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Honest Commemoration: Reconciling women's 'troubled' and 'troubling' history in centennial Ireland¹

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Ireland is in the throes of a decade of commemoration. The process of commemorating the tumultuous revolutionary events that led to the establishment of the Irish state a century ago has incorporated government sponsorship of events, public debate, cultural interventions and exciting new academic scholarship on the period of revolution. The outputs of the first stage of the government's 'Decade of Centenaries' program 1912-1916 – including conferences, books, studies, concerts, documentaries, public events and drama – were most impressive

(<https://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/category/official-commemoration/>).

The national commemoration of the Easter Rising of 1916, for instance, was notable for its sensitive and rich cultural content. In the arena of scholarship, access to new historical sources including those available free and online (such as the Bureau of Military History collection) as well as academic engagement projects (such as the 'Women of the South' Project in the Farmgate Café in Cork's English Market

(<http://farmgatecork.ie/womenofthesouth/>) have inspired a new generation of interdisciplinary scholars to study the Irish Revolution and generated a new conception of 'public history'.² The second phase of the program, for 1917-22, covers the War of Independence, the Civil War and the partition of the island in the state's formation, north and south. This stage also included a series of events to mark the hundred-year anniversary of votes for women in 2018

(<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/visit-and-learn/votail-100/>). Building on earlier work (such as Ward 1995), new academic scholarship on the achievement of votes for women and the critical role women played in the Irish revolutionary period has emerged in the decade of centenaries (Pašeta 2013; McDiarmid 2015). The Irish government's 'Vótáil 100' program also commemorated women's participation in institutional politics in the course of the last century in a number of events and a pop-up museum representing women's history through ephemera, which was curated by Sinéad McCoole.

However, disturbing scandals and historical abuses in women's lives have also come to light in Ireland in the last twenty years and in the midst of

these initiatives. Recent research has addressed the neglected question of the violence women experienced (including forced hair cutting/shearing and sexual assault) in the period covering the War of Independence and the Civil War – addressing the thorny question of violence against women perpetrated by members of the national army (Connolly 2019). The violence of the revolution was not just a war between men, and this new research consolidates a more complete picture of women’s experience during and after the revolution. Traumatic stories of incarceration and institutional abuses that were also prevalent in the period of revolution have emerged, primarily through public inquiries, investigative journalism and survivor testimony in more recent decades. O’Sullivan and O’Donnell (2012) provide an overview of the incarceration of tens of thousands of men, women and children during the first fifty years of Irish independence. Psychiatric hospitals, mother and baby homes,³ Magdalene laundries, reformatory and industrial schools formed a network of institutions of ‘coercive confinement’ that was integral to the emerging state. Historical injustices that were perpetrated in state-funded, religious-run institutions in Ireland and concealed at the time have been documented in a number of state inquiries and reports, including the Ryan Report of 2009; the McAleese Report of 2013; and the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Mother and Baby Homes of 2019. In a move indicative of the impact of this documentation, in 2013, as a result of the McAleese Report, the Irish government apologized to the women who were incarcerated in Magdalene laundries that existed until the late 20th century.⁴

As Shelton notes, ‘history is replete with episodes of genocide, slavery, torture, forced conversions, and mass expulsions of peoples’ (2019). States and societies throughout the world are regularly asked to account for historic abuses and provide redress to victims, with some of these historical injustices involving events occurring a century or more ago. In Ireland, this applies to the large scale system of institutionalization and to the traumatic legacies of the past that continue to exist – outside of the official state commemoration program – in present-day narratives of survivors of injustice who are reflecting and participating in political and legal actions seeking redress and retribution. This chapter provides a critical overview of the commemoration process in Ireland, examining the role of women’s history and feminism in the decade’s events. After considering the relationship between ‘history’ and commemoration and outlining key issues in Irish women’s history, this essay proposes an alternative approach to commemoration concerned with historical accountability and truthful remembering capable of including profound injustices and abuses of power that occurred in their own time and which are a disruptive element of the present. The concept of historical accountability can be understood in different ways, including in terms of ‘giving an account’ of oppression, violence or brutalization by conducting methodologically sound, evidence-based research, and as ‘being accountable’ in scholarship to groups or individuals ignored, eclipsed and excluded from generalized accounts of society and the collective memory of nations. The analysis provided in this chapter suggests that historical accountability should be a more central consideration in a program of national commemoration claiming to address difficult questions about the past.

