Ethical and Shared Remembering: Commemoration in a New Context

Living with the Legacy: Key Themes of the Decade, Past and Present

Johnston McMaster
and Cathy Higgins
in partnership with
Maureen Hetherington
The Junction

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We live in critical times dominated by an economic crisis. A century ago a brutal and bloody war convulsed Europe. It too was a critical time, much of it thought now to be senseless. It changed the map of Europe and ensured that the 20th century would be the bloodiest century in recorded history. It also ensured that the world would go to war again later, but not much later in the century. In the context of this European war and slaughter, only a world war because soldiers from global imperial outposts came to Europe to fight and die, Ireland’s violent struggle took place. It militarised unionist and nationalist politics, claiming lives from Cork to Belfast. It had sectarian overtones, rooted in high profile religion and an invented, partisan god. At the end of a decade, not only had Europe changed but Ireland had changed too. Thousands of Irishmen, Catholic and Protestant, nationalist and unionist died, in much greater numbers than those who died in Ireland, in the killing fields of France and Belgium, some too at Gallipoli. The violent decade in Ireland, like the Great War, left a legacy, also ensuring future violence and killing. The Irish war dead all became victims of sectarian and partisan politics, either forgotten or lionized to serve a nationalist or unionist cause in the decades that followed.

A century on, we are reappraising the Great War because time does not stand still and distance provides larger perspectives. So too a century on we reappraise the decade 1912-1922 in Ireland, the sands of time also enlarging our perspective and opening up more honest, critical evaluation. The critical acknowledgment of this more distant decade of ‘troubles’, even provides us with lenses or a template through which we can begin to critically acknowledge the more recent ‘troubles.’ By identifying key themes from the early decade and exploring them, we begin also to see the themes as legacy. The same themes were at the heart of the more recent violent decades. They stoked the fires of conflict for over thirty-five years. Yet a decade into the 21st century we are in a new and very different context. A peace process has advanced remarkably, though by no means complete. Europe is in a place our forefathers and foremothers a century ago could never have dreamt it would be. There is a global economic crisis and there is the reality of globalisation, struggling into a new era of interdependence.

All of this makes some of the themes of 1912-1922 antiquated, anachronistic, even obsolete. All has changed, changed utterly, and a very different kind of beauty is being born.
This booklet will explore the key themes of a century ago, not only trying to look critically at them, but also to be serious about the present. How do we deal with nationalism, religion, violence in the 21st century? What are the challenges for now? A century ago there was an intense class or social struggle and a feminist struggle, both struggling for social justice and greater equality, yet both eclipsed during the decade by respective nationalisms and violence. Both remain as contemporary challenges. The rich literary culture of then was shaping ideologies and values as well as raising critical questions through plays, novels, myths and poetry. The dramatists and the poets have still critical questions and challenges to raise.

Memory of the past was being invoked back in 1912-1922, never in an objective way and sometimes in a mythological way. There is no objectivity and very few facts, rather interpretations coloured by presuppositions and biases, and shaped by present needs rather than past realities. The past is a foreign country and we can never really go there. A century on memory still works in odd ways, sometimes dangerous ways. How we remember is a perennial issue and challenge, a theme that never goes away.

A booklet cannot do full justice to the key themes that emerge from 1912-1922. It can only begin to probe, stimulate critical thought, and encourage deeper reflection. It may spark the imagination and creative visioning that will energise us towards a different Ireland in a different world.
Nationalism is a European invention. It may be said that German nationalism was born at the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century. At best German identity and awareness was birthed by the Reformation. The German experience may be seen as an early antecedent of the nation-state and nationalism. The invention of nationalism was boosted by the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century. What the Revolution did was to take the lid off an ‘overboiling saucepan.’ What began in 1789 dismantled the French monarchy, ‘the greatest land-power west of Russia.’ It was an absolutist monarchy responsible for much social injustice and economic hardship. Its roots were medieval and the Revolution was to break those links with a medieval past. The King was executed in 1793 and the Revolution became symbolised by the Terror. The Guillotine was invented ensuring death by more technical efficiency. Bloodthirsty language and bloodshed were characteristic and perhaps over 35,000 died and many others fled abroad.

There were formal achievements. ‘The formal abolition of feudalism, legal privilege and theocratic absolutism and the organisation of society on individualist and secular foundations were the heart of the ‘principles of 89’ distilled in a Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen which prefaced the constitution of 1791. Legal equality and the legal protection of individual rights, the separation of Church and State and religious toleration were their institutional expression’. Modern nationalism was born from revolution, and violence was and remained a central feature.

The 19th century crystallised this force of nationalism. By 1871 Germany and its new empire replaced the superpower of France. This not only affected international relations, it was also about militarised power with German and other European armies drawn from the peasant population. This development of militarised nationalism was to ensure European hegemony worldwide during the 19th century. European values including European religion were being exported. The interests of the nation were now the supreme good and whilst there was in some places a cultural nationalism, much of what developed was aggressive political nationalism. The blood of the nation became mixed with the soil of national territory and Europe became dominated by the distinction between ‘historic’ and ‘unhistoric’ nations. The premier league of nationalism was determined by the established powers, France, Britain, Prussia, Austria and Russia. They also decided that Spain, Portugal,
Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Greece were ‘historic.’ It looked very much like a map of a future Europe of twelve nation-states.

This crystallisation of nationalism drew on a number of sources, helpfully set out by Norman Davies. Six main sources were used to invent nationalism or create nation as ‘imagined community’:

- History was used as proof of a nation’s age-long struggle for its rights and land.
- Language was reformed and standardised as proof of a nation’s separate and unique identity.
- Folklore was mined to connect a nation to its ancient cultural roots.
- Religion was mobilised to sanctify national sentiment and to erect barriers between ethnic groups.
- Racial theories were used to give a nation unique and pure identity. The Aryan Race was first put forward in 1848.
- Every branch of art and literature was mobilised to ‘dress’ national themes, including folk dances.

National emblems were what mattered, not civilisation. But what existed was ‘imagined community’ and ‘invented Tradition’ with nations creating their own myths.

**Britain’s Two Intransigent National Movements**

The development of ‘imagined community’ and ‘invented Tradition’ and the sources used to create these can be recognised in the dynamics of Ireland in the 19th and early 20th centuries. History, language, folklore, religion and racial theories, music and myths, were all mined to create the nationalisms.

Britain was of course, one of the imperial powers, a major player in the creation of 19th century nationalism. And yet in Britain’s first colony, and with a long divide and rule policy, two intransigent nationalisms had been created.

The Catholic nationalist tradition was being invented, certainly after the French Revolution, through the 1798 Rising and throughout the 19th century as various attempts were made to buy off the Catholics, yet not with political autonomy. The
British Liberal Party became a committed Home Rule Party and after a number of aborted Risings, Gladstone introduced his first Bill in 1886. In parallel with all of this was a Gaelic Revival, the recovering of Irish mythology, romantic poets, the founding of the Gaelic Athletic Association, and aggressive political nationalism. There was an inevitable anti-Englishness in all of this and the physical force tradition was growing as the form of aggressive nationalism. Britain, with its military presence in Ireland countered this with militarism, and as each of the 19th century Home Rule Bills was rejected by Westminster, the threat of physical force increased. By 1916 the militarisation of Irish politics was complete, or at an unprecedented level.

Each of the Home Rule Bills was opposed by the ‘Protestant nationalism of Ulster’. The Protestant identity and opposition has not often been described as nationalist, but it was in the European tradition of the 19th century. Protestant opposition in the north-east was encouraged by the Conservative and Unionist Party in Britain, and up to 70 Conservative MPs were on the Balmoral platform as the newly formed ‘peoples army’ filed past in 1912. There was a Protestant identity, cemented at the time by the Protestant churches, and its determination was to maintain the constitutional union with Britain. The same ‘invented Traditions’ which had created the ‘historic’ nation and imperial power shaped the Ulster Protestant identity, and it too developed as aggressive nationalism or a physical force tradition. Violence encouraged by Conservative leaders and Unionist leaders such as Craig and Carson, threatened violence by an armed or illegal army if Westminster was to grant Home Rule to Ireland. The forming and arming of the illegal UVF led to the forming and arming of the illegal Irish Volunteers, with both sides sourcing their weapons in Germany, the enemy country with which Britain was at war in 1914. The Ulster crisis was a nationalistic crisis, an aggressive nationalism, albeit British, and was itself a rising against the British government. There were European observers, who, wrongly as it turned out, thought that the revolutionary activity or armed resistance in Ulster ‘was about to paralyse by revolution’ the United Kingdom. Perhaps if the Great War had not broken out in 1914, diverting the possibility of civil war, the United Kingdom might well have had revolution on its hands and much bloodshed. Had it happened, it would have been a violent conflict between two contested nationalisms, each with their roots in the aggressive nationalism of 19th century Europe.
Nationalism in the 21st Century

It was assumed in 1871 that Europe ‘should be organised as a system of states where legitimacy derived from the fact that they represented identifiable nations’. There was a confidence among some Europeans and much of this was derived from the fact that ‘there had been no armed conflict between great powers for thirty years (and indeed, for nearly two thirds of the nineteenth century in all)’. Yet the great powers were sabre rattling, even lusting for conflict and war. Expansionism only at the expense of each other was the option and much of this was centred in naval power and superiority. The invented nationalism was to be shattered by two European civil wars turning into the most violent and brutal world wars ever. The powers had great imperial wealth, because of which ‘these conflicts were conducted on an unprecedentedly colonial and ferocious scale’. The killing fields of world wars had shattered the nationalistic project, destroyed values and traditional religious faith, and in 1945 Europeans looked out from their ruined world.

Not only was the map of Europe re-drawn, the European empires began to collapse bringing to an end the European imperial project. Colonies sought their independence, sometimes in bloodshed, while Britain and France in particular created ‘Arab’ or ‘Islamic’ nations in the Middle East, not only drawing borders but ensuring dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, the people of which are now demanding democracy, rights and greater freedoms. Not surprisingly the ‘Arab Spring’ is not coming about peacefully in all cases, Syria and Libya being the most violent examples.

With the aggressive nationalism destroyed by the end of the Second World War, Europe had to rebuild itself and somehow rose from the ashes. It did through the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community. This was the beginning of a momentous journey of conflict transformation and reconciliation between France and Germany. The process has continued to develop and today there is the European Union, by no means perfect, but a reconciliation project that has ensured that Europe is at peace with itself for the first time in centuries. Once a continent synonymous with Christendom, Europe is now post-Christian, but also a continent with spirituality and ethics. Europe is an ethical society. It is only secular in the sense that levels of religious practice have diminished and the church is no
longer at the centre of political power, as institutions have been deprivileged and decentred.

The other European religion, nationalism, as invented in the 19th century has also been shattered. In the light of the earlier ‘invented Tradition’, Europe is now post-nationalist. Borders still exist but not as economic boundaries, and within the European Union there is free movement of citizens. Passports are now European Union passports and the Euro, for all its difficulties, is a global currency, replacing sterling. Nationalism now is much more cultural, and national rivalries are more obvious and confined to the European soccer championships and the World Cup.

