Forum

ELA DRĄŻKIEWICZ AND THOMAS STRONG

Repealing Ireland's Eighth Amendment: abortion rights and democracy today

In 2018, the Irish public voted to repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution, which since 1983 banned abortion in the country. While this was a watershed moment in Irish history, it was not unconnected to wider discussions now taking place around the world concerning gender, reproductive rights, the future of religion, Church–State relationships, democracy and social movements. With this Forum, we want to prompt some anthropological interpretations of Ireland's repeal of the Eighth Amendment as a matter concerning not only reproductive rights, but also questions of life and death, faith and shame, women and men, state power and individual liberty, and more. We also ask what this event might mean (if anything) for other societies dealing with similar issues?

Key words abortion, reproductive rights, Ireland, social change, Repeal the 8th

The Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution, which was approved in 1983, banned abortion in the country. In 2018, the Irish public voted to 'Repeal the 8th' by a resounding majority (67%) that surprised most observers (Kelly 2018). Though 'Repeal' – as this specific political process became known – reflected distinctive local dynamics, it was not unconnected to wider discussions now taking place around the world concerning gender, reproductive rights, the future of religion, Church–State relationships, democracy and social movements. In this Forum, we want to prompt some anthropological interpretations of Ireland's repeal of the Eighth Amendment. What was it like? And we want to ask what this event might mean (if anything) for other societies dealing with similar issues.

Both the outcome of the referendum, and the political campaigning that led up to it, were watershed moments in Irish history. For months, the entire nation seemed to be focused on a single question: Should abortion be legal in Ireland? The event itself comprised an intense ritual of civil religion, albeit one through which the social position of the Catholic Church itself would ultimately be (re)evaluated. Through the imagery and ideas of the various formal campaigns engaging the referendum, as well as through the talk characteristic of the referendum's informal spaces, the act of voting itself became a matter not only of reproductive rights, but of questions of life and death, faith and shame, women and men, state power and individual liberty, and more. National discourses and intimate conversations – in major media, around kitchen tables, on doorsteps – were overcome by passionate debate. Telephone poles were covered from top to bottom with abortion imagery and messages, yielding a sometimes alien streetscape of foetal icons floating above footpaths and freeways. As opposing rallies were staged in town squares, canvassers knocked on the doors of strangers urging a vote one way or another. Matters conventionally

held to be private, such as sexuality and pregnancy, were thrust into public view, as questions of political and public consequence crossed into home and hearth. It seemed as though no aspect of social life was untouched by the event: gender and generation, kinship and family, party politics and grassroots activism, morality and medicine, nation and culture – the referendum crosscut each and brought them into new relations with each other.

But we believe the 2018 referendum was in fact a matter of great consequence not only for Ireland, but for other locations in Europe and elsewhere, where similar issues are today in the forefront of public debates. One way to assess this claim is to look at the vote in terms of the politics of gender and reproduction in liberal democracies today. Read against a background of Brexit (Green *et al*. 2016; Franklin 2019) and a host of reactionary/populist electoral results and political manoeuvres elsewhere, the Irish abortion vote invites careful consideration. In the context of a global wave of reactionary, explicitly anti-feminist politics (Franklin and Ginsburg 2019) in North and South America (Andaya and Mishtal 2017; Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2018), and in Europe (Castañón 2019) where governments attack 'gender ideology' and seek to roll back protections for reproductive rights (Kováts 2018), the result of the Irish referendum appears anomalous, and therefore of special anthropological interest.

Contrary to the above-mentioned examples, Ireland seems to be liberalising with respect to the political control of private life, and with respect to the question of gender equality in society. For example, the abortion referendum followed a similar vote on same-sex marriage three years earlier, a vote that also resulted in a resounding public endorsement of marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples. Whereas reactionary populism elsewhere is energised by the dangers that queers and feminists putatively pose to conventional norms of sexuality and gender, in Ireland new configurations of family gain mainstream recognition even as feminist activists claim victory in overcoming decades of (Church-authorised) social control of female sexuality. If the populist wave is a reaction against a certain construction of 'gender' as threatening to the conventional order of things, a threat also racialised when paired with discourses pertaining to migration and 'native' populations, should we then consider gender as a central analytic for understanding contemporary shifts in political orders in Ireland and elsewhere (Briggs 2017)?

The change in Ireland's reproductive regime may also be interpreted as an ultimate proof of the softening power of the Catholic Church in the country. Since the scandals emerging in the 1990s concerning abuses in state-subsidised and Church-run welfare, health and education institutions, the moral authority and social prestige of the Catholic Church has collapsed. The 2016 national census showed the highest ever increase (73%) in people declaring affiliation with no religion, and a steady growth of non-Catholic and non-Christian denominations in Ireland. Nevertheless, 78.3% of the population identify as Catholic. Moreover, closely following Repeal, when Pope Francis visited the country in 2018, the Taoiseach (prime minister) insisted that the vast majority of Irish still do not want a complete separation of Church and State. Thus, while the latest events point to the major transformation of the fabric of Irish social life, especially in the demise of a homogenous Irish-Catholic identity and in weakened Church power over matters pertaining to sexuality, the secularisation process in Ireland and the separation of Church and State is far from straightforward. While older forms of Catholic devotion, such as those described by Taylor (1995) might belong

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

to history, new religious identities continue to emerge, and the question of a secular Ireland begins to become intelligible.

But Repeal not only symbolised a major change in the relationship of the Church to the State and the public, perhaps even more importantly it signalled a shift in the Catholic institutions themselves. When the Eighth Amendment was adopted in 1983, Church hierarchies, as well as religious symbolism and values, took centre stage. In 2018, in contrast, they were pushed backstage, or remained tacit. For example, there was no direct reference to Catholic values and teaching in the 'Love Both' campaign against Repeal, and members of the Church hierarchy were not given space in the most prominent public TV and radio debates. While the Church did not change its stance on abortion and remains strongly interested in shaping social life in Ireland, it significantly shifted its strategy in influencing public opinion by 'outsourcing' the task of canvassing and lobbying to seemingly secular organisations, such as the Iona Institute, which purposely hide their Church affiliation. This specific move signals an important shift in Church politics, and a move towards the paradigm of transparency (Pelkmans 2009). To date this strategy has been mostly seen among certain ideological movements involved in development. However, as Repeal shows, it has become an important (even if not always successful) tactic of Churches, which remain interested in influencing political and social spheres of Western societies, allowing religious forces to hide their controversial agendas from public scrutiny and rebrand themselves as neutral.

Another important question that the abortion referendum in Ireland prompted concerns the future of modern democracy, especially in the light of the growing mistrust of state institutions and political systems of the West. The referendum was ostensibly achieved in a process of direct democracy. The referendum was, however, not just an expression of the state's willingness to have citizens' voices heard on an issue of the utmost importance but was also simply a legislative necessity as any amendment to the Irish Constitution requires a public vote. What proved unique about this referendum was the Citizens' Assembly – one of the first attempts in deliberative democracy in the Western World (Farrell *et al*. 2013; Lang 2007). The Citizens' Assembly was established in 2016 by the then-Taoiseach Enda Kenny, to consider the repeal of the Eighth Amendment, as well as other issues. The Assembly consisted of 99 randomly chosen citizens, working with an advisory group of five experts (a medical lawyer, two constitutional lawyers and two obstetricians). In relation to abortion, the Assembly was tasked with voting in favour of or against repealing the Eighth Amendment, as well as producing non-binding recommendations for envisaged Oireachtas legislation. The incorporation of this novel democratic tool has been highly prized by commentators, who not only announced a major shift in Irish political culture but also pointed to Ireland as an exemplary leader of guiding a transformation of fatigued Western democracy (McGreevy 2018; Humpherys 2016). In this context, the Citizen Assembly, as a new 'technology of democracy', had been announced quickly as a remedy for reducing levels of mistrust in state institutions and democratic governance (Farrell *et al*. 2018; Suiter *et al*. 2016; Suiter 2018). However, while the Citizens' Assembly on the one hand demonstrated an innovative side of Irish politics, it also exposed a crisis in Irish political culture, in which old relationships binding politicians and their constituencies through patronage and clientelism proved broken and characterised by mutual lack of trust and disconnection (Bax 1970; Komito 1984; Gibbon and Higgins 1974; Coakley 2006; Thomsen and Suiter 2016). Unable to read popular moods, unsure if Irish people were ready for the change, Irish politicians feared to take responsibility for calling the

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

referendum themselves. Their induction of the Citizens' Assembly has been seen by many as 'Kicking the can of responsibility down the road' (Clifford 2016), a way of avoiding taking a lead on the abortion issue, rather than a progressive step to cede some legislative power to ordinary people.