The Decade of Centenaries: Commemoration or History?

The relationship between academic history writing and commemoration has been subject to a degree of scrutiny both during the decade of centenaries and more generally in the interdisciplinary field of memory studies (Frawley 2014; Pine 2016; Beiner 2019). The public commemoration of the 1916 Rising was one of the first major events in the state's program. Numerous public commentators during 2016 attempted to both define the role of the commemoration of the 1916 Rising from the perspective of 'professional history' and interpret the Rising itself, assessing its origins, impact and revolutionary scale, in particular. The prominent public role of academic history writing and historians during the decade of commemorations is palpable. Rankean historiography, which seeks to ground history writing in unimpeachable facts based on sources as close to the event or person whose history was being written, is still an important principle in Irish history writing. If the relevant sources cannot be found, then scholars cannot write 'scientific history'. As Higgins argues (2012), however, there is a clear disjuncture between commemoration / commemorative practice and this interpretation of history. Similarly, as Edward Madigan writes,

We should remind ourselves at the outset that historians, academic or otherwise, hold no monopoly on the interpretation of the past, and that there are many ways in which we can learn about and confront the events our ancestors lived through...while there should ideally be as much interaction between history and commemoration, we should recognize emphatically that they are not the same thing. (Madigan 2013, 1-2)

Undoubtedly the integrity of 'the past', which professional historians are trained to reconstruct primarily through the prism of texts, archival sources and oral history, counts for a great deal so that, among other things, the politics of the present is not flagrantly employed to provide a completely distorted view of what actually happened in 1916, the subsequent revolutionary years and post-independence decades.

Evidence-based research is clearly essential to reconstruct historical experience. The craft of analyzing data and evidence, however, always brings to bear an interpretation that is framed by the author's standpoint and theoretical disposition. As Tom Dunne (1992) has suggested, history writing produces a particular kind of text, one shaped as much by the politics of the writer as by established conventions in regard to evidence and debate.

Alongside greater acknowledgement that the writing of Irish history has always been selective, the danger of historians creating 'myths' for political ends in moments of commemoration has also been rehearsed, including in John Regan's text *Myth and the Irish State* (2014). Regan's text provided a critical interpretation of a select range of historiographical debates and 'myths' that have shaped and divided the canon of Irish history over time, focusing in particular on the role of the Troubles in Northern Ireland as a key political fault line. However, perpetuating a myth that historical arguments about the past only take place between men and historians more interested in the masculine

attributes of the state must not be perpetuated either. There is much further charged debate to be had about the 'rights and wrongs of our history' (the title of a robust 2014 review of Regan's book in the *Irish Times* by Diarmaid Ferriter), but this includes in relation to the difficult position of women in Irish history, which gets negligible mention in Regan's text.

Historiography combines the study of historians and historical method. The writing and construction of Irish history throughout the twentieth century was undoubtedly selective, partial, incomplete and ideological in relation to women's history and gender inequality: a history that was predominantly about one gender was clearly deficient. E.H. Carr, in the 1961 George Macaulay Tervelyan lectures on the theme 'What is History?', sought to undermine the idea that historians enjoy a sort of unquestionable objectivity and authority over the history they study. Likewise, feminist scholars and historians challenged this view in Irish historical by critiquing the gender bias of mainstream histories, which was (and still is) reflected in the absence of women in senior positions in the profession. The exclusion of women from key tomes and anthologies in other disciplines seeking to define canons (such as the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*) was also a source of contention in Irish studies at this time. Carr, in common with feminist scholars, challenged the idea that the privileged historian was in any sort of commanding position, 'like a general taking a salute' (Carr 1961). Feminist scholars embarked on the critical task of recovery work in women's history from the 1980s and gradually claimed their rightful place in understanding and elucidating the past.

