and a strategy to mainstream gender. This report was published the following year.[11] This report signalled a new era in Irish gender equality policy-making, rendering the Second Commission on the Status of Women obsolete in a new era of 'gender mainstreaming.' This paper questions how this new agenda reflected in the National Plan for Women (2002)?

National Plan for Women 2002

The agenda for gender equality established by the Platform for Action in 1995 identified a number of important roles for national women's movements in bringing about gender equality. The Beijing Declaration also established a number of concrete mechanisms by which gender equality could be achieved. One of the key mechanisms for establishing gender equality at the national level was through the establishment of a national plan for women. In the Irish case, both the project to develop performance indicators for gender equality, published by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (1999) and the National Plan for Women (2002) were funded, organised and published because the Irish government felt compelled to report on progress regarding the Platform for Action at the Beijing +5 summit in New York, May 2000.

> The Report to the UN on the National Plan for Women 2002 is Ireland's response to the invitation to governments made in the Political Declaration by the United Nations General Assembly in New York in 2000 to develop and implement national action plans to work towards the advancement of women in all areas of society (National Plan for Women, 2002: 5).

The experience of working on the indicators report and a review of the National Plan (2002) suggest that gender equality policy in the Republic of Ireland has developed from a liberal feminist base to a complex, integrated approach to equality, in line with global standards. This is reflected in the fact that the chapters of the National Plan for Women (2002) are closely based on the twelve critical areas of concern outlined in the Platform for Action at Beijing. Poverty, education and training, health care, violence against women, conflict, economic inequalities, decision-making, mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights, media portrayal of women, environmental concerns, the rights of girl children.

Preparation of the National Plan for Women (2002) was also conducted in line with UN requirements to consult women on a national

[11] I was a member of the research team that produced this report, entitled, *Development of Performance Indicators for Gender Equality*, Y. Galligan, M.Ward, A. O'Donovan., G. Carney and E. Schon, E. (2000) Dublin: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

basis. The consultation was extensive and submissions were so numerous that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform felt compelled to publish two reports. The official report, entitled, *Report to the United Nations on the National Plan for Women 2002 on the Implementation of the Platform for Action (2002)* and also a document entitled, *Aspirations for Women collected in the course of the consultation process on the National Plan for Women (2002).* This second report resembles the Second Commission Report (1993) as it contains a large number of suggestions, often contradictory, but representative of the 335 women's groups and individuals who felt compelled to contribute to their National Plan. It is explicitly recognised that this document is not government policy:

> Because this document (Report to the United Nations on the National Plan for Women 2002 on the Implementation of the Platform for Action) was so much part of governmental policy we had to make a distinction between it as a policy and the aspirations gathered during the consultation process. The Aspirations document is not government policy so it does not have the same status (AI, 2002).

Governmental response to the Report of Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) stated:

> ..the government will be prepared speedily to consider and, where appropriately and practicable, to implement the further recommendations they will make in due course.[12]

This is comparable with the loose commitment to consider the Aspirations document stated in the National Plan proper. The Aspirations document is said to:

> ..give a valuable and unique insight into the views and aspirations of the women of Ireland at the beginning of the new millennium. This will serve to guide and influence government policy (National Plan, 2002: 6).

Recognition of the superior status of the official report over the aspirations document suggests that some gender issues are a current concern of Irish legislators, certainly more so than it was in 1993. That said, there is little doubt that the Second Commission (1993) provided a clear picture of the disadvantaged status of women in Irish society in 1993. While a

[12] Response by the Taoiseach Mr. Charles J. Haughey, TD, to the first statement of the Commission on the Status of Women, 25 April, 1991.

weakness may have been that it lacked any clear plan of action to change this situation, it at least demonstrated the necessity of equality policy tools, leading to the welcome acceptance of international policies such as gender mainstreaming in 1996. Secondly, it is evident from the interview data and documentary research that the National Plan for Women (2002) is clearly an international requirement closely adhered to by national officials, who will use the plan to develop a National Women's Strategy (2003-2010) as outlined in UN commitments (AI, 2002). In conclusion, while the Commission on the Status of Women (1993) was a significant symbol of feminism and women as a legitimate voice in Irish political life, it was severely limited as a programme for reform of Irish gender relations. Government policy regarding the Second Commission was limited to monitor and evaluate progress in each area. There was never any comprehensive, strategic commitment. While the Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) may have contained much of the same feminist ideals as the National Plan for Women (2002), the fundamental difference is that there was no policy commitment, no government spending allocated towards the implementation of the Second Commission. Has increased governmental commitment to gender issues led to any observable changes in the implementation of everyday policy? These issues are explored in the remainder of the paper.