Political leadership on abortion rights was therefore somewhat dubious, and Repeal might rather be interpreted as a culmination of many years of activism and organising (De Londras 2015, 2018). The movement was driven especially by on-the-ground, grass-roots feminists such as those who founded the Abortion Rights Campaign (Mullally 2018; see also De Zordo *et al*. 2017). On an annual basis in Dublin, the yearly 'March for Choice', featuring often irreverent and confrontational feminist iconography, kept abortion rights visible as a question facing the nation. In October 2012, the death of Savita Halappanavar from complications related to a septic miscarriage provoked a public outcry. Halappanavar had requested termination of pregnancy but was refused by her hospital, an injustice highlighting the manifest dangers of Ireland's abortion law for pregnant women. Halappanavar became something of a martyr for abortion rights. The activist roots of the referendum were symbolised by ubiquitous black 'REPEAL' sweatshirts, designed by Anna Cosgrave, that quickly became iconic of the movement as a whole. On the day of the repeal vote, Dublin Castle filled with jubilant crowds celebrating victory. In an era of seemingly intractable political paralysis and mutual distrust, perhaps the movement for reproductive rights in Ireland provides a counter-note to the bleak pessimism and division facing polities everywhere.

What then does Repeal signify in a transnational context? First, while abortion issues are a prerogative of national legislation, they may also be the subject of international scrutiny. After 1983, the Irish abortion question was repeatedly taken up by international tribunals, including the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights; it was also investigated by Amnesty International. During the Citizens' Assembly, World Health Organization representatives made some of the strongest impacts on members of the public, leading to particularly liberal recommendations for new abortion legislation. Second, the history of Ireland 'exporting' its 'abortion problem' elsewhere – as when Irish women were forced to travel to Britain to seek abortion services – became a focus of the discourse of the referendum. The highly influential 'In Her Shoes' initiative, a grassroots campaign gathering together and publicising the testimonies of women harmed by Ireland's abortion ban, often featured stories of the specific difficulties involved in travelling to Britain during a 'crisis pregnancy'. Third, the mobilisation of the Irish diaspora and the 'home to vote' phenomenon raised the international visibility of Repeal, and ultimately contributed directly to votes in support of it. Finally, on the heels of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the referendum became first political event in which, to protect the integrity of voting, Google issued a blanket ban on all referendum advertising, while Facebook only allowed advertising paid for by Irish campaigners. Ultimately, Ireland for a moment became ground zero in an international contest over 'reproductive governance' (Morgan and Roberts 2012).

For that reason, with this Forum we want then to ask what makes Ireland different at this moment? This invites ethnographic specificity; many of the reflections that follow delve into distinctive details of Irish social life and history. At the same time, this distinctiveness also elicits comparison, and so some of our authors point to other contexts where gender politics, Church–State relations, and so on, have recently been thrown into question. Above all, the Irish case illustrates at least one example of

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

dramatic social change driven by grassroots activism. In the context of a world increasingly governed by authoritarian regimes, perhaps the Irish example offers a ray of hope in regard to the powers of democracy.

Ela Drążkiewicz *and Thomas Strong*
Department of Anthropology
Maynooth University
Maynooth
Ireland
edrazkiewicz@gmail.com
thomas.strong@mu.ie
[Corrections added on September 12, 2020, after first online publication: The authors "A Jamie Saris" and "Pauline Garvey" removed.]

References

Andaya, E. and J. Mishtal 2017. 'The erosion of rights to abortion care in the United States: a call for a renewed anthropological engagement with the politics of abortion', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 31: 40–59.

Bax, M. G. 1970. 'Patronage Irish style: Irish politicians as brokers', *Sociologische Gids* 17: 179–91.

Briggs, L. 2017. *How all politics became reproductive politics: from welfare reform to foreclosure to Trump*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Castañón, S. 2019. 'A feminist movement for us all', *Jacobin* (https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/05/spain-feminist-movement-unidas-podemos) Accessed 5 May 2019.

Clifford, M. 2016. 'Government problems: kicking the can of responsibility down the road.' *Irish Examiner* 13 September (https://www.irishexaminer.com/viewpoints/columnists/michael-clifford/government-problems-kicking-the-can-of-responsibility-down-the-road-420684.html) Accessed June 2020.

Coakley, J. 2006. Society and political culture, in M. G. Gallagher and J. Coakley (eds.), *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 36–71. Oxford: Routledge.

De Londras, F. 2015. 'Constitutionalizing fetal rights: a salutary tale from Ireland', *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* 22: 243–89.

De Londras, F. 2018. 'Repeal the 8th, activism, social movements and constitutional change in Ireland', *Constitution making and constitutional change blog* (https://constitutional-change.com/repeal-the-8th-activism-social-movement-and-constitutional-change-in-ireland/) Accessed June 2020.

De Zordo, S., J. Mishtal and L. Anton 2017. *A fragmented landscape: abortion governance and protest logics in Europe*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Farrell, D. M., E. O'Malley and J. Suiter 2013. 'Deliberative democracy in action Irish-style: The 2011 We the Citizens pilot Citizens' Assembly', *Irish Political Studies* 28: 99–113.

Farrell, D. M., J. Suiter and C. Harris 2018. '"Systematizing" constitutional deliberation: the 2016–18 citizens' assembly in Ireland', *Irish Political Studies* 1–11.

Franklin, S. 2019. 'Nostalgic nationalism: how a discourse of sacrificial reproduction helped fuel Brexit Britain', *Cultural Anthropology* 34: 41–52.

Franklin, S. and F. Ginsburg 2019. 'Reproductive politics in the age of Brexit and Trump', *Cultural Anthropology* 34: 3–9.

Gibbon, P. and M. D. Higgins 1974. Patronage, tradition and modernisation: the case of the Irish 'Gombeenman', in C. Clapham (ed.), *Private patronage and public power: political clientelism in the modern state*, 27–44. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan.

Green, S. *et al*. 2016. 'Brexit Referendum: first reactions from anthropology', *Social Anthropology* 24: 478–502.

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

Humpherys, J. 2016. 'Why Ireland's citizens' assembly is a model for Europe. Unthinkable: deliberative democracy experiment shows Ireland "trusts its citizens, instead of fearing them"', *The Irish Times* 27 November (https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/why-ireland-s-citizens-assembly-is-a-model-for-europe-1.2876808?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fculture%2Fwhy-ireland-s-citizens-assembly-is-a-model-for-europe-1.2876808) Accessed June 2020.

Kelly, F. 2018. 'Yes vote shows overwhelming desire for change that nobody foresaw', *The Irish Times* 25 May.

Komito, L. 1984. 'Irish clientelism: a reappraisal', *The Economic and Social Review* 15: 173–94.

Kováts, E. 2018. 'Questioning consensuses: right-wing populism, anti-populism, and the threat of "gender ideology"', *Sociological Research Online* 23: 528–38.

Lang, A. 2007. "But is it for real? The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly as a model of state-sponsored citizen empowerment', *Politics & Society* 35: 35–70.

McGreevy, R. 2018. 'Citizens' Assembly is an example to the world, says chairwoman', *The Irish Times* 21 June (https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/citizens-assembly-is-an-example-to-the-world-says-chairwoman-1.3539370?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fnews%2Fireland%2Firish-news%2Fcitizens-assembly-is-an-example-to-the-world-says-chairwoman-1.3539370) Accessed June 2020.