Europe is largely a continent of reconciled diversities. The once key word independence has been replaced by interdependence. The reality in that word is the biggest problem for the Scottish Nationalist Party. Whatever was meant by independence half a century ago is no longer a viable option in a globalised, interdependent world.

The nationalisms that created the Covenant in 1912 and the Proclamation in 1916 have been overtaken by European integration. The peaceful pooling of sovereignty by independent, democratic nations could never have been imagined by the authors of the Covenant or Proclamation. ‘The great European narrative for more than fifty years has been the gradual pooling of sovereignty, where appropriate, by the European Union twenty-seven member states comprising some 500 million people’.9 We cannot possibly say that such pooled sovereignty or interdependence would cause Carson and De Valera to turn in their graves. We simply don’t know, such was the ‘foreign county’ in which they lived. We can only guess if they would have been big enough to recognise ‘a voluntary, pan-national political, social and economic structure, quite unlike anything attempted anywhere else before’10. It is where Britain and Ireland, have now been for over forty years, and it is in being part of this interdependent arrangement of Europe that makes Ireland and Britain equals, and that equality was visible and obvious during the recent visit of Queen Elizabeth to the Republic of Ireland.

A unitary state in Ireland is no longer a must or even appropriate in a post-nationalist, trans-national Europe. Neither is the concept of a United Kingdom which is likely to
change in the next few decades. After the 20th century nothing remains the same and the 21st century will continue to evolve as geopolitics change and globalisation moves towards a more integrated, interdependent world. We are increasingly becoming global citizens. This will not mean the end of the state.

The late Tony Judt sees the state in continental Europe playing a major role in public life for three general reasons:

- **Cultural** – only the state can provide the services and conditions by which citizens can lead the good life.
- **Pragmatic** – in a global market outside state control, it means a greater need for the state as intermediary institution to make possible civilised life.
- **Representative democracy** – the state makes it possible for a large number of people to live together in some measure of agreement in order to survive together.

Aggressive nationalism is dead and the demise of its physical force expression is a moral victory and an ethical achievement. The 21st century on the island of Ireland is about a different and more ethical kind of politics, characterised by liberal, participative democracy, human rights and local, European and global interdependence. It will be the politics of the larger, much larger, common good.

**Reflection questions**

If nationalism is an ‘invented Tradition’, is the 21st century inventing something new and different?

What does it mean to be global citizens working for a larger common good?

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8 Ibid, p470.  
2. The Role of Religion and its Diminishing Profile

The Christian religion had high profile in the decade, 1912-1922. The ecclesial institutions, priests and clergy had an influential role in community, public and political life in Ireland. Like everything else in Ireland, that too has changed. Culturally established and privileged churches at the centre of Irish life are now culturally disestablished, deprivileged and decentred. This is not peculiar to Ireland but is a Western phenomenon as the Christendom model of church-state, faith-politics relationship has collapsed. The ecclesial monopolisation of goodness, truth, spirituality and even God no longer holds. All of this change in the century since the decade does not mean the end of faith, nor does it mean the end of faith applied to politics and public life. It means that the public institutions of church have a different relationship and role in a liberal democracy and a pluralistic society. They are no longer dominant or in control, a role they had become used to and the loss of which they find difficult. It calls for a radical change in the understanding, arrangement and use of power both within the churches and in how they relate to the public square. There is the potential for more authenticity in communities of faith, and for a more modest and creative role.

Consolidation and Dominance 1912-1922

The 19th century had already brought significant changes for Irish churches. Gladstone, the British Prime Minister, had introduced the Act to disestablish the Church of Ireland, which became law on 26th July, 1869. This was a separation of church and state in relation to the Church of Ireland which had been the state church from the 16th century. Traumatic as it was, the Church of Ireland, not only reorganised itself, but after a decade had become stronger and more independent. In the decades that followed the church consolidated its position and role and in Belfast engaged in church building on an impressive scale. By 1914, Belfast had 34 parishes which consisted of 37 churches. At this stage, Church of Ireland membership made up 13.13 per cent of the Irish population. By 1914, Presbyterians were 10.04 per cent and Methodists 1.42 per cent of the Irish population. Roman Catholics were by far the largest Christian tradition in Ireland at 73.86 per cent. Disestablishment had affected all the Christian denominations. Irish Catholicism was no doubt glad to see the end of Church of Ireland privilege and status, but disestablishment also meant the end of the Maynooth Seminary grant. Yet under the leadership of Cardinal Paul Cullen, the Catholic Church in Ireland
not only engaged in a massive building programme, liturgical and doctrinal life was greatly enhanced and the Catholic Church became civic society or the alternative state for the faithful. ‘The Catholic Church was an important social, cultural and political institution and its views and values, expressed by a united hierarchy, informed all levels of Catholic experience. The influence of numerous religious orders was particularly strong’. The Catholic Church, especially in the southern part of Ireland was a culturally established Church, and even though Cardinal Cullen rejected any constitutionally established role for his church, the Cullenisation of the 19th century Catholic Church had transformed it into a dominant institution in every part of Irish life. Its dominating power gave justification to the Protestant slogan of the north-east, that Home Rule was Rome Rule and the fear that underpinned it.

Yet, it was especially during the Home Rule era that all of the churches were heavily politicised and involved and influential in the politics of that time. There was an informal alliance between the Catholic bishops and Parnell’s Parliamentary Party. Even after the bishops condemned Parnell and his relationship with Katherine O'Shea, the Catholic Church’s influence remained strong. The bishops had already declared themselves in favour of Home Rule, and if the Parnell affair had shown anything, it was that the bishops would have Home Rule on their own terms and through a political leader they could control.

In 1867 Cullen had condemned ‘revolutionary nationalism’ and was concerned that ‘our love of country should degenerate into a false patriotism’. Yet priests became very involved with a militant land war and later in the 20th century decade, blessed arms and those involved in aggressive nationalism. Their Protestant counterparts did the same, including at least one Church of Ireland bishop, photographed blessing UVF arms in Ballymena.

The Protestant churches were much agitated by Home Rule and were in total opposition to it. When the first Home Rule Bill was introduced in 1886, the Church of Ireland held a special meeting in opposition. The Bishop of Limerick affirmed ‘our constant allegiance to the throne and our unswerving attachment to the legislative union’. The Bishop of Down and Connor described Home Rule as ‘a living death for Protestants’. When the Third Home Rule Bill was introduced in 1912, all three larger Protestant Churches held special meetings and expressed total opposition to
it. Clergy had leadership roles in times of political crisis and the Protestant churches were deeply involved in their local communities. Protestant Church leaders were among the first seven signatories to the Ulster Covenant on 28 September 1912. In 1914 a former Presbyterian Moderator identified the Protestant fight with 1689 and the Siege of Derry, a theme still being repeated by Presbyterian Moderators even after partition. The Williamite wars not only shaped the Protestant memory but the response to the present crisis and contemporary history in the making. Methodists, in line with evangelicals were certain that the Roman Catholic religion was the prime cause of all the problems of Ireland.

All of the churches were politically involved and represented powerful voices in the politics of the decade. They were powerful institutions shaping politics and culture in Ireland. But by the end of the 20th century, ‘Cullens’ church would be in crisis and for the Protestant churches, not only was the British empire gone, so too was the empire theology, dominant and pervasive in 1912. Christendom was dead and the world had changed.

**Religion in the Present Decade 2012-2022**

In Ireland today religion is much less prominent. Institutional church status and privilege connected to political power have gone. Religious political and cultural hegemonies are not a 21st century Irish experience. Irish churches are having difficulty with their deprivileged, decentred role, often complaining about secularism and being sidelined, or political correctness having gone mad. But is it true that Christians can no longer talk about Jesus or witness publically to their faith? There is always the possibility that Jesus is being spoken of in ways that make no sense in a pluralistic, multicultural society. The thought-forms and categories may have become meaningless, not because people are opposed to faith, but they want a faith that connects to 21st century personal and social experience. Sectarianism is also the churches millstone, its terrible burden of history. If the profile of Christian religion in 2012 is no longer what it was in 1912, churches can make one of two responses:

- **Negative Responses:**
  - Complain about secularism and marginalisation, that we live in a godless age and the church is being discriminated against.
- Retreat into privatised, spiritualised and individualised faith.
- Develop a fortress mind-set and build up the barricades of ‘traditional’
dogmatic theology, which become our various Catholic and Protestant forms
of fundamentalism.
- Go into denial pretending that Christendom is still here, or fight to preserve
or retrieve Christendom.
- Buy into negative and destructive dualisms, - faith as private, politics as
public and separate faith and politics, a tendency for both church people and
politicians.

• Positive Responses:
- Welcome and accept that in the West we are free of authoritarian governments
and that the divine right of Kings (and Queens) has been dismantled.
- Welcome that we are heirs to a relatively new experiment in political structures
and nation-building: the democratisation of society.
- Realise that despite the Western dualism, democracy permits and encourages
the church and individual Christians to become a lively partner in the public
arena.
- Embrace the end of Christendom as the liberation of the church from the
corrupting influence of political power and as freedom to develop a more
critical, prophetic and authentic voice in the public square.
- Embrace the post-modernist pluralism as liberating the church from a
domination role, the antithesis of the mind of Jesus – the Kenotic Jesus of
Philippeans 2 who let go of power-over to become servant.
- Welcome the freedom and challenge to articulate faith and faith values in the
public square on an equal basis with all other voices, using nothing but the
moral force of persuasion.
- Let go of triumphalism as well as domination, to embrace a partnership role
in shaping social and ethical values, living by them and helping to shape a
liberating and holistic dimension to politics, economics, education, health,
environment and relationship building and social coherence.

Christendom will not be restored and there will be no return to privilege and
status. As for being at the centre of political and social power, the church follows
a leader who spent his entire life and work on the edge, especially alongside the
marginalised and the poor. It is the status quo, domesticated, middle class, power intoxicated and sectarian Jesus who makes no sense to increasing numbers of people. This is the Jesus that secular and pluralistic society does not want the church to speak about or impose on them. There is a more authentic Jesus in the gospels, whose Jewishness and humanity need urgent recovery.

If positive responses are to be made as suggested above, then those of the faith communities in Ireland need to learn to re-read their foundational texts, the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian Testament. This will mean moving away from doctrinal readings, scholastic, pietistic and individualistic readings.

It will mean re-reading the Bible as a socio-political text, even rescuing the Bible from religion and recognising that it is a subversive political text. This is because its story-line is an ongoing struggle to live faithfully and ethically in a world of domination systems. Genesis to Revelation is located in the shadow of empire, a system in which the characteristics are:

- Hierarchical
- Patriarchal
- Militaristic
- Violent
- Oppressive: socially, economically, culturally, theologically

This is the foreground to Judaism and early Christianity and is the foreground that produced the radical alternative socio-political vision of covenant and Kingdom, reign or empire of God.

To re-engage and re-read the radical and subversive foundational texts of faith will enable the faith community to configure a different relationship to politics and public life, not of domination and control as in 1912-1922, but as partner, critical friend and ethical community in a spirit of humility and servanthood.
Reflection questions

How might the churches respond to the new world of the 21st century?