Research design and methodology

Decisions about methodology for the thesis were based on previous research completed as a member of a team charged with developing quantitative indicators of gender equality for the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in the Republic of Ireland in 1999-2000.[13] This research effectively served as a pilot study, and as such it is explicitly included in the final research design for the thesis. A number of important observations were made from the 1999-2000 research. Firstly, the research revealed that gender mainstreaming offered a valuable opportunity for Irish feminism in theory and practice. However, it also demonstrated that its vague articulation meant gender mainstreaming would most likely be appropriated by the liberal values of Irish political culture. Most importantly, it revealed that a quantitative methodology would fail to reveal the long-term effects of equality legislation and equal rights. Given the absence of both data and knowledge about gender in the Irish policy-making system (Barry, 2000: 5), it could prove difficult to explain the persistence of substantive gender inequality despite various positive action measures, with the use of surveys, questionnaires or other quantitative methods. The main task when

[13] See Galligan et al. 2000.

developing performance indicators for gender equality in the government sponsored 1999-2000 report was to gather empirical evidence quantifying the status of Irish women. This is understandable given that the empiricist values of objectivity and numerical abstraction sit well with the liberal conception of equality popular in Irish political culture (Gallagher,1999: 94). Our project set out to establish an objective measure for the advancement of women in the Republic of Ireland. This proved difficult since public statistics had never been gathered with the consideration of gender. This was confirmed by a number of policy-makers interviewed in 2002.

> When the Equal Pay legislation was brought in in the 1970s the IDA started gathering statistics about women and men. But then they were told (by the govt) that that was not in the spirit of the new legislation and that they should stop gathering statistics on gender (AI, 2002).

The result of this action was that statistics gathered had unconsciously treated male activities as the norm. Many of the activities performed by women were never counted. This gave the appearance of men being the sole contributors to economic wealth and political life in Irish society.

Qualitative Measures

The desire to reveal more than the number of Irish women participating in public life had significant methodological implications for my research. How can the qualitative impact of gender mainstreaming on mainstream bureaucracy be gauged? I needed to devise some qualitative method of ascertaining why gender mainstreaming was introduced in the Republic of Ireland and what kind of changes it precipitated for Irish gender equality policy. Given that one of the few areas of agreement surrounding gender mainstreaming was that it was a meaningless term[14], I was led to thinking about the language of gender mainstreaming and how it reflects norm changes regarding gender equality. What was communicated to policy-makers via the medium of gender mainstreaming policy-making documents, training, advisors and femocrats? My research became concerned with attitudes towards gender roles within and beyond the bureaucracy. How are ideas and attitudes about gender formed? I drew on the work of a wide range of feminist perspectives (hooks, 2000; Elshtain, 1997; Elgstrom, 2001; Goetz, 1996; True, 2001; Wodak, 1997) to establish a theoretical basis for 'gender mainstreaming.' By thinking about the construction of feminist knowledge(s), I am able to draw on feminist expertise in IR,

[14] A discussion of the contested meaning of gender mainstreaming became one of the core contributions of the thesis.

philosophy, linguistics, and policy studies. I was no longer interested in 'how many women?' I am now interested in normative shifts regarding gender policy and how language change could be identified as a qualitative indicator of social change (Spender, 1980). The methodology for my study took a firm qualitative rather than quantitative grounding in line with other critical feminist work (Oakley, 2000). I set out to establish why gender mainstreaming had been introduced in the Republic of Ireland, and whether it had led to a normative shift in Irish gender equality policy. I employed feminist knowledge, theories, practices and perspectives to build knowledge in the form of a theory of gender mainstreaming. In practice, I interviewed as many Irish policy-makers (25 in 2002) interested in or working on gender and specifically gender mainstreaming in the Republic of Ireland.

The Interview Process

Gender mainstreaming is implemented as one small element of a seven-year project, financed in part by European Structural Funds, called the National Development Plan. Gender mainstreaming is currently being implemented across the whole plan (http://www.ndpgenderequality.ie). Requests for interview were sent to policy-makers involved in the implementation of gender mainstreaming according to criteria specified below. Of the 53 requests for interview, 23 policy-makers never responded, despite follow up telephone calls. However, 4 of the non-respondents did recommend more junior members of staff who then contacted me directly. One respondent was on long-term sick leave and another retired during the six-month period, leaving a total of 25 successful interviews being conducted. Respondents were chosen on four distinct bases: First, membership on the Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Co-ordinating Committee, which co-ordinates equality policy and legislation. Second, direct involvement with gender mainstreaming through his/her position in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the lead department on gender mainstreaming. Third, senior membership on the National Women's Council of Ireland, representing institutionalised feminism in Ireland. Finally, a number of interviews were conducted because primary respondents recommended that certain individuals would be valuable contributors to the project.

Respondents included EU bureaucrats and policy-makers who previously or presently worked on gender equality. Interviews were semi-structured but conducted openly in order to give respondents an opportunity to express their views.

The interviews were conducted over the six-month period from July to December 2002, apart from an initial pilot interview conducted in February of that year. Most interviews lasted about one to one and a half hours. Anonymity of the respondents was assured, as most of the

respondents were policy-makers who did not want to be identified. The interviews are coded according to a random numerical order in order to avoid recognition of respondents. Much time was spent deliberating on whether to tape record the interviews or not. It was decided that I would try to tape the first interview. This proved to be a cumbersome and unhelpful process for a number of reasons. Firstly, the tape-recording impeded the flow of the interview, acting as a distraction to both interviewer and interviewee. Secondly, and most importantly, the respondent offered a number of pieces of important information, but only when the tape recorder was turned off. This led to the conclusion that policy-makers would be more likely to speak freely in an interview situation if they were not recorded. In any case, most respondents made non-use of recording equipment a condition of interview. As a result, the only course of action left open to me was to take substantial notes during the interviews and write up the interviews immediately afterwards. It is arguable that the quality of the data gathered was improved rather than impaired by this decision.