Morgan, L. and E. Roberts 2012. 'Reproductive governance in Latin America', *Anthropology & Medicine* 19: 241–54.

Mullally, U. 2018. *Repeal the 8th*. London: Ubound.

Pelkmans, M. 2009. 'The "transparency" of Christian proselytizing in Kyrgyzstan', *Anthropological Quarterly* 82: 423–46.

Pinheiro-Machado, R. and L. Mury Scalco 2018. 'The Bolsonaro effect', *Jacobin* (https://jacobinmag.com/2018/10/brazil-election-bolsonaro-corruption-security-pt) Accessed 5 May 2019.

Suiter, J. 2018. 'Deliberation in action – Ireland's abortion referendum', *Political Insight* 9: 30–2.

Suiter, J., D. M. Farrell and E. O'Malley 2016. 'When do deliberative citizens change their opinions? Evidence from the Irish Citizens' Assembly', *International Political Science Review* 37: 198–212.

Taylor, L. (1995) *Occasions of faith: an anthropology of irish catholics*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Thomsen, S. R. and J. Suiter 2016. Candidates, parties and constituency relations: a study in Irish clientelism, in J. A. Elkink and D. Farrell (eds.), *The act of voting: identities, institutions and locale*, 161–77. London: Routledge.

NANCY SCHEPER-HUGHES

Abortion in Ireland and the silence of Pope Francis

The midwife-abortionist, not the prostitute, is perhaps the oldest profession. Saint Brigid of Kildare (*Naomh Bríd*), a beloved patron saint of Ireland, was also a patron of midwives, babies, pregnant women, and of children born to single mothers. One of the miracles attributed to her was her intervention on behalf of a nun who failed to keep her vow of chastity and became pregnant, as the lore would have it, 'through youthful desire of pleasure and her womb swelled large with a child'. Saint Brigid blessed the nun's belly 'causing the child to disappear, without coming to birth, and without pain'. One might say that Saint Brigid is also the patron saint of 'holy' abortionists.

In 1983, the Irish Constitution amended the law that gave the newly fertilised egg the same right to life as the woman carrying the embryo. But the history of abortion in Ireland began much earlier, with colonisation. The UK Offences Against the Person Act prohibited abortion in Ireland beginning in 1861. The Catholic Church's position

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

on abortion has changed many times since Thomas Aquinas, Pope Innocent III and Pope Gregory XIV believed that a foetus does not have a soul until 'quickening' when the foetus begins to announce its liveliness. Until then Catholic teaching was vague about just when the foetus was endowed with a soul, or ensouled. Abortion before 'quickening' was not seen as sinful or criminal. Until the late 19th century, abortion in Europe and North America was still treated as a private family matter. The state was not yet involved. Early abortions were fairly common. Vaginal douching and 'cocktails' of herbs like pennyroyal were used to stimulate a 'late' menstruation. Abortion services and devices were advertised in newspapers in coded texts.

Even in countries where abortion was legally prohibited, they were rarely prosecuted. I once worked closely with a white South African police detective in Durban in 2004 on an international organ trafficking scheme. Louis H. was a devout Christian who had earlier in his career been assigned to investigate illegal abortion clinics in Durban. He changed his mind about abortion when he followed a tired Black woman emerging from an abortion clinic carrying a small cotton sack with the remains of her foetus, going home on a public bus. When he questioned her, the poor woman cried and the detective told me that he finally realised the suffering of women who were denied legal abortion by the state. 'That woman almost made me a feminist', he told me.

When Pope Francis arrived in Dublin in August 2018 to open the World Meeting of Families, he did not say anything about the abortion referendum. Could his silence on the Irish referendum be seen as a step toward what I have called 'the Conversion of Pope Francis' (Scheper-Hughes and Scheper-Hughes 2015)? The Pope's first 'conversion' on abortion was the announcement of an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (2015–2016) during which Francis offered a temporary dispensation to those who had 'procured' an abortion. During the Jubilee Year the Pope allowed priests rather than bishops to absolve and forgive women who confessed and regretted their abortion. The Pope said nothing about Canon Law 1398 that condemns those who procure a completed abortion to 'automatic excommunication' (Menzies 2018). Recently he also described those seeking abortion as 'hiring a hit man' (Horowitz 2019). I know enough about death squads and gunmen to criticise the Pope's violent metaphor as insufferable and grotesque (Scheper-Hughes 2010).

Early abortion is not like the murder of young men in Brazilian favelas who have been killed by hit men recruited by police to exterminate a class of young poor and unemployed Black men. What does the Holy Father know about the difference between paid vigilante murderers and doctors who are paid to perform an abortion? Has he ever seen a sad middle-aged Xhosa woman in South Africa dragging herself back from an abortion clinic onto a bus, carrying a cloth shopping bag with the remains of her abortion? She would likely place the miniscule remains on her bureau lit with a candle and pray to her ancestor spirits.

I am not suggesting that abortion is nothing. It is not like a tooth extraction, as some callous women have said. Even the loss of a baby tooth requires a tooth fairy. However, there are no embryo fairies. Still, a lot more can be said about the moral and biological life of the embryo. Here I learned a great deal from the midwives I worked with in Northeast Brazil. Mothers in extreme poverty and scarcities of all kinds imagined their dead or dying 'angel babies' as fated to premature death by hunger, disease or passive neglect in the face of everyday violence. As they understand it, not every

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

embryo or foetus had the strength, the force, the will or the desire to survive. I think that would be accepted by neonatologists. A great many will die by 'natural' causes.

The Catholic midwives with whom I lived and studied in Northeast Brazil saw embryos and foetuses differently than Catholic clerics. They did not see embryos as persons. The unborn were often referred to as *criatoras* (creatures) while sickly infants were described as little birds whose trajectory might be a short passage on Earth on their way to a larger spirit world. Some fragile and pale infants were let go by their mothers as 'not wanting' to live. I met priests in Northeast Brazil who refused to baptise dead or dying infants, sadly turning the mothers away. The priests would say that 'Jesus does not want any more angel babies', to which these women would say, 'If Jesus doesn't want our angel babies, who else could want them?'

Padre 'Fernando' was one such priest, who told me he could no longer bear having to baptise angel babies day after day. He asked me for help. He wanted me to tell the women who believed that their infants wanted to die everything there was to know about birth control. 'All of it!' he said: the pill, the devices and the morning after pill. 'But Padre,' I said, 'the morning after pill would be an abortion.' He replied: 'Tell them in detail every form of family planning and then at the end you can say that only the ineffective and useless "Billings method" is approved by the Pope.'

I wonder if Pope Francis is aware of priests like Padre Fernando, the midwives in Northeast Brazil or even the story of Saint Brigid. If so, his immediate silence about the Irish referendum was appropriate. When Argentina's Congress was preparing and analysing a law to decriminalise abortion, Francis sent a letter to all Argentines imploring them to defend unborn life. He asked his compatriots to 'make your contribution in the defence of life and justice', to 'improve the world with your work to take care of the weakest'. However, at the end of the letter, the Pope apologised, saying that 'For those who may feel offended by some of my gestures, I ask your forgiveness. I can assure you that my intention is to do good and that at my age my interests have little to do with me personally.' Argentina, like Chile, was poised to become the third nation in Latin America – after Cuba and Uruguay – to legalise abortion. In 2017 Chile managed to pass a strictly limited abortion law allowing abortion on three grounds: when a woman's life is in danger, when there are foetal anomalies incompatible with life and following rape. In Argentina, abortions can only be performed legally by a certified doctor to avoid danger to life or health of the mother, or if the pregnancy was the result of rape or an attempt against the purity of a feeble-minded or demented woman. The reproductive rights of ordinary women have not been recognised by these laws.

The Pope never sent a letter to the people of Ireland like he did to the people of Argentina. Engaging with the Irish public about abortion during his first visit could mean his having to face angry protesters and demonstrations. The deep anger and resentment in Ireland toward the sins of the Church is the legacy of clerical child sex abuse and the suffering of generations of pregnant women who were treated as social outcasts and sent to Church-run Mother and Child homes where their 'illegitimate' infants were taken from them for adoption.