What kind of relationship is now required between faith and politics, church and state?

References
Violence and atrocity have always been with us, at least since the beginning of modern Irish history, 16th century to the present. Violence is a reality we prefer to deny and the denial is practiced by politicians, historians, and church leaders. The most recent phase of violence was frequently condemned, but rarely described or critically analyzed. But this was not merely the response to 1969 and the years following. Politicians, historians, and church leaders have succeeded in suppressing historical violence. Ireland’s past is dominated by political and colonial violence and religious discord. Much of the 20th century conflict is rooted in the early modern origins. Yet the political, colonial, and religious violence goes largely unacknowledged, evaded and left to fester and breed further violence. The contemporary violence of republican dissidents and the UVF has been shaped by the ideological legacy of five centuries of modern Irish history, during which there has been a collective failure to name and unmask the violence at the heart of it.

Acknowledging the past may be greater than we think or care to know, but the discomfort of the past needs to be named, ‘promoting a more nuanced understanding of historical events and processes’.

There is still no avoiding the awkward challenge that all history is interpretation and contested histories will remain; yet the task of unmasking the violence of our modern past is the imperative upon which a different and better future depends. This need not descend into a blame game, the invocation of recriminatory histories to justify our pasts or reinforce our victimhoods.

_Focusing on ancient violence should not mean revictimising or manufacturing its causalities: truth lies not in the voyeuristic rehearsal of their sufferings, nor in the harnessing of those tribulations to modern grievances, but in the acknowledgement of the nastiness of the past in its own terms._

This applies not just to the 16th and 17th centuries, but to the violence that dominated Irish history also in the 20th century.

**The Violence of the Decade 1912-1922**

The events of the decade changed Ireland politically and the change was and remains most evident in partition. It was also a decade of brutality and violence
and any remembering or commemoration a century on will be just another act of denial unless the violence is critically acknowledged and unmasked. The decade 2012-2022 provides the potential to remove the ideology or religion of violence from the future.

The dust had hardly settled on the events of 1912-1922 when the denial of violence began. Revolutionary militarists turned constitutional politicians began to crudely rewrite history for their own purposes. Anti-democratic, violent revolution became ‘national struggle’ or ‘national liberation’. Kevin O’Higgins, the first Vice-President of the Irish Free State government was locating the origin of the Irish revolution ‘exclusively in Sinn Fein’s 1918 general election victory’. It would never do to disown the ‘martyrs’ of 1916 as anti-democrats.

Quite apart from denying the fact that Irish constitutionalism was born of non-democratic revolutionary violence, the denial of the term revolution post-1932 also served the useful purpose of denying that there was an alternative to violence in achieving independence and statehood.

But violent revolution had been chosen as the exclusive option, and that option was chosen in 1912 by the Unionists. Ulster unionism armed and threatened violent resistance, going against the democratic will of the Westminster Parliament. The formation and arming of the Ulster Volunteer Force led to the new militarisation of Irish society, its reflex being the armed and equally illegal Irish Volunteers, which later became the IRA. Both of these illegal military responses ensured a decade of violence and a legacy seen in ‘shards and splinters to the present day’.

Carson, the key architect of the armed unionist tradition, or ‘founder of the people’s army’ as current loyalist lamppost banners proclaim, was not only establishing a military council, but also a ‘Provisional Government’. The ‘Provisional Government’ had its roots in the militarism of the unionist movement, which was a violent act against the British rule of law. It is a matter of historical chronology in the 20th Century that the Ulster Protestants were the first to arm themselves against the British government, and not as a version of history might suggest, the separatist republicans. They simply mirrored the unionists.
After partition, Carson seems like O’Higgins, to have stepped into denial. He was to stand down as unionist leader and leave Northern Ireland, only rarely returning. His farewell speech to the Unionist Council is remarkable in that he points to the future, and exhorts the new government of Northern Ireland to be inclusive and non-discriminating in relation to the nationalist community ‘beached’ as they were within a state they did not want. This 1921 speech was in contrast to a year earlier when he had shown no interest ‘in playing fair with the large Catholic minority within Northern Ireland’.

You will be a Parliament for the whole community. We used to say that we could not trust an Irish Parliament in Dublin to do justice to the Protestant minority. Let us take care that that reproach can no longer be made against your Parliament, and from the outset let them see that the Catholic minority have nothing to fear from a Protestant majority… Let us take care that we win all that is best among those who have been opposed to us in the past in this community… And so I say: from the start be tolerant to all religions, and while maintaining to the last your own traditions and your own citizenship, take care that similar rights are preserved for those who are different from us’.6

There is no mention of armed resistance or illegal Provisional Government. But then the Presbyterians had insisted, perhaps conveniently, that the Covenant only applied to the 1912 crisis, an argument which had been used against the ‘border’ unionists in their protest against being ‘beached’ in a Free State they did not want. At any rate, everyone was constitutional now and in Dublin and Belfast it was convenient to deny the anti-democratic and violent atrocities of the decade. The legacy was not to go away.

Was an Alternative Possible?
The events of the decade took place in British Ireland. This is why we are dealing with British history as much as Irish history. Ireland was Britain’s first colony, and so modern Irish history, at least from the 16th century to 1922, is a history of colonisation with certain characteristics of all colonialism, divide and rule policies and violence and counter-violence. Colonisers do need to take responsibility for their policies and actions, and so too do the colonised. We can and do need to analyse the impact and legacy of the Plantation of Ulster, as also those of
Ascendancy politics. And yet, there is the inescapable paradox that, ‘despite a range of social and institutional reforms introduced by Britain in the late nineteenth century designed to pacify the country, Ireland nonetheless produced a revolt in 1916 that gave rise to a wider war of independence three years later’. Causes of nationalist antagonism had been removed in an impressive list of reforms:

- Disestablishment of the Anglican Church in 1969
- Catholic control of nearly all education and grants to the Maynooth Seminary
- Land Reforms such as the Wyndham Act – small landowners and no absentee landlords
- Social Reforms extended to Ireland – for relief of congested districts
- Parnell’s constitutional parliamentary tactics made Home Rule inevitable
- By 1900 Irish Constitutional Nationalism held effective control of local government and Irish social institutions
- Monopoly of economic power in the hands of the Protestant gentry following the 1800 Act of Union, was broken.

Why then, a rising in 1916 and the subsequent War of Independence? The constitutional alternatives were alive, much had been achieved, and there was inevitability about Home Rule. Two factors fed into the anti-democratic violence of the decade in British Ireland.

A republican physical force tradition had been developing since the early part of the 19th century. The development of the Irish Parliamentary Party and constitutional politics, the latter having been the engine of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, this was key until its complete demise, brought about largely by violence in 1918. And yet the Irish Republican Brotherhood was a growing militant force, infiltrating and undermining political and cultural developments. Driven by ideology, shaped by Irish mythology and Catholic theology, as in Pearse and the mythical poets, it worked towards the moment of opportunity, which came in 1916. The Rising may have failed completely had it not been for the British military violence in executing fifteen of the Rising leaders in May 1916. The tide of national emotion and sympathy turned towards the executed ‘rebels’ and their cause.

Just as the IRB gathered aggressive momentum, so as Home Rule Bills were introduced, the Ulster unionist resistance was becoming more volatile and
militarised. By the time of the third Bill in 1912 this was being encouraged by British Tories, out of power and split over tariff reform. Ulster unionists provided the Tories with a cause and their, in some cases, militant support encouraged unionists to defy the British government. As one Tory put it at the end of the 19th century, ‘Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right.’ Kipling’s poem, ‘Ulster 1912’ ended on a militant note, ‘If England drive us forth/We shall not fall alone’.

The military action and violent threats of the Ulster Unionists might well have created a revolution, not merely in Ireland, but in the United Kingdom, had it not been for the outbreak of the Great War. That is how serious the threat of unionist militarism was. The Curragh mutiny, the refusal of British officers in Ireland, to take military action against Ulster Unionist illegal arms and violence was a stark indicator of how serious unionist military resistance was. The revolution may not have reached Britain, but the IRB and the republican movement noted the militarisation and the British inaction in dealing with it. The militarisation of Ulster Unionists made the 1916 Rising inevitable.

At heart, the shared violence was sectarian. Whether in Cork or Belfast, the killings were sectarian and the 1921 solution of partition meant that, ‘Sectarian relations within Northern Ireland seemed permanently soured as a result of the nature and extent of the partition settlement’.9

The 1912 Home Rule Bill was not bound to fail, nor was partition inevitable, but shared violence ensured that Home Rule failure and a partition settlement did happen. The violence exacerbated a huge dilemma. The achievement of Home Rule, if it could have happened without massive bloodshed, would have left an Ireland with one million plus very reluctant and culturally destructive citizens concentrated mainly in the north-east. In a sense, unionist guns, an illegal army and provisional government, and the massive threat of violence ensured a violent decade and a ‘Protestant state’ at the end of it. But it also, in part, guaranteed 1969 and its violent fall out. On the other hand, had Home Rule been implemented against the wishes of a very reluctant north-eastern Protestant population, Alvin Jackson’s conclusion might have been brutally true:
Northern Ireland under the Union has been likened to Bosnia, but Ireland under Home Rule might well have proved to be not so much Britain’s settled, democratic partner as her Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{10}

A Centennial Decade – An End to Violence?

However dominant the violence in Ireland, 1912 – 1922, it was a small part of an even greater violence. The decade was dominated by the Great War and shattered by it. It was violent slaughter on an industrial scale claiming 50,000 Irish lives, one million dead, and two million wounded in the British Empire alone. The bodies of half of those killed on the Western Front were never found. They were the millions of the ‘disappeared’.

Harry Patch was the last British Tommy who died in 2009. Two years earlier when he visited the battlefields for the last time, he said,\

\textit{Millions of men came to fight in this war and I find it incredible that I am now the only one left. Just like them, when I went over the top, I didn’t know whether I would last longer than five minutes. We were the PBI – the Poor Bloody Infantry – and we were expendable. What a waste. What a terrible waste.\textsuperscript{11}}

It was a decade of atrocity and violence and the killing in Ireland was a small part of a European culture of nationalism, violence, and war. Of the lives lost in the Great War, in Ireland’s decade of violence, and in the recent violent conflict in Northern Ireland, which includes Dublin, Monaghan, and English locations, Patch’s words apply, ‘What a terrible waste.’

Another veteran, Henry Allingham, who died aged 113 years, two weeks before Patch died at 111 years, was not as outspoken as Patch about war. He did say though that, ‘War’s stupid. Nobody wins. You might as well talk first, you have to talk last anyway’.\textsuperscript{12} Allingham may well be right; war is stupid. Perhaps the same should be said of Ireland’s decade of violence and the three plus decades of violence in Northern Ireland. It was stupid and like the Great War, in the end all sides talked anyway. Why did they not talk earlier and save themselves the waste of life, the lives of the respective combatants themselves, and the many more non-
combatants? It’s too late now for the dead and the physically and psychologically wounded, but not too late to take violence out of our politics, community, and culture, and ensure that never again will violence be used to settle differences. Nor ever again our response of fear of the other, because that is the psychological root of violence. Violence is the failure of politics, the failure to encounter the other and to be attentive to the other. Violence is the failure to talk, maybe even tragically the lack of capacity to talk. We prefer instead exclusivity, which in the extreme violence translates into elimination. Violence then becomes as it has in modern Irish history, and in the decade to be commemorated, a terrible ethical failure, a terrible ethical searing of Ireland’s 20th century cultural and communal landscape.