These interviews provided up to date ideas, insights, and information on Irish policy-making and gender mainstreaming. The level of expertise, knowledge and openness to feminist ideas I encountered in the interview process confirmed my feeling that it is gendered concepts and how they are legitimated that produces and reproduces female subjugation. A review of Irish political history and the ideas on which Irish political culture are founded helped me to identify liberalism rather than feminism as an inevitable cheat in terms of Irish gender equality. Moreover, by using a feminist methodology, I ensured that my research project would not be appropriated as more evidence of the 'failure' of feminism to provide workable equality policies. Rather, the critical perspective I adopted allowed me to expose Irish political culture and bureaucracy as patriarchal institutions struggling to modernize, but working on a liberal ideological basis regarding equality and gender.

Hypotheses and method

In order to reveal as much as possible unbiased evidence from the data, the analysis of interviews was conducted using a systematic technique of qualitative research called *analytic induction*, a standard method of testing hypotheses in field research (Silverman, 1993: 160-165). The initial step when employing analytic induction as a method is to define a phenomenon and generate a hypothesis (Silverman, 1993: 161). For this thesis, the phenomenon is gender mainstreaming, which is defined as follows:

> Gender mainstreaming' means that government policies should not reproduce inequalities between women and men based on gender

roles, norms and identities that ascribe differential status to individuals on the basis of their biological sex.[15]

There are three different hypotheses being tested with the data gathered at interview.

H1: that the introduction of gender mainstreaming in the Republic of Ireland is the result of a combination of leadership by international actors and collaboration of national-level policy-makers who promote international norms at domestic level.
H2: that ambiguities surrounding the interpretation and definition of gender mainstreaming, manifest in the language of gender mainstreaming impede its successful implementation.
H3: that the gender equality agenda in the Republic of Ireland has evolved from a women's rights to a gender equality agenda.

The process of analytic induction involves closely reading the interview transcripts a number of times. Each time the transcript is read with a different hypothesis in mind. Sections of the transcripts, usually answers to particular questions were provisionally classified according to particular variables. The variables tested the influence of various actors namely, international organisations (UN), the EU, national feminist organisations, or national government. The transcript was then re-read, this time looking for all other pieces of evidence supporting or contradicting a particular hypothesis. Deviant responses were put into an 'other' category and re-assessed later.[16] The isolation of these deviant cases allowed for some basic conclusions to be drawn from the remaining evidence. It was by this process of induction that I was able to substantively claim that the majority of policy-makers thought the EU was the most important actor in initiating the adoption of gender mainstreaming. This process also allowed me to conclude that domestic policy-makers played a key role by using international pressure to gain more resources for gender policy. Perhaps most importantly, the deviant cases revealed that childcare was an area of policy that had been unofficially 'mainstreamed.'[17] The pre-occupation with

[15] The definition offered here is constructed on the feminist differentiation of 'sex' vs. 'gender'.
[16] A number of unsolicited findings emerged from the data that both supported and contradicted the central research hypotheses, primarily the significance of domestic actors (policy-makers) in augmenting the status of the equality and law reform branch of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Related to this finding was evidence that childcare had developed as a policy priority to the extent where it emits the characteristics of an issue that has been (inadvertently) 'mainstreamed'.
[17] 'The lower levels aren't concerned with policy – the Asst. Secretary is in leveraging change. NAPS (National Anti-Poverty Strategy) is a major project that was introduced into

the meaning of gender mainstreaming evidenced in the literature was also evident in the interview data as a deviant case. These findings are discussed in some detail in Chapter 6 of the thesis. Analytic induction, therefore, provided an extremely effective method for applying some of the 'necessary' and 'sufficient' criteria of quantitative research to qualitative work conducted within an interpretative framework. This paper, however, is limited to reporting the main findings of the thesis in a fairly general way.

To sum up, the small number of observations, the absence of relevant (i.e. gender disaggregated) data and the relative youth of gender mainstreaming (1996 – present) as a policy rendered a discursive, qualitative, rather than a quantitative, methodology more suitable for the thesis. Various attempts at designing systematic and objective measures of the piecemeal adoption of international (mainstreaming) norms concluded with the hypothesis that the introduction of gender mainstreaming in the Republic of Ireland is the result of a combination of leadership by international actors and collaboration of national-level policy-makers who promote international norms at domestic level. Or, to put it another way, the adoption of gender mainstreaming as official policy regarding gender equality in the Republic of Ireland in 1996 demonstrates the pro-active adoption of international norms by relevant domestic actors.

National Acceptance of an International Agenda (H1)

The traditional approach to gender equality problems in the Republic of Ireland has been to 'add women and stir' to the extent where 'women and' becomes part of the vocabulary of those working both in equality and within the mainstream policy structures. Everything from 'women and the environment' to 'women and politics' is listed as a sideline for those interested in the mainstream policy areas.[18] This kind of language signifies the peripheral location of Irish women within all areas of public life. Feminists operating at the international level have identified this and developed a sophisticated set of concepts and definitions, a language to help uncover and articulate how gender discrimination leads to inequality and how that effects not just individual women, but Irish society as a whole. Feminists theorising on the international have identified exclusions as revealing. '...feminists… together with non-feminist critical and postmodern IR scholars, claim that we can learn much about the world of politics by paying attention to the discipline's empirical, theoretical and political exclusions which make possible and give meaning to those agents,

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everything and came from the Department of Social Welfare…That was the initiative of a few people. S's work on childcare is another example. The class of people on top who will push the role out is important' (AI, 2002).