I prefer to think that the Pope's silence in Ireland was the silence of discernment and compassion. In his Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera*, Francis wrote that everyone needs consolation because no one is spared suffering, pain and misunderstanding, and that silence can be healing. 'Sometimes silence can be helpful', he said, especially when one cannot find the right or adequate words in response to the questions of those who suffer. In his encyclical *Laudato Si, Praise to you, My Lord*, Francis

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

writes: ‘We have to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.’ Perhaps the final conversion of Pope Francis will lead him to care as much about suffering mothers – the cries of poor women who are forced by a moral imperative to reproduce again and again – as about suffering Sister Earth. Hopefully the Pope will come to understand that while some abortions are done without enough reflection, others are done with sadness and with love for the children a mother can already barely nurture, feed, clothe and shelter. Maybe he will find it inside himself to say, as he did with respect to actively gay priests in the Vatican, ‘Who am I to judge?’

Nancy Scheper-Hughes
Department of Anthropology
University of California
Berkeley, California
USA
nsh@berkeley.edu

References

Horowitz, J. 2019. ‘Pope Francis says abortion, even of a sick fetus, is like hiring a “hitman”’, *The New York Times* 25 May.

Menzies, G. 2018. ‘Most heinous sin? Misogynistic legacy of Canon Law and abortion’, *The Irish Times* 19 June.

Scheper-Hughes, N. 2010. Face to Face with Abidoral Queiroz: death squads and democracy in Northeast Brazil, in L. K. Cheliotis (ed.), *Roots, rites and sites of resistance*, 150–87. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Scheper-Hughes, N. and J. Scheper-Hughes 2015. ‘The final conversion of Pope Francis’, *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies* Spring: 13–15.

HUGH TURPIN

Catholic scandal, the referendum, and the ongoing reconfiguration of Irish moral stances

Scandal has contaminated the Irish Church, but it has also contributed to the production and transmission of new moral stances. For growing numbers, the ‘good Irish person’ is one who recoils from the abuses of the theocratic past and seeks to bring about Irish freedom from institutionalised religious influence. The referendum demonstrated the growth of this ethic. Clergy were squirrelled away. Scandal made the religious past and its symbols into something toxic to be hidden for the pro-life side, who instead attempted to reframe themselves with secularised rhetoric around equality, fairness, social justice, medical science and nationalism. By contrast, scandal was an affordance for their opponents, who could draw on revelations around the abuse of women and children in repressive institutions such as Mother and Baby Homes to cut through the pablum of ‘Love Both’. Both sides attempted to tap into a deep-seated schema of Irishness as rebellious struggle for freedom from oppression, but this found a more

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

natural home in the Repeal campaign than in pro-life efforts to channel anti-elite populism. Perhaps in some sense the tarnished image of Holy Catholic Ireland contributed to apparent resistance to reactionary politics: who wants to go back to *that*?

Most of the population, however, appear to be content to retain some links to Catholicism, and scandal may even have empowered them to shape this relationship in more favourable terms. This 'cultural Catholicism' is perhaps best understood as a spectrum of bespoke stances which have peeled free from hierarchical obeisance and strategically seek out ideal accommodationist mid-points between personal freedom and lateral social and familial traditions. The referendum forced cultural Catholicism to reveal a moral stance on a key issue, and in so doing shook the foundations of this tacit deal of limited lingering institutional influence in return for identity and social harmony. Prior to the Referendum, it was often possible for religious conservatives to harness the ambiguity of cultural Catholicism and present themselves as spokespeople for a silent, cowed majority: 'the 78.3%' at last count. This kind of talk is now impossible. In the referendum's wake, some enraged conservative clergy and Catholic media pundits took aim at cultural Catholicism and threatened to punish yes voters and mass non-attenders by refusing Baptism and First Communion to their children. But if the referendum both displayed the public viability of stances predicated on Irish freedom from Catholicism and revealed the distance between cultural Catholicism and the Church, it may yet turn out to have at least some unanticipated contradictory effects.

While conservative churchmen seem to have stepped down from the brink of breaking their potentially-useful 'anthropological link' to the Irish population, we should pause to consider how Repeal will in its turn reconfigure conservative Catholic subcultures. If the campaigning effectively demonstrated just how tainted conservative Catholicism has become, it also perhaps lit the spark for retraction and rebranding. The last 25 years have seen the moral hand of secularism grow inestimably as a stark narrative has developed around the duty to address the evils of the Catholic past and purge the ongoing vestiges of theocracy in the present. Conservatives lacked something comparable. But swiftly after the results came out, many pro-life voices dropped their pretences around being spokespeople for a silent majority. Post-referendum discourse suggests the Irish religious right is now free to reconstruct itself as a moral minority standing bravely and autonomously against a brainwashed 'culture of death' which celebrates infanticide as freedom. Such framing may be used as a gambit to drown out the taint of paedophilia and reclaim the mantle of moral purity. At the same time, the victory may dampen further cultural Catholic moral disaffiliation by increasing perceptions that the Church is now 'harmless' and no longer threatens secular freedoms. Much media discourse seems to assume the country is somehow immune to a rightward swing and that Ireland's progressive gains are irreversible. However, in a long-term future that potentially features increasing geopolitical and economic uncertainty, who knows where the combination of a morally reinvigorated 'outsider version' of the religious right, ongoing ethno-cultural affiliation with Catholicism, and fading memories of theocracy might lead?

Hugh Turpin
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast
Northern Ireland
H.Turpin@qub.ac.uk
[Corrections added on September 12, 2020, after first online publication: The authors "Fiona Murphy" removed.]

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

A JAMIE SARIS

On the vagaries of conservative thought: success and paradox in the campaign to Repeal the 8th

The Repeal the 8th campaign capped a heady time in Ireland where decisive majorities (roughly 2:1) passed significant constitutional changes via referendum, approving same sex marriage in 2015 and stripping the pernicious 'equal protection' clause embodied in the Eighth Amendment out of the Irish Constitution in 2018. This victory opened up a legal pathway for modern reproductive services in the country and, in the opinion of many pundits, marked an irreversible movement of Ireland towards an imagined European 'modernity'.

Without diminishing the success of these campaigns, I want to suggest that the mainstream of their rhetoric was much less radical than most popular analyses portrayed. Not surprisingly, I am also sceptical of modern Conservative complaints that a 'liberal consensus' now exercises hegemony in Ireland, marginalising 'traditional conservatives' and (in terms of that insidious phrase imported from the American culture war) 'people of faith'. Instead, I want to suggest that both successful campaigns cleverly exploited a difference in 'conservative' thought, one that is wider in Ireland for historical reasons than in other Western countries.

I refer to the gap between the small 'c' and the big 'C' conservative. The latter is committed to ideological consistency and defeating political enemies and, when religiously tinged, these enemies are 'evil'. This has become the dominant strain of Right-wing politics in the Anglosphere (especially the USA) as centrally controlled Conservative messaging has structured politics right down to the local level in increasingly Manichaean terms. By small 'c' conservative, on the other hand, I mean people with local, even traditional, sensibilities, but embodying these commitments overwhelmingly in actual human relationships. In the same-sex marriage referendum, this focus on local relationships was masterfully embodied in a famous YouTube ad portraying a nervous, middle-class young man ringing on 'typical' doors in a widely conceived 'Irish space', politely asking for 'Sinéad's Hand' in marriage (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qxkq6Wd3h9U). This ad reworks a culturally valued custom, asking for the blessing of parents for a heterosexual union, to model what same-sex couples were (uncomfortably) having to ask all of Ireland. Thus, this short film cleverly reframes a seemingly big change in *polis* in terms of a more local (even traditional) discomfort in *oikos*, where the viewer is cast as '*that* person' constantly sticking one's nose into 'the business' of others.