To begin to remove violence from our culture, communal, and indeed religious life requires a large dose of humility. Not only humility at the failure to do things differently in the 20th century, but also the ethical failure which the dependence on violence was, and the mystique with which we surrounded violence. This means, ‘humility to counter the violence of exclusivity with a generosity of attention’.¹³

A centennial decade provides opportunity to move beyond our exclusivity and to open up a ‘generosity of attention’ to each other. This will mean a shared and critical acknowledgement of the violence in our past, attending or listening intently to each other’s partial story and committing ourselves to never again.

Of course the listening will involve talking with each other, translating to each other when the perspectives are not understood or are misunderstood, and in the ‘generosity of attention’ to have parts of our story challenged or enlarged.

People who have been apart for a long time have a lot of catching up to do, a lot of talking and listening and filling in of gaps. Having lived within enforced and destructive cultural boxes, a lot of translation work is required:

_The readiness to translate back and forth between ourselves and strangers… is, I submit, one of the best recipes to promote non-violence and prevent war._¹⁴
The decade 2012-2022 will fail if we deny the violence of a century ago. But if we are ready to create shared initiatives, encounters, creative education programmes, dialogues, storytelling, reflection, hospitality events where nationalist, unionist, republican, loyalist, Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter (and there are growing numbers who don’t want to belong to any of the traditional groups, but even dissent from all of them) are together willing to translate back and forward in relation to the events of 1912-1922. Engagement with that part of our past, including its violence, will throw light and provide perspective on the more recent violent past. Maybe the violence itself will become a thing of the past. Queen Elizabeth spoke in Dublin of the importance ‘of being able to bow to the past but not be bound by it.’ On the same occasion, President McAleese said that while, ‘We cannot change the past, we have chosen to change the future.’ The choice was made only through talking, albeit late in the day. Now it is preventative talking and listening to ensure no more terrible waste, no more shared stupidity, no more stone-age logic of violence.

Reflection Questions

How can we ensure that there will be no denial of violence in the decade of commemoration and how can we acknowledge the violence without indulging in a blame game?

What practical steps are needed to remove violence from culture and tradition?

References

During the period 1912-1922 three major movements in Ireland competed or, at best, combined their energies for public support: nationalism, socialism and feminism. Each sought to win the hearts, minds and imaginations of the people by claiming to ‘fight the true fight’ for human liberty, justice and equality.

Feminists were split on the national question and on whether or not the use of violence to achieve a political end was ever justified. They were convinced that if women had a vote the patriarchal social system that justified male rule would become a thing of the past. With hindsight this perspective was short-sighted. In their struggle to compete with men for power feminists lost sight of the wider issue, the nature of power and the way power was abused by those who held it.

A reflection on the socio-political context, along with the strategies employed by feminists during this crucial period in Irish history, goes some way to explaining why feminism failed morally and ideologically to break with the power struggles of the past and create a transformed, empowered and egalitarian society.

**Feminism and Nationalism**

Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins set up the first militant feminist organisation in Ireland in 1908, which they named the Irish Women’s Franchise League (IWFL). Within a few years membership had increased to around one thousand. In 1912 the suffrage paper, the *Irish Citizen*, went to print. Edited by Francis Sheehy Skeffington, Hanna’s husband, the paper’s motto was: ‘*For Men and Women Equally the Rights of Citizenship; From Men and Women Equally the Duties of Citizenship.***¹ The IWFL set about campaigning for the inclusion of the vote for Irish women in the Home Rule Bill, which was proposing a new constitution for Ireland on a male franchise only. The exclusion of women from decision making and the rights of citizenship, suffragists’ exposed as an example of patriarchal violence. Their response was to enter the fray and meet the violence head on.

Members of the IWFL, at first, tried the constitutional approach and raised awareness of the injustices perpetrated against women by the government of the day. However, petitions, campaigns, deputations were either ignored or cast aside. The decision was then taken to choose a militant approach to highlight their political struggles. In June 1912 the Irish Women’s Franchise League, therefore, staged a
symbolic protest against the Irish Party’s intransigence on the issue of the vote for women by smashing the windows of the General Post Office, the Custom House, and Dublin Castle. The protestors defended their actions on the basis that militancy was part of the Irish tradition and, for the first time, was being used on behalf of women, rather than in the furtherance of male liberties. Jail sentences and lack of public support did not deter the IWFL supporters who continued undeterred. Between 1912 and 1914 thirty-six members were convicted for suffrage militancy in Ireland.

In January 1918 women suffragists achieved a limited measure of success when the Representation of the People Act was passed by the British government granting the vote to women over thirty who met certain conditions (i.e. were householders, or the wives of house holders, had £5 of savings, or were graduates). The age range for the male vote was, however, extended, to include those aged twenty-one to thirty with the intention of preventing a female majority in the electorate. Suffragists interpreted this as further evidence of the political manoeuvring of MPs to maintain the status quo. A similar tactic was employed again in 1921, when those in government supporting the Anglo-Irish Treaty decided not to extend the vote to women over twenty-one until after the treaty referendum, in case it adversely affected the outcome. Skeffington summed up the mood among women at the time: ‘We may not vote for the Free State or the Republic, but we may vote later when others have voted us into the Free State.’

As indicated earlier, the granting of the vote to women did little to prevent the regressive and sexist policies introduced by the Free State Government. The 1937 Constitution, developed by Eamon DeValera, set about redefining the role of women as mother, and homemaker, restricting their roles to the domestic sphere. Particularly contentious was article forty-one, which stipulated that women should not neglect their ‘duties’ in the home by going out to work.

**Feminism and Unionism**

Early 20th century suffrage organisations aimed to meet the particular regional, political or religious needs of members. In 1909, for instance, an Irish branch of the Conservative and Unionist Women’s Suffrage (CUWS) was established in Dublin. And in 1913 the Unionist Women’s Franchise Association (UWFA) developed in the
north of Ireland and attracted a membership of nearly 800 women. The majority of women who involved themselves in politics in Ulster were, however, more concerned with the future of the Union than with gender issues.

The Ulster Women’s Unionist Council (UWUC), created in 1911, was the largest women’s political party at the time, boasting a membership of between 115,000 and 200,000. Members defined their roles in patriarchal terms: to stand by their husbands, brothers and sons and be governed by a male agenda. This perspective was endorsed by Edward Carson who was vocal in his opposition to suffrage. The suffrage movement in the north further disintegrated with the onset of war and the partition of Ireland. Gender concerns were not on the agenda of the Northern Ireland State that formed in 1921 and the focus on the constitutional issue continued to dominate the agenda for the remainder of the 20th century.

Re-emergence of Feminism in the late 20th Century
Feminism began to reform itself in the 1970s in Ireland, north and south, and as before campaigned on the issue of gender equality. In the Republic, the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement (IWLM) campaigned for: equal rights for women in law, whether single or married; equal opportunities in the educational system and work place; a fairer pay structure for women; and women’s right to a home. The issue of contraception, the use of which was outlawed at that time by the state, was also included among the list of human rights. The movement focused on the violence done to women and promoted the development of self-help and single-issue groups like the Rape Crisis Centre and Women’s Aid. In many ways Mary Robinson typified the energy, focus and consolidation of this second wave of feminism. She was elected to the Irish Senate in 1969 and her manifesto revealed the issues that she would champion at every opportunity: the importance of creating a pluralist Ireland, the ending of constraints on moral liberty, and a greater role for women in society. She raised the issue of contraception, which was banned in the 1937 Constitution, and pointed to the four thousand plus Irish women who annually sought abortions in Britain. She challenged church and government for failing to take responsibility for the problem by ensuring these women had alternatives. Her election as President of Ireland in 1990 marked a turning point for women and in that role she demonstrated the contribution women can make to nation building and world building. With Robinson feminism in Ireland entered its third stage and
Mary McAleese, Robinson’s successor, over the last fourteen years has contributed in her own way to feminism’s coming of age.

The development of feminism in Northern Ireland has been somewhat shackled by the thirty-five plus years of violence and community division. According to Grainne McCoy,

*Societies which have experienced violent conflict over ethnic differences or national identity have often been described as characterised by strongly traditional attitudes towards women’s roles.*

In the 1970s nationalist women joined the IRA and equated the feminist struggle with the political struggle. They involved themselves in paramilitary activity, alongside men, with the intention of pressurising British forces into withdrawal, in the hope of establishing a united Ireland. Loyalist women also participated in paramilitary violence: some were involved in moving weaponry and supplying safe houses, while others were directly involved in all aspects of paramilitary activity. Like their loyalist and nationalist predecessors who endorsed violence as a solution to the constitutional issue, these women, if they engaged feminism at all, viewed it as secondary to the national agenda.

Since the Troubles began women have also carved out space in local communities to improve living conditions, and relationships, and build peace. In 1970 a group of Catholic and Protestant women joined together in Belfast to form Women Together for Peace. In 1972, 400 mothers protested outside the official office of Sinn Fein in Londonderry at the murder of a nineteen year old Derry man, who was shot by the Official IRA because he was a soldier in the British Army. This action led to the creation of the Derry Peace Women who received support from local Protestant and Catholic women. In 1976 two women, Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, established the Peace People and began a campaign for peace that received overwhelming support. These groups demonstrated women’s capacity to engage civil society to challenge injustice and create an inclusive, non-violent society. While raising the profile of women they were not overtly feminist or promoting the feminist cause.
As in the Republic, women’s self help groups also developed which focused on violence against women and provided support for single mothers and rape victims. It was not, however, until 1996 that a women’s group was born that was concerned not only to promote just peace but also raise feminist awareness and challenge the gender imbalance in the political sphere. This group called itself the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC) and was the first cross community female political party to exist. Although the NIWC played a pivotal role in negotiating agreements between opposing political parties in the run up to the signing of the Belfast Agreement, ten years after its creation the NIWC was dissolved. With a political agreement the majority of voters settled back into patriarchal conformity and returned the usual Orange and Green candidates, consequently the two NIWC candidates lost their seats. History repeated itself and nationalism once again trounced the feminist agenda as people’s primary concern.

This time, however, the equality issue did not disappear off the political table completely, thanks to groups like Northern Ireland Women’s Initiative (NIWI) now DemocraShe, and the Women’s Education Project (WEP), renamed the Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA). Both of these groups campaigned rigorously to have the clause concerning the ‘right of women to full and equal political participation,’ contained in the Belfast Agreement (1998), implemented. A number of women have received political training from DemocraShe and have been duly elected onto local councils and taken up posts in political parties. WRDA, aware of the need for gender balance and awareness raising in the community sector, has focused its energies on providing training for women in community development, policy work and service delivery.