[18] See list of chapter titles of the Second Commission on the Status of Women report.

characteristics and outcomes that are ostensibly included in IR' (Elshtain,1996: 211). Gender mainstreaming is an attempt to institutionalise the values of the international women's movement in mainstream policy-making processes at state level. It aims to demonstrate where gender imbalances lie in the policy-making process, through the influence of International Organisations and external advocates such as the women's movement.

Evidence from the literature, together with observations from the data, point towards the improbability of gender mainstreaming having emerged as an initiative of the Irish bureaucracy. If gender mainstreaming is not the brainchild of Irish policy-makers, then it must come from some other source. Though voiced in entirely different contexts and with different provisos there was general agreement amongst policy-makers that the current gender equality agenda is not an exclusively Irish endeavour. Most policy-makers, when asked where the idea of gender mainstreaming originated, simply could not identify a single agency responsible for the introduction of the policy. The evidence provided by policy-makers would seem to suggest they perceive it as an international, or at least an EU initiative. Identification of the EU as provider of women's rights and promoter of gender mainstreaming is almost unanimous.

> The EU I suppose just seems to be the beginning of every single improvement in women's conditions in Ireland (AI, 2002).

EU as Leader on Equality Policy

A history of retarded modernisation and the stifling conservatism of clerical interference in political decision-making gave the EEC the appearance of emancipator of the Irish population, particularly of Irish women. An exploration of the evolution of Irish political culture from the values of conservatism and tradition to a more secular position, is reflected in legislation regarding marriage and reproduction, particularly since the Republic joined the European Economic Community (EEC) (now the European Union (EU)) in 1973.A brief review reveals that contraception was not legalised until the 1970s (Galligan, 1998: 142). In the 1980s abortion entered public debate at the behest of the far-right who wished to copper-fasten its prohibition in the Constitution (Coakley, 1999: 24). In 1992, following a case where a 14 year old rape victim was prohibited from travelling to the United Kingdom for an abortion, the Supreme Court ruled that abortion should be permitted only if the pregnancy threatened the life of the mother (Gallagher, 1999: 86). The constitutional ban on divorce was finally lifted in 1995 (Gallagher, 1999: 93). Birth rates have declined and female labour force participation rates have increased since the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1970s (Galligan, 1998: 27). However, the

average female industrial worker earns only 73% of male wages (www.ndpgenderequality.ie). Moreover, while the last two Irish Presidents have been female, there has never been a female Taoiseach. Also, women represent only 13% of members of parliament (TDs) and represent only 10% of senior civil servants (www.qub.ac.uk/cawp/).

The post-colonial heritage described by Kiberd (1997) has resulted in a number of cross-cutting histories and political perspectives influencing the current official gender agenda in the Republic of Ireland. The values of republicanism, liberalism, freedom and democracy have constantly battled with a conservative political culture, habitually subordinate to the canons of the Catholic Church and traditionally suspicious of change given 800 years of British occupation (Coakley,1999). The juxtaposition of conservative and liberal ideologies of 'Irishness' has made the establishment of a vocal and recognized Irish feminism particularly difficult. Moreover, the deeply conservative political culture that provided the baseline indicator for most Irish politics made even liberal feminist goals seem revolutionary in pre-1973 Ireland.[19] 'Given the basically conservative nature of Irish politics and society, and given the significance accorded to the adherence of moral values as interpreted by the Catholic Church, Irish feminism was unlikely to develop a radical political perspective' (Galligan, 1998: 44). For instance, the influence of the Catholic Church and more recently the development of a highly influential Catholic lobby has regressed policies regarding abortion in Ireland. In 1983 a backlash against the women's movement, legitimated by the morally and politically powerful Catholic hierarchy convinced a morally confused legislature to introduce the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. 'This so-called 'pro-life' amendment of Article 40.3 ensures that the right to life of an Irish mother is in no way superior to, or deserving of more respect than the right to life of the unborn' (Scannell, 2001:76). The presence of a vocal and powerful Catholic right lobby also delayed the legalisation of divorce until 1995 (Galligan, 1998: 103). The conservative nature of Irish political culture has served to make liberal values like individualism and freedom popular amongst those who wish to modernize Irish political culture. In comparison with an oppressively conservative Catholic culture liberalism holds out hopes of freedom, equality and self-determination (Kiberd, 1997). These values, a result of Ireland's post-colonial culture, permeate all aspects of Irish society, particularly Irish gender relations.

Given this political culture, International Organisations such as the EU and the UN are key to the promotion of gender equality in the Republic of Ireland. Spear-headed by the women's movement and given political

[19] Ireland joined the European Union, (then the European Economic Community) in 1973, widely agreed to have spelt a turning point for Irish modernity (Kiberd, 1997; Galligan, 1998).

credibility by the EEC, the development of equality policies in the 1970s laid the groundwork for the pursuit of a liberal conception of equality in political institutions in the 1980s (Galligan, 1998). 'The EU has given the equality thing a huge boost, like the marriage bar[20] had to go when we joined. I'd say it was a mixture of everything – structural funds, directives and regulations' (Author Interview, R18, August 2002). While policies in the Republic of Ireland initially tended to focus on 'women's issues' such as reproductive health, childcare or employment equality (Galligan, et.al., 2000), by the mid 1990s, gender mainstreaming became a priority across all policy areas from health and education to marine and natural resources. Gender mainstreaming is recognised as a long-term plan for which EU support is absolutely central.