Alongside the historian's critique of a tendency to create false myths about the past for present political ends in contemporary politics (Regan 2013), a number of other 'dangers' associated with historical writing at a time of commemoration have been pointed out in public interventions, including by Anne Dolan and Ronan Fanning. As part of a series of articles in the *Irish Times* on the decade of centenaries, in 'Commemorating 1916: How much does the integrity of the past count?', Dolan examined the 'limited role' (Dolan 2015) of professional history by pointing out the gap and distinction between commemoration – as a broader social and political process of the wider national collectivity, the state – and the scholarly principles and task of 'history' as practiced and envisaged by prominent professional historians. Dolan, echoing Higgins' earlier analysis (2012), argued: 'But when has commemoration ever truly been about history? The memorial events for the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising told us more about 1966 than they did about 1916, and 2016's efforts are not likely to be different' (Dolan 2015).

Ronan Fanning, in the same series, cautioned against debunking established (or perhaps the *establishment's*?) views of the past at a time of remembrance by engaging in what he termed endless 'whatifism':

There is a real risk that the commemoration of the Rising will degenerate into a self-indulgent exercise in whatiffery: that the recognition of the importance of what happened in 1916 will be diluted by the unhistorical obsessions of the crystal-gazers with what might have happened if the Rising had not taken place. (Fanning 2015)

But the role of scholars at a time of widespread public commemoration is not *just* to look back, remember and assess the relative magnitude of events as they actually took place, or to protect an 'established' view while never asking 'what if' questions. The past is not *pure* or resolved once it has been written up. Public commemorations also raise questions about the impact of unequal power, experience of marginalized groups and selective memory. Guy Beiner (2019), for example, has explored the nature and impact of 'social forgetting' – where communities apparently attempt to obscure, erase and otherwise leave behind certain events from their past. In addition, historical interpretation cannot stand still or be sealed in an airtight vault once it has been written by its preliminary masters and professoriate. There are too many unanswered and airbrushed questions in Irish history writing thus far to arrive at such a safe/assured view – and too many state inquiries into historical injustices and abuses that require much more evidence/excavation. A key problem is that women would never have been written into Irish history had 'what if' questions not been asked by pioneering women's historians and feminist scholars (and indeed local historians outside academic institutions) from the 1980s on (Ward 1995). One entirely valid question, for instance, is *what* would Irish history look like *if* women had been properly included in the prevailing narrative of twentieth-century professional history writing: should a history that managed for such a long time to effectively exclude and minimize half the population not be fundamentally rewritten, rethought and *revised*?

The rewriting of women into Irish history in recent decades was not just ideology as originally implied – it was, rather, a necessary *scholarly* corrective to the received history being incomplete, gender biased and partial. In addition, methodological and ethical issues concerning accountability arose. Why were women's lives and experience excluded from the historiography of the Irish revolution (a key focus of the decade of centenaries) and assessment of its aftermath for such a long period of time? The occlusion and exclusion of women from the dominant historical narrative was perhaps, instead, an inevitable consequence of the gendered bias of arguments about historical purity and authority (Fanning 2015) and, undoubtedly, not enough 'whatifism', especially if we shift our focus to historical accountability and a history of some of the more profound *injustices* evidenced in Irish women's lives. As Cheryl Glenn writes, 'Writing women (or any other traditionally disenfranchised group) into the history of rhetoric, then, can be an ethically and intellectually responsible gesture that disrupts those frozen memories in order to address silences, challenge absences, and assert women's contributions to public life' (2000). Beyond commemorating the Irish revolution and the establishment of the republic as a set of political institutions and as a 'Free State', an excision of deeply troubling silences and secrets buried in Irish women's lives and collective experience is occurring. State-led commemorations clearly link past and present narratives in a manner that is not benign or purely ceremonial and this requires further elucidation in relation to gender and historical injustices, at the current conjuncture.

Commemoration and Women

As was the case in many other 'revolutions', an elite class of men both took the credit for the revolution that deposed British rule in the Republic and

assumed state power in its aftermath. Women had played a critical role as revolutionaries before independence. Yet the Catholic church and new Irish state created a social and political order in which women were explicitly and progressively marginalized in public life and in the law after 1922 – a marginalization duplicated in the main content of historical scholarship right up to the 1980s in Ireland. By the 1980s, however, a new wave of women's history writing and feminist theory in effect flourished alongside the vociferous revisionist and nationalist debates that divided Irish studies (Connolly 2004).