The future of Feminism in Ireland
Recent legislation in Northern Ireland, to redress inequalities in society, has the potential to create the environment for reassessing and re-educating the community about the nature and consequences of patriarchy. A Gender Equality Unit (GEU) was established to advise and support government departments in the mainstreaming of gender equality into policies and services, and to tackle gender inequalities. Following consultation, GEU published a Gender Equality Strategy
(GES) in 2006 with the intention of creating ‘…[a ] society in which men and women are equally respected and valued… sharing equality of opportunity, rights and responsibilities….’

In 2008 a report entitled Gender Equality Strategy: A Baseline Picture was published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). It provides a series of gender indicators to measure the experience of women and men: education (school/life-long learning); employment (type/hours); earnings; income and poverty; childcare; caring; health; transport; violence and crime (victims/perpetrators); and decision making roles.

In 2009 OFMDFM published its Gender Equality Action Plans for women and men, identifying obstacles to equality of opportunity, and the necessary actions needed to achieve greater balance over the lifetime of the Programme for Government (2008-2011). It stipulates:

Women may experience multiple inequalities where for example they are elderly, lesbian, disabled, from a different ethnic minority background. Women in general work longer hours and are paid less than men, (taking both paid and unpaid work into account). Women generally carry the major responsibility of domestic chores and caring (including childcare) within families. Women predominate in low-paid, part-time jobs. Women are more likely than men to be victims of domestic violence.

The most recent report produced by Bronagh Hinds, one of the founders of Democrashe, for WRDA, entitled The Northern Ireland Economy: Women on the Edge? gives a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the financial crisis on women. The report focuses on the economic vulnerability of lone parents, migrant women, young women who cannot access the job market, single older women with inadequate pensions, and those women on welfare and living with debt. It recommends that ‘government must consider the gender impact of measures for deficit reduction and economic recovery and significantly increase the number of women in economic and financial decision-making.’ (Executive Summary).
As these reports confirm, there is no denying the patriarchal framework that still underpins Northern Irish society, and which continues to impact negatively on women. Recent gender equality legislation has underlined the need to transform existing systems and structures by embedding equality principles and practices in all civic institutions.

But changing legislation, while important, is not enough, in itself, to bring about a shift in patriarchal perspectives. A change in the way we think is also required. Women and men need to be re-educated to critique and challenge unjust relations of privilege and under-privilege, power and powerlessness, domination and subjugation, which prevent the creation of relationships based on genuine mutuality and gender equality.

The third generation of feminists, represented by figures like Robinson and McAleese, hold that there needs to be a re-evaluation of the ethical value base that informs socio-political decisions and actions. They believe key to this is a radical shift away from the Irish fixation with violence and death; that works itself out in competing nationalisms, the myth of redemptive violence, and a patriarchal socio-political domination system. In its place they endorse a refocus on birth and creativity, using the feminist symbol *natalité*, which underlines the hope, possibility and wonder implicit in all of life’s diverse forms. If all of life is truly celebrated then the concern will be to create a humane, equitable, just and peaceable society.

Over a century ago our feminist foremothers and fathers began the slow dismantling of an unjust patriarchal system. We can bring their efforts to fruition and do all we can to rid our society of its toxic presence. In the end the choice is ours! So, what will our legacy be to future generations?
Reflection Questions

In what ways have Irish feminists both mirrored and challenged the cultural conditioning that has shaped society, north and south, over the last century?

How might the feminist symbol of natalité transform the minds and hearts of Irish people toward a life-affirming, egalitarian ethic and a just peace?

References

Introduction: A Literary Renaissance
There was a cultural and national revival at the beginning of the 20th century in Ireland that found expression in literature, music, language, and sports. It was spurred on by the hope that Ireland would become a Republic, with its own self-governing parliament independent from Britain. The focus, in this chapter, is on a selection of writings from key Irish literary figures, which shed light on the tumult of ideas and emotions preceding, and immediately following, the 1916 Rising. The range and complexity of literary responses to the period 1912-1922 in Irish history is extensive. At best, this chapter provides selective snapshots of three significant writers grappling with context, cultural tradition and the dynamics of liberation.

Leaders of the 1916 Rising included poets and actors who were involved in the National Theatre movement. As such, they would have been aware of the impact of a piece of dramatic street theatre on the Irish mindset. What better way to publically stage the production of a Republican Manifesto! Their choice of the GPO as a location was significant, as it was centrally located in Dublin; as was their choice of the day. Easter has symbolic religious significance in the Christian imagination and celebrates Jesus’ victory over death and the imperial Roman system that crucified him. Its central message is redemption from oppression.

The explosion of literary fervor that led up to, and included, the decade 1912-1922 was not a new phenomenon. The 1798 Rising similarly inspired a literary revival. Marianne Elliot refers to the way in which the romantic and the militant have interconnected in the Irish imagination to inspire men and women to engage in, and celebrate, ‘heroic sacrifices.’ W. B. Yeats’ Cathleen Ni Houlihan, which is set during the 1798 Rising, tells the story of the transformation of Ireland, which was represented as a poor old woman who became queen and called the men (sic) of Ireland for personal sacrifice as a sign of true patriotism. The Protestant home ruler Stephen Gwynn is reputed to have said, after attending a performance of Yeats’ play: ‘I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot.’

Oscar Wilde, John Millington Synge and W. B. Yeats, each belonged to the Protestant Anglo-Irish ascendency class. They shared a commitment to the decolonising process, and to liberating ‘minds and hearts,’ from debilitating cultural
traditions or false perceptions. Wilde, in particular, challenged stereotypes that depicted the Irish as superstitious, emotional and lazy, and therefore incapable of self-rule; and the English as progressive, rational and hard-working. The literary task, then, involved establishing or revealing authentic identities, so that transformed relationships between coloniser and colonised might be possible. The anti-imperialist thrust of their Anglo-Irish literature underlines these writers’ revolutionary intent. The literary revival was, therefore, an exercise in cultural and socio-political resistance. According to Declan Kiberd, the Irish political leaders of the early 20th century, including Pearse, Connolly, de Valera and Collins, took their inspiration from the ideas circulated by poets and playwrights. In fact,

…what makes the Irish Renaissance such a fascinating case is the knowledge that the cultural revival preceded and in many ways enabled the political revolution that followed.³

So what were some of these revolutionary ideas?

**Flaunting Civility: Oscar Wilde**

Oscar Wilde focused his considerable talent on deconstructing the imperial mythology invented by England to justify its colonial mission. Wilde was of the belief that until England reinvented itself Ireland would never be free. Living as an exile in London, Wilde’s plays, like Shakespeare’s comedy of errors, used satirical humour to expose the true natures hiding behind elaborate masks. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* his characters’ public personas are the exact opposite of their private ones. Also a committed feminist, Wilde ridicules the patriarchy of the time. His female characters are strong, independent women, who in their dealings with the men are shrewd and business-like. The men, sentimental and impractical, make decisions based on emotional responses. In subverting patriarchal gender stereotypes Wilde cleverly points up that human nature is neither fixed, nor determined; and that, in fact, there is no such thing as a type, either racial or gender. In his plays, Wilde shows that ‘the other’, which he called the ‘double,’ is a projection of our shadow side, whatever we are repressing in ourselves. Relationships with those deemed ‘other’, are thus driven by fear and the need to control. Owning the repressed self and becoming integrated was, Wilde recognised, key to healthy relationships between Nations and genders. It was for
this reason that he sought to hold a mirror up to English society and show that only when characters accept their true selves and ‘come out’ publicly is there any hope of honest relationships and a redeemed future. Wilde’s own personal struggle for authenticity no doubt influenced his subject matter. He knew admitting to his homosexuality in a court of law meant incarceration. But he lived, as he wrote, with integrity, courage and honesty, values he deemed core to any cultural and socio-political revival.

**Words without actions lack substance – John Millington Synge**

John Millington Synge, on Yeats’ advice, visited and spent time on the Aran Islands, with a view to expressing the life that he encountered there. *The Playboy of the Western World*, his last play performed at the Abbey theatre in Dublin, where the National Theatre movement had found a home, was staged in 1907. Unfortunately, it gained notoriety for the wrong reasons. Audiences, offended by the play’s critique of nationalistic sentiment and the representation of Irish peasantry as violent, superstitious, and even obscene, interrupted the first night’s performance and began rioting. This violent response confirmed Synge in his conviction that such a people, incapable of self-critique, were not capable of self-government.

What the play does with economic aplomb is capture the violent context of the time. The barbarity of colonialism is represented by the thousand militia crossing through County Mayo; the Mayoite villagers compare these British forces to ‘loosed khaki cut-throats.’ Synge’s particular concern is the impact of this colonial violence on the colonised. Their reactions are mixed. On the one hand, it has prompted a fascination with violence; with the villager, Sarah Tamsey, willing to travel miles to see the man who bit the yellow lady’s nostril. On the other, it has encouraged a hatred of the English law and its representatives; and created the environment for the main character, Christy Mahon, to become a self-confessed hero on the back of his boast that he has killed his father. Pegeen Mike, one of the principal characters, compares Christy to past Gaelic poets, like Owen Roe O’ Sullivan who was immortalised for his way with words and violent temper: ‘I’ve heard all times it’s the poets who are your like, fine fiery fellows with great rages when their temper’s roused.’ (Act 1, Ins.369-371).
When, in Act three, Christy’s father enters the pub, and it’s discovered that the supposed murder was no more than a tall tale, Pegeen’s reaction exposes what, for Synge, is the real weakness of the Irish peasantry in the grip of the brutality of colonialism, their incapacity to act. Such a people, he was convinced, live on dreams that lack substance in reality:

\[
I'll \ say, \ a \ strange \ man's \ a \ marvel, \ with \ his \ mighty \ talk; \\
but \ what's \ a \ squabble \ in \ your \ back \ yard, \ and \ the \ blow \ of \ a \ loy, \\
have \ taught \ me \ that \ there's \ a \ great \ gap \ between \ a \ gallous \ story \\
and \ a \ dirty \ deed. \ (Act \ 3, \ Ins. \ 544-547).
\]

When Christy tries to commit the deed he has become renowned for, and the villagers witness his attack on his father, who is left for dead a second time, they turn against him. Christy’s action has moved the event from the fictional realm of story, where men can emulate the heroic deeds of Cuchulain, to the real world. Fear of repercussions from the law enforcers, which they had claimed to despise, determines the villagers’ response. The men, too scared to approach Christy and tie him up, reveal their cowardice. It is left to Pegeen, on Shawn’s urging, to take charge. Not only does she throw the rope around Christy but burns his leg with a sod from the fire. Christy’s profound disbelief is understandable. This is the woman who had previously proclaimed her love in poetic terms and now, when he has attempted the very thing he was being lauded for, she leads the assault.

In a patriarchal culture, where the men issue orders and it is left to the women to do the work, Pegeen has survived by voicing her anger and frustration in sharp and cynical repartee. We earlier witnessed her transformation as Christy awakened a sensitive and romantic side to her nature that had become buried. But in the end the freedom Christy offers from the constraints of rural existence is beyond her reach. She settles for Shawn, a man afraid of his own shadow, and even more so of the Catholic Church; and patriarchy reasserts itself as she resorts to doing his bidding.