> Gender mainstreaming is going to take a long time if there is continued commitment in the EU this will speed it up as opposed to just having a department for equality. The EU is pivotal as it keeps it at the centre but there is always something that pushes gender into the margins (AI, 2002).

This role of EU institutions, particularly the Commission as a policy catalyst is evidenced in reports from a senior equality official who states that continued pressure from the European Union maintains momentum behind gender mainstreaming policy.

> EU people were continually criticising us on not developing gender mainstreaming (AI, 2002).

The data, therefore, suggests a more significant role for the EU in the introduction of gender mainstreaming than my hypothesis that the EU is just one particular actor implicated in broader international initiatives to mainstreaming gender contends. This implies that the EU has had a disproportionately significant role in the promotion of gender equality initiatives since the 1970s, up to and including gender mainstreaming. Contrary evidence, however, emanates from policy-makers working on the National Plan for Women, who asserted that the UN played a more important role in the introduction of gender mainstreaming.

> I think they all played a part but if you asked me to pick one I would have to say the UN through the Beijing Platform for Action was the most important (AI, 2002).

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[20] The marriage bar, lifted in 1973, (Galligan, 1998) prohibited a woman's participation in the paid labour force on becoming a wife.

A closer look at the role of the EU revealed that that all of the information and training policy-makers received on gender mainstreaming had been EU funded, supported or organised. The opinion was voiced that the EU had a large amount of influence primarily because the Commission had begun to make gender equality measures a funding requirement since the last round of structural funds in 1996 (AI, 2002).

> The impetus is there from the EU because our funding is dependent on meeting gender requirements on the programme complements and the NDP. The Beijing conference is immaterial once it gets down to us. The fact that it is a funding requirement focuses us a lot (AI, 2002).

These disagreements are explained by observations made as the research progressed that policy-makers' frame of reference is unavoidably narrow in the sense that if they were working on an EU funded project they believed that the EU was the primary impetus behind that particular policy area. This was not surprising since supranational institutions like the EU take some trouble to publicise their efforts, developing a brand and logo, which is clearly observable in every publication and training day they sponsor. Likewise, if they were involved in writing reports for UN requirements they felt that the UN was the most influential body in the promotion of gender mainstreaming. This conclusion brought to the fore the significance of the policy-makers' perceptions of an issue in determining whether it would be classified as an international (UN or EU) or domestic initiative. The data suggests that domestic actors are important in terms of raising its profile, gaining funding and support at the national level.

> In the civil service there are loads of women who push it, who really fight for it to be adopted and more broadly taken on board (AI, 2002).

Though, as stated above, this could be due to pressure emanating from EU institutions. In any case, it is apparent from the data that policy-makers perceptions and the general culture of policy-making in Ireland has significant implications for the status of gender equality policy.

Policy-makers and the culture of policy-making

For the most part, policy-makers in senior positions (Principal Officer and above) seemed more aware of the influence of multiple agencies in producing new policy initiatives.

> Well for the period that I was working on gender equality policy the EU influence was huge. In Ireland I think the economy was just right as well. Things were beginning to boom and there was scope for change in the labour market (AI, 2003).

This experienced policy-maker offers several instances of international influence being exerted over Irish policy-makers. Increased communication between policy-makers at the international level accommodates the proliferation of new agendas for change. Often, arguments for the increased profile of a particular agenda used elsewhere, are borrowed by policy-makers at the national level.

> When Mary Wallace was appointed Minister I went with her to meet her German equivalent…who recommended that we try to get what we could while times were good. For instance, in Germany now because there are less jobs, efforts are being made to get women back into the home. I would say that the economy opens doors, it drives things. In the EU the labour supply is getting tighter and from where I stood in the EU it made a big difference to have structural fund money (AI, 2002).

Another policy-maker remarks on a number of instances where interaction and communication with fellow equality policy-makers abroad have influenced her perception of gender mainstreaming. For example:

> I was at a Council of Europe meeting and the Dutch were saying …this is forcing women into the labour force and no wonder women wouldn't be into it because if you are not well qualified or a high earner being moved into the labour force is no help at all (AI, 2002).

These policy-makers recognise an important interaction between domestic and international pressures such as labour supply issues with equality policies. They were also more aware that legislation and policy around particular issue areas such as equality were often out of sync and even contradictory. While Irish equality legislation is arguably ahead of the posse, the fundamental weakness of legislation still applies – it can never deliver as proactively as policy.

> We [the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations] issue press releases for every case and have a website. Apart from general information it also contains a database of all our decisions…It is getting a lot of hits – from the States and Europe because our legislation is way ahead of elsewhere (AI, 2002).

Later, the same policy-maker remarks:

> But the legislation is stuck at the level of equal opportunities…There is a new EU directive – on race, general discrimination and a third on gender. There is a changing definition of indirect discrimination then you can make a more objective assessment. We don't get many indirect cases (AI, 2002).