It's hard to think of as successful an advertisement in the Repeal the 8th debate. There were several ponderous No ads, arguing for the sanctity of life in Church teachings, and repeating the Youth Defence line that abortion = murder. At the same time, there was a steady stream of 'Yes' ads, not bad, but not especially memorable. The genius of the Repeal the 8th campaign, though, was in another sphere entirely. A quarter century after the so-called 'X Case' and the recognition of European Law that allowed Irish sources to advertise and facilitate the provision of information for reproductive services in the UK (under the protected rights to information and travel), as

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

many as 200,000 Irish women (and more than that number in some estimates) had taken the ferry ride or purchased the airplane trip to the UK for abortion services.

The Yes campaign used such brute statistics to great tactical effect. Well before the ad war heated up in earnest, they ran a quieter campaign, encouraging women to tell their stories of availing reproductive services in Britain over tea at kitchen tables and roasts at Sunday dinners. The sheer numbers of such women meant that, in a small country, very few Irish middle-class families could not draw one and usually more first-degree relationships with women with these experiences. Thus, when the symbolic war escalated in the last few weeks before the vote, the overwhelming majority of 'Middle Ireland' did not hear the abstract phrase 'abortion = murder', but 'You are calling "*my*" wife, daughter, cousin and/or aunt a murderer.' The success of this strategy was shown in the last days before the vote as homilies from some enthusiastic priests in a scandal-tainted Church framed a Yes vote as the victory of 'baby-killers'. These priests looked on in shock as parishioners of all ages walked out, not just in Dublin, but in such supposedly conservative redoubts as Limerick and Castlebar. At that point, I (at least) knew that the referendum had been won.

This virtuoso symbolic work in the space between types of conservative thought was a tactical success, but it has strategic limitations. Not all forms of oppression and exclusion can be so easily worked into this space between the mischievous messaging of modern Conservative thought and the innate decency of many conservatives. Subject positions like 'homeless', 'junkie', perhaps some immigrant and many queer identities are not so easily attached to the respectable 'my' of middle-class life. Solidarity is an achievement of political struggle, and shades of this sentiment cannot forever rely on an untheorised 'family' and a sort of respectable 'our' to be granted. A truly inclusive society is in front of us, not in a nostalgia for supposedly simpler bonds of 'natural' affection, but in a future where we finally realise our shared humanity.

A Jamie Saris
Department of Anthropology
Maynooth University
Maynooth
Ireland
ajamie.Saris@mu.ie
[Corrections added on September 12, 2020, after first online publication: The authors "Ela Drążkiewicz, Thomas Strong and Pauline Garvey" removed.]

JOANNA MISHTAL

As Church–State relations cool, reproductive rights expand

From an anthropological and feminist perspective, the Repeal referendum in Ireland highlights the decisive role of Church–State relations in shaping policies that in turn shape gendered experiences. In particular, the Repeal stands out as an extraordinary democratic moment which made visible the disjunction between the Catholic Church and Irish society. This public revelation is a democratic feat when compared with Poland (another predominantly Catholic nation), where, despite a growing gap

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

between the Church and Polish society, a referendum on abortion may be impossible in the foreseeable future. A brief comparison between Ireland and Poland is interesting to consider through the Repeal vote lens.

Ireland has historically maintained a form of religious regime through power constellations that privileged the Church's role in Irish medicine, schools, politics and public life, creating the monopoly on moral knowledge on which the Church's public authority rested (Bax 1991). Interdependencies between the state and the Church also existed, as the latter fulfilled vital roles for the state by managing healthcare and education. This natural order of things obscured how religion ordered material, human experiences (Carrette 2000), especially in matters of reproduction and sexuality. Since the 1970s, however, Irish religiosity has been declining, and contestations of the abortion law have emerged from many parts of society, including the medical community (Mishtal 2017). Yet, because the fall in affiliation significantly lags behind the fall in practices, the Church has been able to maintain the national narrative of Ireland as a 'Catholic nation'. I have argued, based on a parallel case of Poland, that this illusion of a Catholic consensus (based on affiliation rather than religiosity) is critical in the Church's ability to maintain its structurally embedded position in the government and influence key policies, including restrictions on reproductive and LGBTQ rights (Mishtal 2015). In fact, when the Catholic Church reasserted its political role during the power vacuum after the collapse of state socialism and severely restricted abortion in the newly democratic Poland in 1993, the bishops categorically argued against a national referendum claiming that moral issues may not be subject to a popular vote. Thus, despite feminist and other pro-democracy groups' campaigning for a referendum, the Polish abortion law became one of the harshest in Europe through a top-down legislative decree. In contrast, the Irish referendum and the Marriage Equality Act referendum in 2015 show how a liberal democracy *can* work, in part by denying the special status of the Church in policy-making.

The Repeal referendum also illuminates the fact that, despite the high Catholic affiliation of 78% among the Irish, there is a clear acknowledgment of the need to address the reality of Irish women travelling abroad for abortion and a growing use of telemedicine to ship abortion pills to Ireland (Norman and Dickens 2017). In other words, abortion as a need, decision and experience has always been in Ireland. Thus, as the new abortion law is implemented, it will be important for researchers to pay close ethnographic attention to women's experiences (can abortion be accessed in Donegal as well as in Dublin?), and understand the degree to which the law makes the service locally viable given its restriction to only 12 gestational weeks. It is quite likely that many Irish women will still find it necessary to travel abroad. Equally important will be studying up to understand how healthcare providers and policy-makers ensure (or not) that the law becomes a reality in practice. The Repeal referendum therefore, far from closing a chapter, opens many new avenues for engaged anthropology that may contribute to informing how reproductive health policies are understood and implemented in Ireland and beyond.

Joanna Mishtal
Department of Anthropology
University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida
USA
joanna.Mishtal@ucf.edu

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

References

Bax, M. 1991. Religious regimes and state-formation: toward a research perspective, in E. R. Wolf (ed.), *Religious regimes and state-formation: perspectives from European ethnology*, 7–27. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Carrette, J. 2000. *Foucault and religion: spiritual corporality and political spirituality*. New York: Routledge.

Mishtal, J. 2015. *The politics of morality: the church, the state and reproductive rights in postsocialist Poland*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Mishtal, J. 2017. Quiet contestations of Irish abortion law: reproductive health politics in flux, in S. Stettner, K. Ackerman, K. Burnett and T. Hay (eds.), *Transcending borders: abortion in the past and present*, 187–202. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Norman, W. V. and B. M. Dickens 2017. 'Abortion by telemedicine: an equitable option for Irish women', *British Medical Journal* 357: j2237.

HELENA WULFF

Abortion in Ireland: from the Swedish point of view

Change happens quickly in Ireland – once it happens. If Ireland has become liberal all of a sudden in relation to abortion, Sweden has been liberal to some extent since 1938, when abortion became legal there – with certain restrictions. There had to be medical or humanitarian reasons. Embarrassingly, even eugenic reasons were included at the time. The law has been amended a number of times, incorporating social medical reasons and birth defects as grounds for abortion. The current abortion law was introduced in 1974. It allows 'free' abortion, meaning that the woman does not have to refer to any reason for seeking an abortion until the 18th week of pregnancy. Compared to the USA or Ireland, the abortion law in Sweden has not stirred much debate. To choose abortion without providing reasons has on the whole been regarded as a feminist right, and one way of facilitating women's increasing presence in the work place. However, in 2017, an unprecedented situation occurred: a midwife who applied for different job openings in Sweden informed her potential employers that she would not take part in abortions because of her faith. Her applications were rejected. The midwife took the case to court, but lost.

The abortion law is still taken for granted in Sweden, not least because it is a secular country. In 2000, the Protestant Church of Sweden was formally separated from the State, but long before that, in 1951, it became legal to leave the previously mandatory Church of Sweden. The rates of practising Catholics and Muslims have increased somewhat with immigration, but agnosticism is the major stance in the population as a whole. In line with the growing right-wing movement across Europe, there is a right-wing party, the Sweden Democrats, gaining momentum in the country. It is significant that the Sweden Democrats use, successfully, the same strategy of disguising controversial views and rebranding as a neutral organisation, as the Catholic Church in Ireland is doing, in order to get its political influence back. The Sweden Democrats are too clever to argue against abortion, but they do suggest a more restrictive law.