Christy rejects the villagers and, along with his twice resurrected father, leaves to seek his fortune elsewhere. In leaving, he becomes master of his own fate, no
longer relying on others’ perceptions of him, or their good will. He is secure enough in his own identity to become independent. The play ends on a note of lament as Pegeen admits she is unlikely, ever again, to become the fully alive person she was with Christy. ‘Oh my grief, I’ve lost him surely. I’ve lost the only playboy of the Western World.’ (Act 3, Ins. 624-625).

What message did Synge intend to convey through this play? Using dramatic irony he expertly exposed what he deemed a fault line in the Irish character: an inability to risk revolution for fear of the consequences; preferring, instead, to tell stories of past heroes while remaining in servitude to colonialism. In doing so, he left his nationalist audience in no doubt as to his conviction: that nationalism relying on past dreams and nothing else is redundant and will betray itself when faced with the possibility of freedom. Is the play, therefore, an incitement to revolutionary action? And is this why the predominantly middle class nationalist audience on opening night reacted with anger? The riots certainly raised the play’s profile; and Synge’s stinging critique, that real revolution needed heroic actions to realise freedom’s dream, likely impacted those who eventually led the Easter Rising.

**Searching for an identity – William Butler Yeats**

William Butler Yeats was also concerned with the nature of the nationalism that stirred the Irish people. Early in his career he urged his readers to observe that true nationalism was never fixed in the past but was always re-inventing itself by being open to the future. Yeats, like Wilde, viewed his contribution to the national cause as dismantling the ‘style’, or false impression, of the stock Irish person in English culture. For Yeats the real Irish spirit, glimpsed in past legends, could only emerge when the colonial straightjacket was stripped away.

Yeats also believed a cultural renaissance had to precede any declaration of independence. Art for him envisaged ‘…a different order of reality from that which is given…. Fictions, though they treat of the non-existent, by that very virtue, help people to make sense of the world around them.’ Yeats saw it as the artist’s role to formulate the new style, or form, of the nation, and thus express that new life which had never found expression. The theatricality of the 1916 Rising, clearly, fitted his early conviction that style is all important.
Before the Easter Rising occurred, Yeats had expressed his disillusionment with conventional nationalism. The previous year, he had written to a friend that all achievements are based on compromise. The Rising confirmed his revised stance. Appalled at the loss of Pearse and MacDonagh he found no comfort at their graves. In his poem entitled Easter 1916 he enumerates life’s pleasures, which the dead can no longer experience: a horse splashing in the stream, and moor-hens diving and calling to moor-cocks. Death has robbed the Rising’s leaders of the ability to love the real world, or perhaps, he ponders, their fanaticism had already deprived them of this capacity. ‘Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart.…’ The poem ends with a series of hard questions. In light of the political context, when Home Rule had been passed into law and ‘England may keep faith’ was their sacrifice needed or justified? And was it possible that the love they professed for Ireland really had at root a hatred for England?

During the civil war in Ireland Yeats struggled with his role as a poet. In Meditations in Time of Civil War he imagined himself in various public guises: philosophical guide for a people, instructive sage, ethical aesthetic, or a writer of ‘the finest play under the sun.’ In the context of a nation gripped by the crisis of civil war, Yeats concluded that all these roles were inadequate. One stanza in particular confirms his disillusionment with militant nationalism and the impulse driving it:

\[
\begin{align*}
We \text{ had fed the heart on fantasies,} \\
The \text{ heart’s grown brutal from the fare;} \\
More \text{ substance in our enmities} \\
Than \text{ in our love.}\end{align*}
\]

In later writings, Yeats’ focus changed to mastery of the conflicting demons within the self. Following Irish independence he sought in his work A Vision to provide a spiritual foundation for the new nation-state.

**Conclusion**

As members of the educated Protestant aristocracy, Wilde, Synge and Yeats, benefitted from experiencing life outside of Ireland. This sensitized them to the fact that both coloniser and colonised were in need of liberation from the misshapen identities that bound them. Each of these writers struggled with the same issue,
which is still our issue: How to remember the past with integrity so as to create a liberating future? Or to put the question another way: ‘How to build a future on the past without returning to it?’ They believed that the past should never close off the future. In other words, while there is value in being rooted in tradition, we are always in the process of creating new traditions. Traditioning, for these literary figures, is a future orientated activity that has power to challenge and disrupt what has gone before. What they were not always agreed on, however, was how to create the longed for liberating future. Synge seemed to come down on the side of militant nationalism, which Yeats came to reject in favour of compromise.

Other significant literary voices raised during this defining period in Ireland’s history, include Sean O’ Casey and James Joyce. The former’s plays offer a socialist critique of Irish society, and the latter underlines the need for an Irish epiphany that would explode the narrow provincialism and moral codes, which dictated socio-political and religio-cultural reality. There is not space in this short chapter to do more than note their contributions to the creation of Irish consciousness and identity.

In our time Seamus Heaney verbalised his own struggle to respond to the more recent violence in Ireland. His insight following the violent summer of 1969 in Belfast was that

\[ \text{…the problems of poetry moved from simply being a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament.} \]

Heaney’s dilemma mirrors the experience of the aforementioned literary revivalists. It demonstrates how context shapes our literary figures and also how their bodies of work are, at best, an attempt at a creative response to the crises unfolding around them. Any analysis of the decade 1912-1922 that does not take seriously the literary impact underestimates the key role played by artists in reflecting on, critiquing, and even shaping the path to the future.
Reflection Questions

In what ways are Irish literary figures shaped by their context?

Is the literature we read ever value-free?

What contribution can literary works make to the creation of a just and peaceful future in Ireland or elsewhere?

References

‘Memories are the roots of our identity, individually as well as collectively. Therefore it is of utmost importance for our identity that we should know how to deal with the complex webs of our memories. The integrity and wellbeing of our existence depends on whether we are at ease with our past or whether there are things which we need to put away in some dungeon of our heart, whence they are bound to inflict us with sudden and sickening intensity’.

Introduction
Memory is not unchanging, it is continually being made and re-made and therefore is susceptible to manipulation, myth making and fabrication. The memories of events between 1912 and 1922 have been made and re-made, manipulated and distorted to reinforce a sectarian mindset that continues to dominate Northern Ireland today. Given the sectarian nature of our communities, we risk remembering and recalling the decade of centennial anniversaries 2012-2022 through a distorted history of memory and employ it as a way of justifying behaviour in the present. However, through a process of purposeful inquiry and critical evaluation, we can explore new ways of recalling the past; we can open ourselves to ‘emancipatory memory’ which can open up a future for our history, at a personal and collective level.

Remembering and Forgetting
Memory refers to our ability to retain and recall information and knowledge as and when we need it, and how and what we remember is an active process and so too is the process of ‘actively forgetting’. The hard work of actively forgetting very memorable events in an effort to deny their existence is reflected in Northern Ireland, whereby people actively choose to remember incidents which are in alignment with their politics and culture whilst choosing to forget or ignore what does not reinforce their way of thinking.

Exclusive remembering of the past (from one particular narrative or perspective) feeds into the memory as fact in the present, which can be dangerous when peace is fragile and people are struggling to come to terms with the violence and trauma of the past. In a society emerging from protracted conflict such as Northern Ireland, the added dimension of trauma further affects memory states. There is
a difference between ordinary or narrative memory and traumatic memory, the latter not being integrated normally into one’s life experiences. This lack of proper integration affects ‘current perceptions, affect states, and behaviour and may return as physical sensations, horrific images, nightmares, behavioural re-enactments, or a combination of these’. Both the narrative memory and the traumatic memory shape current attitudes and beliefs which help to bond and create a sense of community. When attitudes and beliefs are shaken and destroyed through the failure to deal with the underlying issues of individual and collective trauma, this adds to the disorientation and breakdown of community.

In Ireland, both north and south, there is widespread trauma as a result of the recent conflict and from the unresolved issues of a decade of change and violence from 1912 to 1922, which shaped contemporary Ireland. There is no glory for any side, nationalist/republican, unionist/loyalist, that has yet to deal ethically with the bodies of the disappeared, the injured and bereaved, and the underlying sectarianism that is at the heart of deep division, violence and murder. And traumatic memory is not confined only to those who have witnessed or been part of violence; it is played out by younger generations who have no lived experience of past events, and yet are traumatised through memories, personal and collective, which have been passed down from one generation to another.

Memory is complex and historians and sociologists today question an unqualified notion of a coherent and monolithic collective memory. Instead they demonstrate how collective memories may clash and compete. This complexity is reflected by Lene Yding Pederson who proposes ‘categories of memory’ which are useful when reflecting on the upcoming centennial events:

- **Personal memory**: This refers to the memory of a personal past, where the objects of the act of remembering are events and acts that belong to an individual’s own life story.
- **Cultural memory**: Unlike communicative memory, which is informal, cultural memory communicates institutionalised figures of memory and can be understood as repertoire of symbolic forms and stories through which communities advance and edit competing identities.
• *Postmemory:* This is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.

**Memory and Remembrance**
Participation in, and adherence to commemorative ritual is integral to our social and political identity and culture. It is basic to how we remember at the individual, family and community level. Remembrance and Commemorative events are concerned with keeping past events alive in our memories in the present-day and while this can be a healthy aspect to our culture, it can also be negative. In Northern Ireland commemoration is often used to legitimise and cultivate behavioural patterns, attitudes and social norms to retain dominance and power over communities. In the past, national memorials have been created and promoted by the domination system in order to keep a particular version of history alive for social and political purposes. These sanctioned remembrances construct a culture of collective memory which is embedded in the psyche and history making of the community as a whole. Such commemorations have the potential to separate and dominate; for example most memorial sites and remembrance events in Northern Ireland, profile a one-sided ‘community of memory’ thus ensuring that alternative and competing memories are forgotten or suppressed by that community. This is true of our parliamentary buildings at Stormont, which reflect a dominant unionist historical perspective in the erected monuments of Carson and Craig. How we encompass a wider history is one of the challenges of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Rather than one dominant historical perspective, there is a need to weave our diverse ‘histories’ to complete the story of our shared past. And it is a shared past, regardless of how we wish to view it.

The upcoming centennial events, 2012-2022 can and must be commemorated as a shared past which paves a way of being with each other in the future. Professor Sabine Marschall (University of KwaZulu-Natal, SA) has written extensively about commemoration and has developed thinking on how to commemorate in a way that unites rather than divides. Marschall highlights four types of commemorations, familiar to Northern Ireland, the legacy of which feeds into our personal and cultural memory today:
1. **Official sanctioned commemoration:** Reflects the dominant system or group, based on large consensus (but in reality not tested). It takes the form of statues, sculptures, gardens, murals. Official memory sites can, paradoxically, encourage forgetting because people then do not feel the need to remember (no outpourings, suppression or lamenting).

2. **Unofficial vernacular commemoration:** Emerges from below through the media. Increasingly ordinary people are taking on board expressions of grief and trauma expressed through visual, spontaneous outpourings such as flowers, pictures, flags, shrines, normally anchored in local tradition and culture. Marschall points out that migration, global networks and other forms of communication create a memory without borders and can be turned into media global spectacles.