This respondent is making a number of links here, between national and international levels, explaining that EU thinking may be ahead in terms of conceptualisations of gender, but also that Irish equality legislation is ahead on the number of grounds covered. The national and international levels work in tandem, though not in sync, in favour of more systematic and legitimated means of promoting equality as an integral element of political culture. In the case of gender mainstreaming, the impetus emanates more clearly from an international direction. While Irish legislation may be ahead, there is nothing to suggest that gender mainstreaming could have developed as a solely national initiative. The culture of policy-making in the Republic of Ireland, as described by one policy-maker would seem at odds with the culture of constant self-critical re-evaluation required to implement gender mainstreaming (Mossink, 2001).

> …the culture of policy-making particularly in Ireland is all about getting money for your department and then using that money to buy things like buses and roads and houses with no analysis of who's going to use the stuff or how the money is going to be spent…its very like bread-winning and homemaker stuff they policy-makers get all this dosh and they bring it back to the department and never think about what happens then (AI, 2002).

Likewise, the level of co-ordination and inter-agency activity required of a co-ordinated gender strategy like mainstreaming also appears as an aberration to most policy-makers. This respondent is disillusioned by the lack of inter-departmental teamwork evidenced within the Irish bureaucracy.

> …very male, very territorial, each department has its own turf and you never ever walk on somebody else's turf never ever. You've got to check with them if you can do it (AI, 2002).

Gender mainstreaming is the first strategic policy on gender equality introduced in the Republic of Ireland. Furthermore, it is the first time the

feminist agenda has attempted to penetrate the mainstream from the inside out. Irish equality policy has tended to be based on legislation and piecemeal change on an issue-by-issue basis. Never before has there been any coordination of departments to deal with the fact that gender inequality permeates every aspect of Irish life.

> We don't communicate and coordinate well in the civil service. The structural difficulty is that there is a very congested agenda. It is very hard to get into information swapping. People meet at the senior level – that's where there is cross over but it has to be set up it doesn't happen within the system (AI, 2002).

The issue of co-ordination and the development of a coherent gender equality strategy is one of the key requirements in the implementation of gender mainstreaming. As stated earlier, gender mainstreaming has been adopted in effect as well as in theory a comparison of pre and post mainstreaming gender equality strategy documents, the Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) and the National Plan for Women (2002) will reveal new strategies and initiatives. The fact that an ad hoc approach to gender inequality is insufficient is recognised in the introduction of the Second Commission. "This ad hoc approach ensures that the issue of women's equality is starved of reflective thinking and careful planning" (Commission on the Status of Women, 1993: 9). In fact, the National Plan for Women (2002) is the first concrete policy commitment to gender equality, apart from *ad hoc* equality legislation on the part of the Irish state. In terms of policy co-ordination, the National Plan for Women (2002) while obviously an integral part of moving towards a policy of mainstreaming, it is implemented as a separate function of equality officials.

> Because of resource constraints our work has to be disjointed. I suppose it is a belt and braces approach. We cover gender mainstreaming and the UN commitments separately. My job is essentially to work on the international aspects of issues relating to women not just gender mainstreaming. It is better to have co-ordination rather than letting twelve different departments deal with twelve separate critical areas of concern (AI, 2002).

Observations that there was a lack of co-ordination between individual policy-makers and whole government departments became an important finding of the research. How can a policy like gender mainstreaming, whose whole success rests on the communication of new ideas about gender to permanent bureaucrats take hold in the Irish bureaucratic context. The issue

of communication between policy-makers and 'femocrats'[21] is discussed in some detail in the following section of the paper.

Communicating or Just Talking? – mainstreaming policy (H2)[22]

The diversity of meanings that 'gender mainstreaming' seems to project to different audiences is cited as a persistent problem by those studying its adoption at national level. Woodward (2001) offers a range of alternative definitions currently in use concluding that 'there is a plethora of definitions of mainstreaming, ranging from very specific and measurable policy ambitions to vague articles of faith that can best be considered good business practice' (Woodward, 2001: 6).[23] Initially, Woodward goes to great lengths to illustrate the confusion surrounding the definition of 'gender mainstreaming,' but later offers a clear definition: 'Mainstreaming implies that...the various policy fields should be infiltrated with gender awareness in order to incorporate equal opportunity goals into traditional policy areas' (ibid: 134). She is unintentionally illustrating that 'mainstreaming' is adaptable to the value codes of its interpreter. For instance, Woodward states that gender mainstreaming "challenges the idea that policy can be gender neutral and aims to reveal the norm behind much policy is in fact 'Man'" (ibid: 133). In fact, there is no such presumption in the UN publication that launched gender mainstreaming (United Nations, 1996), which is a list of goals for the achievement of gender equality rather than a recipe for policy reform. While gender mainstreaming may be a feminist policy in Woodward's eyes, in the eyes of an experienced policy-maker it may be first and foremost 'international,' 'strategic' or 'difficult to implement.' Speaking with policy-makers in the Irish Republic struggling with the integration of gender as part of a comprehensive National Development Programme reveals language as an obstacle to communication and understanding of the mainstreaming idea. The comments of one policy-maker is reflective of responses across the policy-making community.

> The first time you say 'gender mainstreaming' to someone they say 'What?' They haven't a clue what it means. If you say it's re-balancing that's not right. If you say its women's issues, that implies

[21] The term femocrat refers to a feminist employed by mainstream bureaucracy in order to import 'gender' knowledge from the margins (usually the women's movement). The term originated in Australia (Eisenstein, 1995, p. 69). A similar role is attributed to the 'gender equality expert' or gender 'expert' in this paper. In the Irish case, gender experts are classed as contract employees under the title of 'technical assistance' (AI, 2002).
[22] This section has been adapted from Carney, G. (2003).
[23] Likewise, the Nordic Council of Ministers state *'there has been some confusion about terminology and the meaning of 'gender mainstreaming''* (http://www1.oecd.org/subject/gender_mainstreaming/about/).