Recovery work conducted since the 1980s has generated important analysis into previously neglected questions in women's lives. As women's historians and other scholars have by now widely documented (Beaumont 1999; Connolly 2003), one of the travesties of the post-independence period of nation building was the marginal role the church and state afforded to women as full and equal citizens in a range of arenas, despite their significant achievement of the vote in 1918. Historical scholarship in recent decades has widely demonstrated that (some) women were to varying degrees afforded an active public role in the revolutionary process in 1916 but were systematically marginalized in the private sphere in the decades after independence. As Beaumont (1999) has demonstrated, even though women in the post-independence era were acutely marginalized by church-state policies, laws and by censorship, they were also active agents in that same history – including in the private sphere of home and in the public realm of activism, work and politics. The 1937 constitution stated, and still states, that women by their 'life' (as opposed to by their 'work') in the home give to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. A cool and dispassionate historical interpretation of this clause suggests that it simply reflects the social order of the day. Women were in reality confined to the sphere of the home and family; feminists of the time were 'exceptional' and marginal women who did not reflect the overall experience of Irish women. Some even argue that the 1937 clause actually gave value to the stem family model on which Irish society was premised and in which women occupied a central (even powerful) role as mothers – ergo the fundamental role of history was seen and accepted as describing society as it was.

But to describe society within a generalization as to *how it was* is to first create an ideological version of the past that presumes society is always built on consent and social order. In addition, such a move fails to dissect the underlying power dynamics on which society is structured and the resistances, differences and conflicts within it. Describing a society in this way also failed to address the silences and oppressions of twentieth-century Ireland, examples of which later rocked Irish society in the 1980s and 1990s vis-à-vis the scale of institutional abuses and scandals that came to light.

The marginalization of women in the public sphere of paid work and politics in Irish society in the decades after independence was not the only issue airbrushed from the official historical narrative for decades. In recent years, it has become apparent that serious forms of abuse arising from institutionalized social control of women's sexuality and reproduction, including in coercive institutions, was also elided. Ireland has been rocked by the revelation of past institutional abuses, including in relation to the widespread institutionalization of unmarried pregnant women and their children in mother and baby homes that recorded excessive infant mortality

rates, unorthodox burial practices and high adoption rates. The *lessons of the past* should have real currency and importance in contemporary Ireland, not least in the arena of women's rights, at a time when the state has hosted a major centennial commemoration to mark one hundred years of female suffrage. A welcome outcome of the commemorative events, apart from the generation of burgeoning and exciting new literature on the revolution itself, should include, for example, critical reflection about gender issues, equal citizenship and the kind of society Ireland is and has become one hundred years after suffrage was extended to women.

The stories of enforced institutionalization and mistreatment of 'fallen' women in mother and baby homes, Magdalene Laundries and other institutions in Ireland throughout the twentieth century have been buried in largely unavailable records. In recent years, a litany of state inquiries and commissions has exposed the harsh reality of life in these institutions *retrospectively* through powerful survivor testimony and other academic evidence. Mandated by the Irish state beginning in the eighteenth century, they were operated by various orders of the Catholic church after independence until the last laundry closed in 1996. In 1993, an order of nuns in Dublin sold part of their Magdalene convent to a real estate developer. In order to develop the site for new housing, the remains of 155 inmates, buried in unmarked graves on the property, were exhumed, cremated, and buried elsewhere in a mass grave, triggering a public scandal in Ireland.

Focusing on the ten Catholic Magdalene laundries operating between 1922 and 1996, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Smith 2007) provided the first detailed history of women entering these institutions in the twentieth century. Smith described how the Magdalene laundries were workhouses in which many Irish women and girls were effectively imprisoned because they were perceived to be a threat to the moral fiber of society. Because the religious orders have not opened their archival records, Smith argues that Ireland's Magdalene institutions continue to exist in the public mind primarily at the level of *story* (cultural representation and survivor testimony) rather than *history* (archives and documents). The importance of interdisciplinary research using other methods, apart from traditional historical methods, was underlined in Smith's work and has been implemented in subsequent memory studies and oral history projects. Pioneering interdisciplinary work has resisted any impulse to write up the objective history of institutions as confined to the distant past and is as concerned with addressing manifestations of injustice, abuse of power and reparation in the present. Pine, for instance, explores how recent cultural explorations of Ireland's history of institutional abuse have focused on buildings as ways of creating a commemorative space and ensuring through active spectatorship this abuse never happens again (2019).