3. **Unintended or silent commemoration:** These represent the manifestations of memory that have not been given a voice. Such commemorations are represented through the physical remains of violence such as deserted military institutions, unmarked mass graves, prisons, military graveyards/old arms dumps which remain untouched. This type of commemoration can evoke painful memories more powerfully than any commemoration marker. Marschall refers to this as ‘official forgetting allied with silent remembering.’

4. **Commemoration through absence:** Such commemoration is represented through sites where all physical manifestations of the building or site are removed (for example where a concentration or prison camp once stood). These unintentional, invisible or vacant sites are unmarked and underdeveloped. While no physical structure remains, the mental images and horror of what happened can be recalled.

We are familiar in Northern Ireland with former check points, army installations and police stations which are either derelict or have been removed since the Good Friday Agreement. How we might acknowledge these sites, as a way of diffusing evocative memory, is a question for community and society as a whole.

According to Marschall, we can depart from entrenched memorialisation and set a new context for framing personal memories by pursuing different types of commemoration.8
This can be done in a number of ways:

- Encourage commemoration practice that combines officially endorsed and vernacular expressions of remembering within a legitimate framework that is negotiated and inclusive.
- Focus on the human aspect of what is being commemorated (not on the political dimension), and on the consequences (rather than the cause).
- Find agreement on how to pay respect to each other’s remembering.
- Encourage respect for the living, regardless of religious or political opinion.
- Consult with a wide variety of stakeholders.
- Be appropriate to the needs that will change over time.

**Memory and Myth**

Every society and culture creates myth in an attempt to make sense of a chaotic and confusing world. Myth can be approached as ‘a profound and creative story attempting to explain the way things are, a why question, and expressing the deepest meaning of creation, life or history.‘ However while myth ideally serves as points of reference for good action within society, myth can also close down community, ‘Myths are at their most enclosed when they become subject to sublime and terrorist interpretations – when they become evil’. It could be argued that when this happens, we shift from myth into ‘pious fiction.’

In Northern Ireland, all sides have been guilty of creating myth about the past and the ‘other’ which can be both negative and damaging. When we apply this to remembering and commemorating, a pattern is formed: In acknowledging only their own losses, each side effectively declares who (alone) is ‘worthy’ of remembering, and reinforces their myth of (exclusive) victimhood. Thus there is no accountability for the hurt and devastation of other lives. Commemorations held by those involved in the violence, whether state or paramilitary, create myth to justify violence and death. For example, the myth of ‘blood sacrifice’ at the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme is still very much in the memories and language of today.

One of the biggest prevailing myths is summed up by Duncan Morrow, Chief Executive of the Community Relations Council for Northern Ireland, who noted that in Northern Ireland, all sides believe ‘Our ethical violence was in response to their unethical violence!’
Foundational Myth

Every new political order needs to form a group identity. Desmond Tutu (1980s), created a foundational myth in the concept of a ‘Rainbow Nation’ as a means of allowing people to move forward after apartheid. Craig, Prime Minister of the newly formed Northern Ireland, stated that Northern Ireland was a ‘Protestant State for a Protestant people’, affirming a foundational myth for Northern Ireland in 1934 in response to De Valera’s foundational myth of a Catholic state for a Catholic people.

There is now the opportunity, and the challenge, to create a new foundational myth. By redesigning the landscape of memory, we can construct a new identity, a foundational myth, which is not held captive by the festering narratives of the past. Ethical leadership by politicians, church leaders, educators, community stakeholders and society as a whole, can work together to make this inclusive and agreed. A number of considerations could be taken into account:

- Agree a point of reference, for example, Good Friday Agreement, St Andrew’s Agreement, 2012?
- Agree on a framework that is inclusive and shared.
- Highlight the key messages to be relayed.
- Set common values and goals (we could use the values of both the Ulster Covenant and Easter Proclamation, see booklets 2 and 6).
- Be sensitive to language – the original Judeo-Christian Covenant offers core values that might be useful: compassion/social solidarity, social justice, right relations, shalom/peace, inclusivity, non-violence, total wellbeing; personal, social, environmental (see booklet 6).

How we ethically manage the upcoming centennial anniversaries will reflect on us in terms of what we have learned from the past and what we can take with us into the future. We have a unique opportunity with the upcoming centennial events to lay the foundations for a new memory, a new foundational myth within an ethical and shared remembering framework that sets standards about how to deal with our conflictual past.
Reflection Questions

What are the myths that feed into our memory in the present?

Who are the makers of memory in our society today?

How do we create a new foundational myth for a new social and political landscape?

References

Whatever the forces of conservation, change happens anyhow. The myth of King Canute hopelessly and unsuccessfully trying to turn back the tide is indelibly printed on our consciousness. From the standpoint of the early 21st century, the decade 1912-1922 is in every way a foreign country. But even as the decade opened with the third Home Rule Bill, Ireland had changed significantly since the first Bill had been overturned in 1886. The key issue of land ownership had largely been resolved. Various Land Acts had ensured that. Home rule had become the dominant issue. Between 1886 and 1912, new, more strident, aggressive and militant voices were being heard. Irish Republican Brotherhood activists had infiltrated political and cultural organisations. There was growing impatience around the failure to grant Home Rule to Ireland. Impatience was also growing in the women’s campaign for the vote. In August, 1911, the Irish Women’s Suffrage Federation was established and some of its protests were becoming violent. When Prime Minister Asquith visited Dublin in July 1912, he was ambushed by suffragettes and a hatchet or axe thrown at him, narrowly missing and grazing John Redmond, the Irish Parliamentary leader. Violent thugs also attacked and broke up women’s suffrage protest meetings.

There was also a growing labour movement and although James Connolly has sometimes been acknowledged as the founder of a socialist movement in Ireland, socialism took root back in 1872. It was then that branches of the International Working Men’s Association were established in Dublin, Cork, Belfast and Cootehill, Co Cavan. The ideas were European and in Catholic Ireland were opposed as being in alliance with atheism. Strongly opposed by the Catholic Church and media these socialist bodies soon came to an end, which led a Catholic Canon Maguire of Cork to rejoice that ‘those wretched people had been expelled from Belfast.’ Connolly’s Irish Republican Socialist Party was not formed until 1896, though between 1872 and 1896 there were socialist movements such as the Dublin Democratic Association (1885) and the Socialist League, around the same time. Both collapsed shortly afterwards. The Independent Labour party was founded in Belfast (1892) and Dublin (1894), and again there was hostile opposition. Connolly’s party, IRSP, was a recognition of the Irish socialist movement, and it called for a raft of social reforms such as old age, widows and orphans pensions, children’s allowances, improved housing, higher wages, improved working conditions and free education at every level. Its aim was for an Irish Socialist Republic in which there would be
public ownership of land by Irish people and state control of industry, land, banks and transport systems.

Connolly left Ireland for the USA in 1903, frustrated at socialism’s lack of progress and returned in 1910 to work as a branch organiser for the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU), founded in 1908 by James Harkin. Connolly became the Belfast organiser for the ITGWU and became with Larkin, deeply involved in the huge wave of class struggles in Belfast and Dublin.

The Great Lock Outs
Ireland, like the rest of the United Kingdom at this time was a class riven society. It was a world portrayed in the popular television series of the 1970’s, *Upstairs Downstairs*. Equally popular in recent years has been a new series of the same era *Downton Abbey*. The class divisions were deep and the boundaries and formalities rigidly adhered to. The 1911 census, the period in which Downton Abbey is set, has 1.3 million people working ‘*downstairs*’ in domestic service. Working conditions and wages were poor and a city like Dublin had some of the worst slums in Europe, where large families lived in appalling conditions, one or two-roomed tenement flats, in which many suffered from cholera, dysentery and typhoid. The context of the decade 1912-1922 was one of extremes, extreme wealth and extreme poverty, not by any means confined to Ireland. It was also a reality even in the more industrialised north.

In Belfast Connolly organised the women workers in the linen industry and, with Larkin, succeeded in uniting Catholic and Protestant workers against employers. In 1911 he led the famous Belfast Textile Workers Strike.

Deep class division, poor wages and working conditions, poor housing and wealthy magnates getting richer on the shoulders of the poor, all cried out for social justice, and the formation of unions to protect and advocate for workers. Significantly it was the Edinburgh born Connolly and Liverpool born Larkin who became the key personalities in the Irish class and social struggle. It was one of class conflict, which between 1909 and 1913 became a time of acute hardship for workers, especially the unskilled workers of Dublin.
Larkinism was a combination of socialism, republicanism and trade unionism, all three embodied by the magnetic and popular personality of James Larkin. In 1907 he was in Belfast organising workers' strikes, including the dockers' refusal to handle goods of strike-breaking employers. Larkin even brought the police in Belfast out on strike. Catholic and Protestant workers united against the Belfast Steamship Company in 1907.

Strike action began in April 1907 with unskilled Protestant workers in the Sirocco engineering works in east Belfast. These unorganised workers were soon forced back to work and signed a pledge not to join a trade union. In June dockers called for a general strike to support their claim for £1-7-6 per week wage and a cut in working hours to 60 hours per week. Unrest spread and employers declared a lock-out. Blackleg workers were imported, additional police and army were brought into Belfast and the Royal Navy was ordered to anchor off Bangor. July in Belfast was usually dominated by sectarian tensions and Orange marches, but in 1907 both east and west Belfast were in solidarity. The ‘Twelfth’ itself was never more peaceful in Belfast and astonishingly two weeks later on the 26th July, Belfast saw one of its biggest labourer demonstrations ever when 100,000 trade unionists and supporters marched through the city with bands and banners. Sadly it was not the end of sectarianism and the unionist media took every opportunity to exploit old fears and divisions and ultimately succeeded in driving a wedge between British and Irish trade-union leaders. Serious rioting by strikers in the Falls road led to two deaths and many injuries. Not only Protestant unionist but conservative Catholics were also distancing themselves from strikers. Joe Devlin was quick to point out that he had never shared a platform with Larkin, and Cardinal Logue in a Derry speech implied that trade unionism was promoting ‘socialism…irreligion and atheism.’ Sectarianism, like nationalism in the south, was to deflect the workers' cause and that of social justice.

By the Autumn of 1907 the strike had collapsed with nothing gained. Militant workers were blacklisted by employers, the more socialist minded Independent Orange Order was disrupted and began to disintegrate and several branches of the Independent Labour party disappeared. It has been suggested that ‘it was this failure of the Protestant workers to shake off decisively their Unionist-Orange shackles, which was the main factor in the defeat of the strike’.¹
Meanwhile, trade-unionism fared no better in the south. When foundrymen in Wexford attempted to join Larkin’s Union in 1911, they were locked out. In 1912 there was not only the traditional expulsion of Catholics from the Belfast shipyard, Protestant trade-unionists, socialists and other undesirables were also being expelled from the workplace. The battle for social justice in 1913 produced the great Dublin lockout. In 1911 Larkin had called for employers to enter discussions, but the employers were also organised and the Employers’ Federation, representing 400 Dublin employers rejected any discussion. It was a declaration of war by the employers. Dublin at this stage was the second city of the British Empire with a large population, one third of its population being unskilled workers. They were casual workers, carters and dockers, while women were underpaid as domestics and washerwomen, if they were not prostitutes earning money from the many soldiers in the city.