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

Having conducted two major studies in Ireland, the first one on dance and social memory (Wulff 2007) and the second on writing as craft and career (Wulff 2017), I did notice that contrary to Sweden (where I live), attitudes to abortion were dramatically divided in Ireland. This issue was not a part of my research agenda, but it came up anyway. One of the writers, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne (2003: 5), who has been engaged in campaigns to repeal the Eighth Amendment, has also written on abortion in her fiction. A short story portrays a young working-class girl, who is an ambitious student at Trinity College in early 1970s Dublin. When she gets pregnant, she visits a clinic in a back street, where the staff try to persuade her 'to get married, to consider, adoption, to keep the baby. All impossible for her.' And she would not make her exams. So they give her a London phone number. Together with her sister, she goes to a public phone booth, bringing 'piles of fivepenny pieces', and calls the number. 'They told us discreetly, that the cost of the procedure plus a night in the clinic would be £300.' This was an unimaginable sum to these girls. So the girl drops out of university, has the baby and becomes an unmarried mother with a low-income office job. It goes without saying that Ní Dhuibhne was imagining a situation which could easily arise in the early 1970s in Ireland.

As I have an all-Ireland focus in my research, I find it important to include Northern Ireland here, not least because there have been key changes recently in relation to abortion: on 22 October 2019, abortion was finally decriminalised in Northern Ireland. This follows the rest of the United Kingdom. After many years of religious and political opposition to abortion, the government in Westminster introduced legislation legalising abortion. This was made possible, Éilís Ní Dhuibne says, because the Northern Ireland Assembly is not sitting and Northern Ireland is de facto ruled from Westminster for the time being. Anti-abortion sentiment is strong in Northern Ireland, she goes on, and in the Republic, but that fades into insignificance beside the fact that in 2019, for the first time, abortion is legal all over the island of Ireland. It is unlikely that this situation will change in the near future. Whether it will change in Sweden might have to do with how the Sweden Democrats do in the next general election.

Helena Wulff
Department of Social Anthropology
Stockholm University
Stockholm
Sweden
helena.Wulff@socant.su.se

References

Ní Dhuibhne, É. 2003. Wuff Wuff Wuff for de Valera, in *Midwife to the fairies: new and selected stories*, 1–8. Cork: Attic Press.

Wulff, H. 2007. *Dancing at the crossroads: memory and mobility in Ireland*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Wulff, H. 2017. *Rhythms of writing: an anthropology of Irish literature*. London: Bloomsbury.

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

BRIGITTINE FRENCH

'A decent way to talk about it': Savita, Irish womanhood and bare life

Certainly the successful referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the Irish Constitution should be viewed as a major victory for those concerned with human rights, gender equality and democratic processes in Ireland and around the globe. Nevertheless, there is value in our disciplinary propensity to look in the opposite direction of such commonly asserted truths, to examine taken-for-granted, common sense understandings of the social world (Dominguez and French 2020). In that direction, I ask: 'What might we see if we consider what *has not* changed with the progressive and much needed repeal?'

To begin to answer to that question, I turn to a particular ethnographic moment in that long struggle, the death of Savita Halappanavar and immediate responses to it in the final months of 2012. From this vantage point, I suggest that the repeal of the Eighth Amendment is not as radical a departure from the history of disciplining femininity within and by the modern Irish state as we may imagine. Rather, the horrible death of Savita Halappanavar became an icon of the lethal injustice women face when denied the right to abortion because she embodied long-standing and highly regimented notions of proper womanhood within the Irish state and family. Others, whose identities and subjectivities do not engender idealised womanhood, are still rendered mere vulnerable bodies whose deaths are not tragedies in contemporary forms of democratic governmentality.

When news broke in November 2012 of Savita Halappanavar's death from a septic miscarriage that doctors in Galway refused to accelerate through a termination, it seemed everywhere I went in Dublin people were talking about it. I mostly listened in what often were quiet, yet furious, exchanges among women who I had come to know while living there. Many of them attended candlelit vigils in honour of Savita and, some of them, marches to demand changes to abortion laws. The women that I knew were not abortion activists; they were outraged citizens of Ireland and the EU. One of them recently told me, 'The death of Savita, while a terrible tragedy, gave us a decent way to talk about it. Before, you just couldn't talk about it [abortion]'.

Decency is a commonly circulating word in Irish discourse and names a normative sense of respectable, moral behaviour that is necessarily culturally situated. It is a gendered concept in Ireland; to be recognised as a decent person by others and institutions, is, in part, to enact normative expectations of good moral behaviour as women and men (French 2018). Notions of decent Irish womanhood have a long history of regimentation by the Irish state since its foundation and have been firmly enshrined in the constitution, of which the Eighth Amendment is only a part. Broader notions of women's proper roles in service of the family and nation codified in article 41.2 remain powerful configurations of decent womanhood in Ireland, configurations that were instantiated in the too-short life of Savita Halappanavar.

Savita was a married woman in a heterosexual relationship. Savita wanted to be a mother and was eager to have the baby she was pregnant with when they both died. Savita was a woman of faith. Savita was a professional woman who put off beginning

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

her dentistry practice until after her baby was born (Holland 2013). In her life, Savita embodied the practices and identity of a good, modern woman in the Republic of Ireland. As such, the loss of her life was met with public outrage. Her death was a senseless sacrifice that led to national and international calls for democratic reform.

However, all such deaths at the hands of the sovereign democratic state are not understood to be tragedies. As Agamben (1998) has argued, some people are reduced to disposable bodies – 'bare life'; those individuals who can be killed, whose deaths are not a sacrifice. Bare life are those rendered killable by the state; they are not recognised as rights-bearing citizens equal to those whose deaths do matter. Before the repeal of the Eighth Amendment, all women in Ireland were potentially 'bare life' while pregnant, as the case of Savita Halapannavar horrifyingly demonstrates. After the repeal, some people still are. Those who seek legal abortion after 12 weeks and those who are trans/non-binary and seek abortion are not yet recognised as full citizens with respect to reproductive and human rights; they can be reduced to bare life by the state law which excludes them. The recent case of Sylva Tukula, a trans woman who died in an all-male Direct Provision centre in Galway and was buried without knowledge of family and friends, urges us to look more broadly at the state's regulation of gender, sexuality and femininity such that it may become lethal for those most marginal.

Brigittine French
Grinnell College
Grinnell, Iowa
USA
FRENCHB@Grinnell.EDU

References

Agamben, G. 1998. *Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Dominguez, V. and B. French 2020. *Anthropological lives: an introduction to the profession of anthropology*. Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

French, B. 2018. *Narratives of conflict, belonging, and the state: discourse and social life in post-war Ireland*. New York: Routledge.

Holland, K. 2013. *Savita: the tragedy that shook a nation*. London: Transworld Ireland.

PAULINE GARVEY

Facebook and Google: national media in Ireland

Over the course of a 16-month ethnography between 2018 and 2019, I spent quite some time sitting around kitchen tables in Dublin. Often the media was referred to when the tentative subject of the Repeal referendum arose. The topic carried the potential to be highly divisive. Televised debates were particularly pivotal and attracted a large viewership, and people who had had abortions spoke about their experiences on air and in print media in a way that starkly departed from the past. People acknowledged their

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

position on social media, but political advertisements from unknown sources appeared in forums too. In fact, in response to this seepage social media giants Facebook Ireland and later Google Ireland banned international political advertisements in the months approaching the Repeal referendum. Adverts coming from foreign sources were deemed to be 'attempting to influence the outcome of the vote on May 25', and thus were blocked in their efforts to 'help protect the integrity of elections and referendums from undue influence' (O'Brien 2018: np).

Now, this move is exceptional considering that Facebook has come under fire on both sides of the Atlantic for its policy of doing precisely the opposite. Facebook's unwillingness to police misinformation in political adverts and its role in the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal attracted global attention in 2018. So why this move that Irish Press Ombudsman Peter Feeney received as 'an acknowledgment by Facebook that they have a responsibility for their role in the public discussion that's taking place around the Eighth Amendment' (Fitzgerald 2018)? Why here and now? There are surely countless reasons behind this move, but my point is that it fits within a broader trend in Irish media. Facebook and Google played an integral role in drawing the boundaries of a debate that attracted widespread international attention. Social media therefore localised and unified in the face of international interest and intervention. If the media, following sociologists Inglis and Keogh (2012: 70) assume the role of 'social conscience of Irish society', this move illustrates just how local social media can be.