Theoretically, the received understanding of the last century in Ireland can also be enhanced by more considered attention to sociological concepts such as 'total institutions' (proposed by Erving Goffman) and Michel Foucault's conception of 'disciplinary institutions'. For Deleuze, following on from Foucault, discipline 'cannot be identified with any one institution or apparatus, precisely because it is a type of power, a technology, that traverses every kind of apparatus or institution, linking them, prolonging them, and making them converge and function in a new way' (Deleuze 1988, 26).

The cultural shift that for Foucault led to the predominance of incarceration via the body and power directly applies to Ireland's history of institutionalization, where women considered sexually transgressive, 'fallen' or a moral threat were institutionalized in large numbers, with their children removed from them (voluntarily and involuntarily) and adopted out in mother and baby homes. Disciplinary power and punishment is reflected in a series and web of interconnected institutions that existed in local communities and were sustained by the state.

The 'Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related matters' is the most recent Irish judicial commission of investigation, established in 2015 by an order of the Irish government. The Commission was set up in the wake of individually-researched claims by local historian Catherine Corless that the bodies of up to 800 babies and children may have been interred in an unmarked mass grave located in a sewer in the Bons Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, County Galway. The remit of the Commission also covered investigation into the records of and the practices at an additional thirteen Mother and Baby Homes, including alleged adoption of children from these institutions without mothers' consent. Originally scheduled to issue a final report by February 2018, the Commission was granted an extension and reported in April 2019. Profound injustices of the past experienced by Irish women will therefore continue to reemerge in the present and in the future through the medium of state inquiries, survivor testimony and schemes to provide redress.

There are many questions to be asked about historical abuses and inequality in contemporary Ireland, some of which have been played out in the courts – a century after diverse groups of women both in Dublin and outside it assisted in the uprising of 1916, which had a clear vision of equality and gender at its ideological core. 'The past' also continues to be intertwined with the state and society's record on women's reproductive rights in the arena of health, bodily autonomy, obstetrics and motherhood. Twentieth-century scandals in relation to Irish maternity hospitals and many instances of systems failure in maternal health (including the death of Savita Halappanavar in a Galway hospital) are rooted in an institutional culture that historically has exercised systemic authority over women's bodies and reproduction, including in Mother and Baby Homes. As feminist scholars have widely demonstrated, many suffrage campaigners in 1918 recognized the significance of achieving the vote but quickly moved on to a range of other campaigns and causes with unrelenting commitment. The important task of commemorating and remembering the granting of the vote for women, in centennial Ireland, should also consider Irish suffragists' continued desire for change beyond the vote and their unfinished cause, which continued in an active women's movement that has sustained and challenged patriarchy ever since (Connolly 2003).

Where does history begin and accountability end in a context where so many practices that damaged mothers and pregnant women persist in legal cases, state inquiries, redress schemes and hospital scandals? The past is also frequently invoked as a central factor in cases of abuse excised in more recent state enquiries and court cases in contemporary Ireland. The 'context of the times' was, for example, used in a 2015 case as an argument to deny adequate compensation to Irish victims of symphysiotomy, a painful medical alternative to caesarian sections that predominated in Ireland to encourage

high fertility rates (McDonald 2015). A purely Rankean argument – that historians have a true capacity and the authority to represent the past ‘as it actually happened’ – was deployed to suggest that doctors and nurses were merely operating in an era of profound Catholicism and was used in the courts to justify lesser compensation in the present for elderly women who were physically and psychologically damaged by a procedure long phased out in other western countries (Connolly 2016). In the example of the case of symphysiotomy in the courts, historiography à la Ranke was invoked in the hearings by lawyers to shape a legal outcome. The ‘context of the time’ argument thus successfully served the state and reflected in the legal case a close relationship between established principles in ‘objective’ historical scholarship and institutional *power*. Historical abuses belong in their time (Catholic Ireland of the 1940s-80s), yet the UN Human Rights Committee report, following July 2014 questioning of an Irish government delegation led by Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald about Ireland’s compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), stated that the ‘perpetrators’ of symphysiotomy should be punished and prosecuted (Holland 2014). On symphysiotomy, which was brought to the committee’s attention for the first time, it said:

The State party should initiate a prompt, independent and thorough investigation into cases of symphysiotomy, prosecute and punish the perpetrators, including medical personnel, and provide an effective remedy to the survivors of symphysiotomy for the damage sustained, including fair and adequate compensation and rehabilitation, on an individualized basis...It should facilitate access to judicial remedies by victims opting for the ex-gratia scheme, including allowing a challenge to the sums offered to them under the scheme. (in Holland 2014)

The justification of this practice as historically appropriate in the past therefore took precedence over an interpretation of this practice as historically unjust, outdated and damaging to women – which it was.