> that it ignores men's issues. You can see people's eyes glaze over when you talk about it… I have to say that the language that is used is not very normal language. It's quite jargony. You wouldn't sell it to the masses. Not like the NDP. If they want to promote it they need to make it more accessible. (AI, 2002).

Likewise, gender experts, imported into the bureaucracy to provide 'technical support' to policy-makers in the implementation of 'gender mainstreaming' express frustration at the lack of ease with which resident policy-makers assimilate the idea.

> I thought I would be involved in changing policies but most of what I am doing is awareness raising. I sometimes think should be called the communications and marketing expert' (AI, 2002).

So, while gender mainstreaming may be meaningless to non-feminists, from a feminist perspective, the term is loaded with meaning, implying that 'gender' is marginalized at present (Carney, 2002: 30). Feminist terms are often thought to be extreme or radical only if they have not become part of general language use (Spender, 1980: 141). By implication, it is possible to argue that any word, concept or idea is deemed 'normal' not because it contains any normal characteristics, but rather because it is given that status (Cameron, 1992). Perhaps clumsy terminology like gender mainstreaming has developed because there exist no words to describe in any meaningful sense an attempt to remove gender bias from policy-making. Apart from eradicating androcentric bias in the language in much of the language activity of bureaucracy, mainstreaming must replace existing phraseology with new words that are both gender inclusive and meaningful. The difficulty is that gender mainstreaming has emerged as generally meaningless to those "ordinarily involved in the process of policy-making," identified as the implementers of gender mainstreaming by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 1998: 1).

The fact is that language developed around gender mainstreaming is meaningless to resident policy-makers who are without gender knowledge or a feminist perspective. Few policy-makers are trained in the area of gender, and fewer still are encouraged to adopt political standpoints. The result is a situation where policy-makers and feminists are talking past one another. Both are engaged in a curious monologue in which there is no actual communication exchange. Feminists are unwilling to accept that policy-makers may have difficulty understanding some of the core concepts of the 'mainstreaming' project.

> I don't think policy-makers are as muddled as they say. The Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment have high levels of knowledge, but they know it involves extra work and no extra resources. It's not worth their while to do it. What matters is what your authorities validate and what you get kudos for (AI, 2002).

The data reveals little evidence of such resistance amongst policy-makers. Rather, the most obvious trend amongst non-feminist policy-makers is confusion as to the meaning of gender mainstreaming. While there may well be an unwillingness to change work practices mid-stream, as is required of the gender mainstreaming project, there is little in the policy to counteract that unwillingness, not even a clear and simple communication of the idea. Perceived resistance to the idea of gender mainstreaming could as easily be attributed to communication difficulties as much as straightforward gender prejudice.

> There was some jargon to learn but the main thing was trying to get to grips with gender mainstreaming. You know there are three different definitions of gender mainstreaming flying around? There aren't even big differences between the definitions but they could result in different things. But I don't know if talking about gender mainstreaming has the capacity to change attitudes. There is no point in just talking to each other about it. We need to go to other departments and see if it is even having an effect there, not to mind having an impact outside departments' (AI, 2002).

The comments of this policy-maker establish the difference between talking about new ideas and communicating them. Communicating feminist goals regarding each policy area allows policy-makers to establish and rectify gender bias. Essentially an idea developed with feminist goals in mind, gender mainstreaming must fit into a policy-making agenda that is already overloaded, often asking policy-makers to fulfil a number of mutually exclusive goals at once. One respondent, an experienced policy-maker responsible for monitoring the productive sector Operational Programme of the National Development Plan, cited 'gender' as one of four 'horizontal issues' – the environment, rural and poverty proofing, that cut across established policy priorities such as health, education, or defence, all of which are encountering similar problems to gender mainstreaming. Apart from promoting research, technological development and innovation, indigenous and Foreign Direct Investment, marketing and sea fisheries development, this respondent was expected to do four different proofs on each of these measures of which 'gender' is just one. It is hardly surprising in this context that he pushed for exemption from 'gender proofing' a

number of measures. The point of this example is not to provide 'its just too difficult' type excuses for the failure of gender mainstreaming, but to demonstrate the obstacles to learning that exist for policy-makers. Perhaps policy-makers do not 'discuss' gender mainstreaming because they do not have the conceptual or institutional space to develop ideas about the impact of gender on their work? Lack of discussion is frustrating for the gender expert:

> Discussion may be far too high level a word. I think its more like we have to do this gender stuff and a few people would do it really well and actually would discuss it and analyse it but most people wouldn't know what to do and would try to not really do anything on it except respond to queries as best they can (AI, 2003).