In one of his scholarly works, Tom Inglis (2007) charts a rapid and profound transition in Ireland. He documents a series of shifts during the late 20th century in which Irish society moved from being dominated by values related to Catholicism such as humility, piety and self-denial to being a liberal-individualist consumer culture in which self-indulgence was, generally, valorised over self-denial. Ideas surrounding the person, self-realisation and the body took centre stage in this transition and former taboos surrounding sex were challenged in politics, the media and popular culture. The prime movers in this transition were, he argues, the media and the market, under whose influence a Pandora's box of unspoken topics were broached on the airwaves and in print media.

The media was important in two ways: first, because in broad sheet, radio and news media it shone a light on international movements and ideas, and second, in so doing it simultaneously maintained a sense of cohesion to the Irish viewership and listenership. There is a large literature on the role of media in providing a sense of cohesion and nationhood to its viewers (e.g. Ginsburg *et al.* 2002) and it is clear that it often functioned in this way in Ireland. The unifying effect of media and its capacity to present a view of the Irish as relatively homogeneous was starkly evident in the reportage surrounding the death of television presenter Gay Byrne in November 2019. Byrne's media career ran from 1962 to 1999 and his radio and television programme openly discussed a range of topics such as sex outside marriage, divorce and contraception, occasionally attracting the ire of the Catholic hierarchy. Byrne's many eulogies again and again emphasised his role in 'changing Ireland'. Against a social background where consensus is highly valued and promoted in many social situations, journalists carry a capacity to become social ventriloquists, particularly high-profile ones such as Byrne.

Most Irish people would accept the role of a few prominent journalists as spokespersons on controversial national topics, but given its international reach and dispersed mode of communication, Facebook, Google and social media more generally are often assumed to be a different beast. However, during the Repeal referendum we were

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

reminded of just how local social media can be. Not only is it locally embedded, we are again reminded of the role of media/social media in Ireland in patrolling the contours of the national conversation.

Pauline Garvey
Department of Anthropology
Maynooth University
Maynooth
Ireland
pauline.A.Garvey@mu.ie

[Corrections added on September 12, 2020, after first online publication: The authors "Ela Drążkiewicz, Thomas Strong, and A Jamie Saris" removed.]

References

Fitzgerald, C. 2018. 'Facebook announces a ban of all Eighth referendum ads from foreign sources', *The journal.ie* 8 May (https://www.thejournal.ie/facebook-ads-3999452-May2018/) Accessed 6 January 2020.

Ginsburg, F. D., L. Abu-Lughod and B. Larkin (eds.) 2002. *Media worlds: anthropology on new terrain*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Inglis, T. 2007. *Global Ireland: same difference*. New York: Routledge.

Inglis, T. and C. MacKeogh 2012. 'The double bind: women, honour and sexuality in contemporary Ireland', *Media Culture and Society* 34: 68–82.

O'Brien, C. 2018. 'Facebook bans foreign ads for Eighth Amendment referendum', *The Irish Times* 8 May (https://www.irishtimes.com/business/technology/facebook-bans-foreign-ads-for-eighth-amendment-referendum-1.3487895) Accessed 6 January 2020.

DANIEL MILLER

Body politics

The repeal of the Amendment occurred during my 16-month ethnography in a small town in North-East Ireland which I call Cuan, an ethnography concerned with ageing and smartphones. I have conducted 14 ethnographies, but perhaps never in a place so bereft of political discussion; rugby, the weather, the local town were far more common topics than politics. At the very time when we see a huge rise of populism, in the era of Trump and Brexit, Cuan seemed remarkably sedate. This lack of debate applied to politics generally and to this referendum in particular. Ireland is governed through the alternation of two political parties, which are the legacy of a savage and traumatic civil war. It seemed as though at one time people in Cuan avoided party politics because it was too divisive in its historical resonances. Yet today the reason is the exact opposite. Most people regard these two dominant parties as very similar centrist parties that reflect a largely consensual and liberal electorate. There just isn't that much to talk about. There will always be complaints and scandals, but these don't resonate with party differences, they are just problems of governance which result in switching to the other party whenever the current government has lost credibility.

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

With regard to the issue of abortion, many people suggested that the debate had been more lively the first time around. But by now they mostly knew each other's opinions. This is a liberal area where there was never any doubt that the vote would be overwhelmingly in favour of repeal, which proved to be the case. This meant that there simply wasn't a good enough reason to prompt divisive discussion. Just once, I recall a visiting folk singer being chided for her explicit pro-abortion song, but even that was more in case someone was offended, rather than anyone taking issue with the stance. My work was focused on older people who were likely those who would have voted against the repeal. They dutifully attend Mass and follow Catholic doctrine on this matter and others. But they can see the age profile of Catholic Mass attendance and seem accepting that the next generation would fail to reproduce this adherence.

Yet I believe there was something profoundly important about this specific issue, which I hope to address in a second ethnographic monograph following after our work on ageing with smartphones. This is the cosmological significance of the body. The single most important activity in Cuan is sport, and today alternative health, ranging from yoga to acupuncture, is more extensive than bio-medical health. Keeping fit and looking after the body has become the primary concern for people after retirement. I hope to try and explain this in that monograph. One factor appears to be that Irish nationalism developed around two practices: the Catholic Church, as fostered by then head of government De Valera, and the rise of the GAA, that is Irish sports. As the Church has faded in authority, sports and the body have subtly come to occupy that empty space. Not something talked about as cosmology, but perhaps the more significant precisely because it is not obvious or contested. The abortion debate centred on control of the body; a shift from Church authority to the responsibility of individuals. As such it went to the heart of what constitutes cosmology in contemporary Cuan; but one that is found in practice, rather than as the subject of discussion. This may help explain why this Amendment was so important, but also subject to so little debate in Cuan.

Daniel Miller
University College London
London
UK
d.miller@ucl.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge receipt of ERC funding ERC-2016-Adg–SmartPhoneSmart-Aging – 740472, which contributed to the research project 'The Anthropology of Smart Phones and Smart Ageing'.

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

FIONA MURPHY AND LOUISE MAGUIRE

Visualising the repeal movement

It is 1971, members of the Irish Women's liberation movement board a Dublin train bound for the troubled city of Belfast at the height of civil unrest. Their goal is to protest, to resist, by purchasing contraceptives in Northern Ireland, and return to the Republic of Ireland with them, a place where an intertwined Catholic and State governance denies autonomy and freedom for a woman over her body.

It is 1983, a fractious referendum takes place, and the Eighth Amendment is placed into the Irish constitution, prohibiting abortion.

It is 2016, a 'Repeal the 8th' mural painted by street artist Maser appears on the side of an arts centre in Dublin city centre. The city council orders its removal. Two years later in the year of the referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment, it is repainted then ordered to be removed again. The mural is painted over as a protest ensues. Placards read, 'You can't paint over a movement.' The mural attains the tenacity of an icon, one reflecting an imbricated politics of punctuated invisibility and visibility that has shrouded reproductive justice in Ireland since the state's inception.

It is 2018, and Ireland is awash with visual images speaking to the Yes and No campaigns. Bodies move through Irish streets with agency, wearing 'repeal' jumpers, flashes of badges, even tattoos indicating a 'yes' or a 'no' have heightened visibility. Campaigners stand on street corners and knock daily on doors. Social media shatters many silences. There have been many learnings from the 2015 marriage equality referendum. All available idioms to redefine reproductive justice are ferociously inhabited and contested. This quest, closing in on the marrow of Irishness, becomes a debridement of the incisive, often wounding complexities of the weave of womanhood, religion and nationhood on this small island. Storytelling and stories become the vanquishing and vanishing pivot of erstwhile and wounding silences. 'In Her Shoes' becomes a powerful storied digital platform – daily, we walk with a different woman impacted by the Eighth amendment – *her, she, you, I* – ultimately, *we*. A nail salon offers 'repeal' manicures; angels stand outside of maternity hospitals, their wings blocking stark images of aborted foetuses on No posters; cats and dogs stand for repeal. Handmaids appear outside the Irish Parliament – no space too absurd or too small – a flood of creativity and cultural production defines this referendum.