The construction of gender and more specifically motherhood through the lens of a historically acceptable church-state model of power has been vividly demonstrated in other scandals that have mired the state and wider body politic and have incorporated the denial of basic human rights such as consent, knowledge and bodily integrity in life and death. Outside of the issues of the Mother and Baby homes, numerous reproductive tragedies rooted in traditions that stigmatized pregnancy outside marriage have dominated Irish political debate since the 1980s. The death of fourteen-year-old Anne Lovett in childbirth alongside her stillborn baby in a grotto in County Longford in 1984 was a profoundly tragic event. Moreover, Joanne Hayes, a single mother, was falsely accused of a double infanticide in a tribunal of inquiry into what became known as the ‘Kerry Babies’ case in the same year.

From the 1970s on, reproductive rights entered the arena of national politics with vigor. A battle for women to establish reproductive and bodily autonomy by accessing legal contraception and abortions has been sustained for over four decades. A referendum passed in 1983 was intended to copperfasten a ban on abortion in Ireland and to protect the right to life of the unborn at all costs in Irish law and medical practice. Subsequently, it also

became apparent that there was an intention to deny women information on abortion elsewhere and the right to travel to the UK for an abortion. The reference to women's 'life' in the eighth amendment to the Irish constitution was, however, later brought into sharp focus when a woman's life and death vis-à-vis motherhood and pregnancy was literally the subject of a High Court case (Ms P) conducted in the days before and after Christmas day 2014, concerning a brain dead pregnant mother who was left on a life support machine against her family's wishes.

In the period since the eighth amendment was introduced, numerous such individual women impacted by reproductive injustices have been the subjects of a range of litigation in both Irish and international courts (see Connolly forthcoming 2020). The X case in 1992 involved the Attorney General obtaining an injunction to stop a suicidal 14 year-old-girl who was raped from travelling to the UK for an abortion. In the case of A, B and C v Ireland in 2010, the European Court of Human Rights found that Ireland had violated the European Convention on Human Rights by failing to provide an accessible and effective procedure by which a woman can have established whether she qualifies for a legal abortion under Irish law. A number of cases related to whether an abortion was permissible in cases of fatal fetal abnormalities were also taken. Irish abortion law received worldwide attention when Savita Halappanavar died in 2012. She requested and was denied an abortion while suffering from septicemia during a miscarriage. The case of Ms P in December 2014 particularly demonstrated the chaos that evolved from a combination of the longstanding lack of clear legislation to define the right to life of the mother as well as the unborn.⁵ The construction of a longstanding problematic version of gendered citizenship and women's bodies was confirmed by the High Court to deny women and their families autonomy, consent and dignity in the arena of maternal death prior to child birth. P, a clinically dead pregnant woman, was kept on a life support machine to deleterious effect because of the eighth amendment to the constitution. The case of Y, who was an asylum seeker, underlined the additional problems the eighth amendment caused for women who were effectively barred from travelling outside Ireland in time for a termination or who were too sick to travel. In light of the problems being caused by the existence of the eighth amendment in obstetrics and the care of pregnant women, the constitutional and legislative abortion provisions were subsequently tabled and discussed at a series of Citizen's Assembly meetings in 2016 and 2017 and at a government-appointed committee in 2017, which recommended substantial reform. In a situation where the eighth amendment was increasingly representing a threat to women's maternal health during difficult pregnancies and miscarriages, the government ultimately proposed the 36th Amendment of the Constitution, which was passed in a referendum on 25 May 2018. Such injustices of the past do not belong 'in the past', therefore; they are continually emerging and reemerging in the present, having been buried, denied and silenced.

Conclusion: what is Ireland remembering?