The Employers’ Federation not only rejected talks, a united demand was issued to workers that they would not join the ITGWU or any other union. Those who refused the demand were sacked. In August 1913 Larkin called out on strike the workers of Murphy’s Dublin United Tramways Company and up to half of the company’s employees stopped work, leading to a bitter and violent conflict.

The Dublin employers were led by William Martin Murphy, who not only owned the Tramway company, but also the Irish Catholic and Irish Independent newspapers, and had been a former nationalist M.P. He also owned the Imperial Hotel and a great deal more, making him not only the leader of the Employers’ Federation, but a formidable opponent in a class conflict. By early September the employers had locked out the employees to try and break their resistance. There was no compromise or negotiation with the Union. It was an all out strike and lock-out. Murphy’s tramline workers had walked off their trams wherever they happened to be. Workers began to starve and were attacked through heavy-handed action by the police and by members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, who were on the side of the bosses. Every week a British trade-union sponsored steamship arrived in Dublin with food. Food and finance were also coming from America and Europe in support of the workers against the lock-out and the employer sponsored violence. Pressure mounted and the Employers’ Federation finally agreed to negotiations in December 1913. On 20th December, 1913 the talks broke down. By early 1914
food from Britain, America and Europe was beginning to dry up and the plight of the workers became increasingly serious.

The employer sponsored violence had already led to a response in November 1913 with the founding of Connolly’s Citizens Army, a 200 strong force to protect and defend the workers. The Citizens Army was not stood down when the strike ended but continued and was active in the 1916 Rising.

By January 1914 the workers had been sixteen months without pay and their resistance crumbled. The employers laid down hard conditions for a return to work. On 18th January 1914 the Union advised a return with Larkin saying, ‘We are beaten. We make no bones about it’. ²

Victory had gone to the employers and the workers had suffered a crushing humiliation and defeat. Connolly’s social vision of equality and social justice became embedded in the Easter Proclamation, but that vision was soon eclipsed by nationalism and the independence movement, as was the women’s movement for votes and social justice. It was a defeat for Larkin, but he was the person who ‘effectively brought the old incoherent national emotions into Irish twentieth century labour relations’.³

Yet the violent brutality of 31st August, 1913, injuring some 400 people and killing one person, was an example of all the violence against the strikers. It was violence from their own nationalist people, the employers Ancient Order of Hibernians, and the individual police had names such as ‘MacGrath, Murphy, Ryan, McCarthy, O’Connor and O’Rourke’.⁴ It was Irish violence against Irish people. In the crowd on 31st August was Thomas MacDonagh, a university lecturer and poet who three years later was one of the leaders executed in the 1916 Rising. MacDonagh too was probably an author, along with Pearse and Connolly of the Easter Proclamation, but again nationalism and violence eclipsed socialism.

The class struggle did not have much support either from the Catholic Church. Socialism, as Cardinal Logue had declared in Derry, is bound up with irreligion and atheism. The church had strongly opposed the early expressions of socialism in Ireland back in 1872. The perceived alliance of socialism and atheism may well
have been in part shaped by the killing of the Archbishop of Paris during the Paris commune of 1871. But ecclesial forces of power and control, or fear of losing them, also shaped unsupportive responses. During the lock-out, leaders decided to send some of Dublin’s starving children to be cared for by Liverpool families. The Archbishop of Dublin objected that the children might have been sent to homes that were not Catholic, and any Dublin mothers who did so ‘can no longer be held worthy of the name of Catholic mothers’. The power of the Church and its system had to take precedence over the relief of starving children and social justice.

Protestant leaders were so often obsessed by anti-Catholicism that class issues were ignored. Preachers had fed congregations with tales of the new European bogeymen like Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin. The 19th century anti-papist street preacher and Presbyterian, Hugh ‘Roaring’ Hanna blasted the land league for being associated with all that is foreign, including ‘Russian nihilism, German social democracy and French communism.’ In the same month, November 1880, the Rev. Abraham Jagoe told Orangemen that the Land League was a conspiracy of anarchy and communism inspired by the Pope and Popery. All of this rhetoric was still alive at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1903 though, a more socially aware Independent Orange Order was founded and by 1905 had 65 lodges. Its Magheramorne Manifesto was severely critical of clericalism which it saw as the sectarian basis of Irish politics. Political parties were blamed for exploiting religious divisions and there was a call for compulsory land purchase. There was no mention of the Union or Home Rule, suggestions were made for a common Irish nationality and the embrace of all religious groups. Two years before the Belfast lock-out the Manifesto was taking a radical stance with social implications. Members were told that ‘They stood once more on the banks of the Boyne, not as victors in the fight, nor to applaud the noble deeds of our ancestors…but to hold out the right hand of fellowship to those who, while worshipping at different shrines, are yet our countrymen (sic) – bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh.’

A key supporter and member was Lindsay Crawford, who was a stern critic of wealth and privilege, and in a publication accused the old Orange Order of being ‘an instrument of landlordism and class rule’. On 12th July 1907, the summer of the lock-out, Crawford told the Independent Parade at Shaws Bridge, Belfast, that Carson and the old Orange Order had become ‘the dustbin of the Carlton club and
the tool of place hunting lawyers’. But Crawford proved to be too radical, even for the Independent Orange Order and was expelled in 1908. Failing to find work in the north he emigrated to Canada in 1910 from where he still took an interest in Irish affairs, criticising the 1916 rising, attacking the Black and Jews, and opposing partition.

By 1912, the year before the Dublin lock-out, Protestant church leaders had signed the Ulster Covenant, not only joining God and guns, but aligning themselves with what Crawford had described as ‘the Belfast oligarchy, the old nobility and squirearchy…wealthy parvenues…land speculators and whiskey magnates’ and their preoccupation with the preservation of the economic wellbeing and prosperity of the north. (Home Rule…disastrous to the material wellbeing of Ulster). Politicians, business people and church leaders had played on enough fears to ensure that thousands of the working class signed the Covenant. A year before the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin verbally threatened Catholic mothers who sent their children to Liverpool to be fed, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh ‘threw himself into the cause of the ‘Protestant province’ and the arming of the Unionist population without a backward glance’.

An Unfinished Story
When the decade ended with the partition of Ireland, the class division remained, socialism, north and south was eclipsed by nationalism and both parts of Ireland settled into being deeply conservative societies, powered by deeply conservative politics and equally conservative religion. High levels of emigration also ensured a socially conservative island. The marriage of church and state in what became the Republic of Ireland in 1948 also ensured that radical or progressive political, social and economic change would not happen. Northern Ireland’s Unionist population had a consuming determination to remain at all costs within the ‘Union’. That meant keeping the sectarianism alive and systemic sectarianism in place, reflected in structural discrimination. Constitutionally based elections ensured that economic or ‘bread and butter’ issues were not adequately addressed. All of this remained until 1972 when the political system, but not the ‘Union’, was dismantled by Westminster. The violence and its internationalisation forced London, Dublin and Washington to intervene with unprecedented energy and broker an agreement. The Agreement leaves the old constitutional question unresolved at a time when old forms of
nationalism are becoming obsolete and pooled sovereignty and interdependence are characteristics of Europe a century on from Covenant and Rising. The basis of Northern Ireland is now parity of esteem and greater equality, though the greatest challenge to this is not cultural and political equality, but economic equality. Unionist hegemony created the fiction that Protestant working class communities were better off within the Union and every vote in every election depended on it. Meanwhile the Catholic working class families were alienated by hegemonic governance and social discrimination. The truth was that both the Catholic and the Protestant communities were neither better off nor worse than the other, both were economically disadvantaged. Now a new fiction has emerged that the Protestant working class is worse off, having been left behind by the peace process, while the Catholic working class has had all the benefits. The interpretative analysis of the recent census will continue to show otherwise. There will be similar patterns of deprivation in both Catholic and Protestant communities, showing a correlation in respective urban areas between poverty, educational underachievement and long term chronic illness. New political and economic energy needs to go into joined-up strategies thinking and planning, not only to create a more equal, just and shared society, but to remove that symptom of an unequal and unjust society, violence, which in turn becomes itself an injustice with destructive effects.

The Republic of Ireland enjoyed an economic boom-time with the Celtic Tiger but the boom itself did not close the gap between rich and poor. Rather it created a wider gap, an economic chasm. It was only an economic miracle for a few, and then the bubble burst. The global financial meltdown, of which the Republic was a symptom, has led to a European bailout and greater hardship for the poorer people in society. Fintan O’Toole believes that stupidity and corruption sank the Celtic Tiger. ‘...the Irish banking system, awash with waves of debts owned by property developers collapsed’.¹³

The global financial meltdown and economic crisis has also made itself felt in Northern Ireland. Ireland is too small an island for Belfast not to be affected by the Tiger’s demise in Dublin. There is such an economic and trade relationship between the two European off-shore islands that Britain could not afford not to step in with economic aid when the crisis hit the Republic. Though Britain boasts too much sometimes about its special relationship with the USA, there is an even
greater and more meaningful special relationship between the UK and Ireland, which is mutual, and has nothing to do with past colonisation, and a violent history.

The world has changed beyond recognition since 1912-1922. The old class conflicts have gone. *Upstairs Downstairs* and *Downton Abbey* are only popular and romanticised pieces of nostalgia. Yet an immense gap remains in all of Ireland between rich and poor. There is still a struggle for socio-economic equality, for the end of poverty, for greater equality of opportunity and for a more just redistribution of wealth. It’s a European Union challenge as well, as some 17% of the present EU population lives below the official poverty line (i.e. an income less than 50% of the average). In Great Britain it is 22% - over 14 million people -living below the poverty line. The economic recession brought about by the greed, overreaching and corruption of a few, may well make these percentages higher in the next decade or so.

A different kind of society requires social vision and civic commitment. Whatever people were fighting for politically in 1912-1922, is long past its sell-by-date. We are where we are now for better and worse. Energy expended on maintaining the Union or achieving a United Ireland is no longer relevant in a global recession and a globalized world. The latter is often thought to be about economics, and in part it is. But to an even greater extent globalization is about a new time where we learn to live without boundaries in a more interdependent world. So our vision has to be local and global, because both are interconnected. This means shared responsibility and generating a consensus around a sense of social justice. Justice, distributive and restorative, is a core value without which there is no human and ecological well being or peace. Justice is also about realising that there is no necessary correlation between money and happiness. Justice is finding the point, personally and collectively, where enough is enough.

A vision for a different future requires values and ‘Values, in political terms, are priorities.’ They are also priorities in social and economic terms. Not only does all of Ireland need values or ethics such as justice and compassion or social solidarity, Irish people need ‘values and energy to use them well’ - to cherish all the children of the island and the planet equally.
Reflection Questions

What were the dynamics and forces that denied workers social justice in the first two decades of the 20th century?

How can we create a value-based vision for a new good society in Ireland, north and south? What values are priority and how do we implement them?

References

Ethical and Shared Remembering: Commemoration in a New Context:

OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES:

Remembering A Decade of Violence and Change, 1912-1922

The Covenant and Proclamation:
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