This is what freedom looks like, one friend tells us, another an avid campaigner asks people how they want Ireland to be seen on the global stage? In many places, abortion rights and reproductive freedom become embedded in a reimagining of Irishness – who are we if we do not allow the Eighth Amendment to be repealed? A nod to 'Trump', to 'Brexit', no we cannot indeed be like them? Who were we once? 'Get your rosaries off my ovaries', a sign in a pro-choice march remembers for us.

The referendum becomes *à la* Donna Haraway (2016)

'a making of kin and oddkin', in a space of conflict and collaboration fuelling expanding and expansive notions of freedom, choice, trust and women's health. A Yes campaign activist, Karen Fagen, sensing this, tweets this feeling of 'togetherness' as 'Tágetherness'. This is a play on the Irish word 'Tá' for 'yes' and the collective effervescence Karen was tapping into during the Yes campaign. The tweet goes viral. In May

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

2018, the Eighth Amendment is repealed, and so many of us are dragged 'out of the shadows' as artist Will St Leger hoped would happen through his 2017 photo installation of women forced to travel for abortions. For many organising women living in Ireland, this though is just the first step in garnering broader reproductive justice. This is the *longue durée* of the Irish women's liberation movement's 'contraception train', our final destination still some way off.

Fiona Murphy
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast
Northern Ireland
F.Murphy@qub.ac.uk

Louise Maguire
National College of Ireland
Ireland
louise.maguire1@ncirl.ie
[Corrections added on September 12, 2020, after first online publication: The authors "Hugh Turpin" removed.]

Reference

Haraway, D. (2016) *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the chthulucene*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

MÁIRE NÍ MHÓRDHA

Emotional labour and the Repeal of the Eighth

> 'It fucks me off, we have to talk about nearly dying before people care…'

So said Emma to me, as we debriefed over a quick cup of coffee together in my kitchen, as our young children scurried around us. It was May 2018. Posters of thumb-sucking foetuses lined the street of our small town. 'A Licence to Kill?', queried one, while another proclaimed, 'If Killing an Unborn Baby at Six Months Bothers You, Vote No.' New posters appeared on poles and walls as if by magic overnight, bearing disturbing claims and imagery.

To the relief of campaigners, as No posters ('Repeal Kills', 'Love Both, Vote No') multiplied, Together for Yes posters finally began to appear. The main feature of these was their large pink, yellow and green speech bubbles. Here, the language was more moderate and abstract ('Sometimes a private matter needs public support').

Pairing up with other activists from our local Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC) group, Emma and I would spend as many evenings as we could knocking on doors, asking for a Yes vote. Under the Together for Yes umbrella, activists across the country

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

canvassed, held stalls, leafleted, spoke on local radio, spoke with families, colleagues, neighbours. Our canvassing training had instructed us to ask if people wanted information – if someone was a definite No, we weren't to engage in any argument or persuasion, but politely end the conversation. If someone was a certain Yes, then we encouraged them to vote, and if they wished, get involved. The elusive Undecideds were our main target – our task was to give them information, to tell them stories of the Eighth, the harm that it caused to people who could get pregnant in Ireland and the ones who loved them. We had to educate, rather than persuade, to 'reach people where they were at'. The speech bubbles logo was accurate.

But at what price, this education, these polite requests, the deferential walking away? What price to the individual campaigners, and at what price to the outcome of the campaign?

So many stories were shared during Repeal – with strangers in doorways, online via the In Her Shoes page or on groups such as Parents for Choice, in broadcast and print media. For many, telling stories of the trauma they had experienced under the Eighth was a catharsis, an act of liberation, healing and solidarity. For others, however, the pressure to tell and re-tell their experience of trauma was draining, de-humanising and re-traumatising. As a member of the activist group Terminations for Medical Reasons (TFMR) told me a year after the referendum, news pieces always focused on images of their 'crying faces', as the women told of the horrific impact of the Eighth on their experience of fatal foetal anomaly, a focus that reduced them to tragic tropes instead of individuals with a depth of experience, emotions and capabilities.

The emotional labour (Hochschild 1983) demanded by the campaign paid off – by 10.01pm on the day of the vote, early exit polls indicated a landslide victory for Yes. Joy, incredulity and relief mingled with weariness among activists who had dropped family and work commitments for the final weeks of the campaign, including many who had fought for Repeal for years.

As establishment figures predictably raced to claim the victory, activists gradually began to process their experiences, the choices made and the outcomes of a campaign that could potentially have been run differently, particularly given its radical intersectional feminist basis (see de Londras forthcoming) and the fact that 82% of the public had apparently made up their mind long before the referendum campaign began (Griffin *et al*. 2019: 201). While the importance of the referendum victory and subsequent legislation is undoubted, the resulting law and abortion provision in the Republic of Ireland still sees many left behind (see Abortion Rights Campaign 2019); as an all-island campaign ARC also focuses equally on achieving full reproductive rights for those in Northern Ireland.

Viewed by a member of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice (MERJ) I spoke to in October 2019 as a 'huge missed opportunity' to build a collective movement for social justice, the decision by Together for Yes to focus on so-called middle-ground voters, to tell personal stories, maintain a tone of deference and decency, and mute the experiences of marginalised people had come at a price.

Anger, frustration and burnout have become dominant themes for Repeal activists as they revisit the campaign, even in the knowledge that they had agreed to the compromises demanded by the Together for Yes coalition. While undoubtedly a source of great satisfaction, relief and catharsis for many, further reflection and engagement is needed on a campaign for which many have paid a high price, and one that is ultimately a single battle in the ongoing struggle for social justice in Ireland.

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.

Máire Ní Mhórdha
Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute
Maynooth University
Maynooth
Ireland
maire.NiMhordha@mu.ie

References

Abortion Rights Campaign 2019. 'Mara Clarke: The law and resulting provision are leaving too many people behind' (https://www.abortionrightscampaign.ie/2019/09/28/mara-clarke-the-law-and-resulting-provision-are-leaving-too-many-people-behind/) Accessed 16 December 2019.

De Londras, F. 2020. Intersectionality, repeal, and reproductive rights in Ireland, in P. Dunne and S. Atrey (eds.), *Intersectionality and human rights*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.

Griffin, G., O. O'Connor, A. Smyth and A. O'Connor 2019. *It's a yes! How Together for Yes Repealed the Eighth and transformed Irish society*. Dublin: Orpen Press.

Hochschild, A. R. 1983. *The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

L'abrogation du huitième amendement de la Constitution irlandaise : le droit à l'avortement et la démocratie aujourd'hui

En 2018, le peuple irlandais a voté l'abrogation du huitième amendement de la Constitution irlandaise interdisant l'avortement dans le pays depuis 1983. L'Irlande vivait alors un moment décisif de son histoire, qui n'était pas sans lien avec de plus vastes débats, aujourd'hui en cours dans le monde entier, portant sur le genre, le droit à la procréation, l'avenir de la religion, les relations entre l'Église et l'État, la démocratie et les mouvements sociaux. Dans ce Forum, nous voulons encourager une lecture anthropologique de l'abrogation du huitième amendement par l'Irlande, car elle concerne non seulement le droit à la procréation, mais aussi la vie et la mort, la foi et la honte, les femmes et les hommes, le pouvoir étatique, la liberté individuelle et plus encore. Nous nous interrogeons également sur la signification que cet événement pourrait avoir (s'il en a une) aux yeux d'autres sociétés traversées par des questions analogues.

Mots-clés Avortement, droit à la procréation, transformation sociale, abrogation du huitième amendement, Irlande

© 2020 European Association of Social Anthropologists.