The primary task of those leading the mainstreaming project within the bureaucracy is to communicate the central goals of gender mainstreaming. This is recognized by some feminists writing on the topic (Verloo, 2001: 9). The difficulty lies in establishing meaningful terms with which to promote an aspiration for which there is no clearly articulated ultimate goal. A number of complex ideas must be communicated. First, that gender equality does not exist at present because cultural and social constructions of gender have excluded female perspectives on policy. Second, policy made in a gender-neutral fashion is not necessarily going to cater for everyone. In fact, policy is more likely to reflect the priorities of those who make it, and these are not the priorities of the whole population. To communicate these arguments lucidly requires bilingual "femocrats"[24] to act as cultural and linguistic translators between policy-making and feminist communities. In the Irish case, gender experts identify the need to appeal to a forward-thinking policy-maker who will act as champion for the cause who persuades others "that this is not lunacy" (AI, 2002). However, policy makers tend to take the path of least resistance, adopting a minimalist approach.

I conclude from this research that in the implementation of gender mainstreaming, a number of key steps between theory and action are being omitted. The key step missing is that of communication and translation. Until gender mainstreaming and its central concepts and ideas are clarified, the tools for its implementation will stagnate. In this paper I argue that these core communication problems relate to the cultural (as well as linguistic)

[24] The term femocrat refers to a feminist employed by mainstream bureaucracy in order to import 'gender' knowledge from the margins (usually the women's movement). The term originated in Australia (Eisenstein, 1995: 69). A similar role is attributed to the 'gender equality expert' or gender 'expert' in this paper. In the Irish case, gender experts are classed as contract employees under the title of 'technical assistance' (AI, 2002).

divide between feminism and mainstreaming theory and action. Developed within feminism, at the margins of political thought and action, gender mainstreaming is essentially a political ideal to be integrated into policy. Such is the tradition of feminist culture to inhabit the margins in order to retain its independence of the (mainstream) oppressor, that gender mainstreaming developed not in cooperation with, but in opposition to, current activities in policy-making. As stated earlier, gender mainstreaming immediately implies marginalisation. This marginalisation of gender issues dichotomises meaning and language development between two different communities. Essentially, if feminism wants its ideas to remain its own and retain "the margins as a space of radical openness" (hooks, 1996: 48) it can. However, if feminism is determined that policy-makers integrate feminist ideas into everyday work-plans then feminism must open its culture, share its language, and communicate its ideas effectively. To clarify, in the past feminist theorists claimed that established norms of reason, knowledge and values were not universal, but male. Tanesini argues that "Their work made it possible, for the first time, to ask questions such as 'whose reason?' 'whose science?' 'whose language?'" (Tanesini, 1996: 354).

The challenge for global feminism in the expression of its central goals through gender mainstreaming is to ask itself these questions. "Whose language?" is being expressed in the communication of gender mainstreaming? The struggle to come to terms with this difficulty is eloquently expressed by bell hooks:

> Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination – a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you? Language is also a place of struggle. (hooks, 1996: 49).

This is the challenge integral to speaking the language of global feminism to the mainstream. The communication of gender mainstreaming requires that feminism forsake ownership of many of the words integral to feminist emancipation, and in doing so transport them from the margins to the mainstream.

Conclusion: from women's rights to gender mainstreaming

This paper has offered a brief overview of the primary findings of doctoral research to uncover the origins and impact of international gender norms in the Republic of Ireland. Firstly, the paper offered a brief introduction to gender mainstreaming. This was followed by a detailed discussion of the changing status of gender equality policy in the Republic of Ireland. A review of the Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) and the Report to the United Nations on the National Plan for Women 2002 on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2002) were used to illustrate instances where Irish gender equality policy appears to be influenced by global standards. From the review I concluded that the greater status attributed to the 2002 report is for the most part due to its association with UN commitments.

Next, the methodology and research design for the thesis proper were outlined in order to identify the central research hypotheses and provide some context and background to the data presented. Once the research agenda had been established, evidence supporting and contradicting the central hypothesis that gender mainstreaming represents a move from a national to an international policy agenda in the area of gender equality policy was presented. Experiences of implementing gender mainstreaming and other international commitments as narrated by policy-makers were used to demonstrate the importance of international institutions, particularly the EU, as a policy actor around gender. This analysis led to the conclusion that the language and discourse around gender amongst Irish policy-makers had evolved from a discourse of women's rights. 'The idea has been adopted and it's moving into the discourse of policy-making, but I wouldn't say its being completely implemented' (AI, 2002).

The new discourse is one where a policy of mainstreaming, rather than women-centred policies is pursued. Finally, the broader implications of these changes for feminism(s) and for mainstream politics and policies are briefly discussed. It remains to be seen whether the new discourse of 'mainstreaming' is a more effective mechanism for the achievement of gender equality. Whatever the outcome in terms of equality, there is little doubt that gender mainstreaming has implications for the organisation of policy in the Republic of Ireland.

> There has been a tendency in the civil service to reply to the question 'Why do you do it that way?' 'Because we have always done it that way…' But I think that is changing and things like mainstreaming are making people change their whole approach to work (AI, 2002).

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Biographical note

Gemma Carney is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Political Science, Trinity College, Dublin. Her main research focus is feminism and public policy, with a special interest in the implications of global feminist debates and activities for national identities. Irish equality legislation is at the forefront of questioning established gender binaries, as a result the profile of knowledge in the area of gender and policy has greatly increased over the past ten years. The impact of these changes on the value of feminist thought to mainstream policy-makers is an area she has identified for further study. Gemma is also interested in feminist methodologies and how modes of analysis impact on public policy and feminist discourses around gender. At present she teaches a broad curriculum course 'Important Issues in Contemporary Politics' to final year students at Trinity.

Other papers published by the Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics include:

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