2018 was a very important year for Irish women: the eighth amendment to the constitution was repealed and the granting of votes for women was marked in

an official state-sponsored centenary. These events, exactly one hundred years apart, indicate social progress in key arenas of women's rights – votes and greater reproductive choice were fought hard for in feminist campaigns over years. And yet, as Fintan O'Toole has stated, 'dark elements of our past' are also forces in our present (2019). Inconvenient truths in the case of institutionalized women disrupt any received sense of a linear historical narrative, where the past is definitely behind us, the present is what is being experienced, and the future something yet to come.

Remembering and marking the centenary of votes for women in 2018 has been very important in and of itself. However, the centenary of suffrage also raises many additional critical questions from the perspective of women. Women's social and political rights have a complex history in Ireland. Texts written by the historians and scholars of the Irish women's movement have catalogued in detail the achievements, difficulties and legacy of a long campaign fought for Irish women's right to equal citizenship in several domains (see Connolly 2003; Ryan and Ward 2018). The persistence of gender inequality is evident, however, in several arenas including in the glaring underrepresentation of women in senior academic positions in Irish universities today. The percentage of female professors of history in Ireland is, for instance, notoriously low. Approximately 87% of all professors of history in Irish universities were men in 2018, yet women comprise a third of all the academic staff listed in history departments.⁶ Women also remain vastly underrepresented in the Dáil and currently suspended Northern Irish Assembly, including at cabinet level, despite the introduction of gender quotas in the republic to address a century-long problem of a very low percentage of women in politics. The fact that 'change' has been so slow in academia, politics and the media, for instance, suggests that although suffrage was significant at the time, as suffrage campaigners of the era themselves recognized, it was just one aspect of an otherwise unfinished cause. The holding of one referendum in 2018 along with the postponing of another (to repeal or replace the 1937 constitutional clause that defines women's role in Ireland as primarily in the home) sharply represents the interplay of past and present, and the tension between tradition and modernity, that infuses women's rights in contemporary Ireland.

The process of 'remembering' the past through the lens of women's lives has real political currency and human rights implications in contemporary Ireland. The centennial commemoration in 2021 of a violent and traumatic Civil War will clearly be difficult (Dolan 2006). The function of commemoration, though, is in part to ensure that other shameful aspects of the state's history are not forgotten or erased either. The question of *what* Ireland is commemorating likewise begs the question of *how* it should be commemorating, including in arenas that are not included in the official decade of centenaries agenda. As David Fitzpatrick has noted, historical accountability arises in this context: 'Commemoration, like good history, should help us to understand what forces impelled people to commit courageous as well as terrible acts. Though the outcome of such investigations is often contentious and morally unsettling, it is preferable to a bland recitation of general blamelessness' (2013, 127). The history of trauma in Ireland is embedded in a bloody revolution in the early twentieth century and a later war in Northern Ireland. But widespread trauma was likewise

generated in religious-run institutions that were ubiquitous and a core element in the state's formation and development. The unequal and at times barbaric treatment of women in Ireland in the last century in several arenas has created a fallout and fault line which must be also be remembered, conceptualized and addressed in the decade of centenaries if the state and society is to arrive at a full, mature and honest appraisal of its past, *inclusively understood*.

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² Public history is defined in different ways in historical literature. In general, it represents an aim to deepen and empower public connection with the past; see, for instance, Ashton and Kean 2009.

³ In 2014, the horrific reality of Ireland's state-funded, church-run mother and baby homes came to light when local historian Catherine Corless discovered a mass grave at a home located in Tuam. Approximately 35,000 women went

through Ireland's nine mother and baby homes between 1904 and 1996, where it is estimated 6,000 babies and children died.

⁴ 'I, as Taoiseach, on behalf of the State, the Government and our citizens deeply regret and apologise unreservedly to all those women for the hurt that was done to them, and for any stigma they suffered, as a result of the time they spent in a Magdalene laundry. The McAleese report shines a bright and necessary light on a dark chapter of Ireland's history' ('Enda Kenny's State apology to the Magdalene women', February 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9qf--olavQ>. Accessed on 19 June 2019).

⁵ See: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/judgment-on-brain-dead-pregnant-woman-wins-award-1.2606884>

⁶ A baseline, online survey I did in January 2018 of 136 (non-retired) academic staff currently listed on Irish history department websites revealed that only three out of a total of twenty-three professors listed (at the Irish Higher Education Authority-recognized A and B Professor levels) were women. There is an absence of Athena SWAN data for history departments in Ireland.