‘Homing in on the States We are In’ Speaking of IMELDA on the continuing legacies of resistance

Introduction

Speaking of IMELDA was a London based feminist performance action group that highlighted Ireland’s export of abortion to England. IMELDA (Ireland Making England the Legal Destination for Abortion). We came together in 2013 when Irish feminist migrants organised a public meeting with Ann Rossiter, author of *Ireland’s Hidden Diaspora*[1] in the wake of Savita Halapannavar’s death[2]. The group drew from post Celtic Tiger feminists and earlier migrations from Ireland. IMELDAs came from a variety of backgrounds from North and South, East and West, from rural and urban places and were born in every decade from the 1940s to the 1990s. The Irish Women’s Abortion Support Group had formed in London 1980, to support women travelling from both parts of Ireland for abortions. After the passing of the 8th amendment in 1983, various restrictions on supplying information were introduced in the Republic of Ireland, while the window to travel abroad was left open. The hypocrisy of the situation where Ireland made England its legal destination for abortion was pointed out to the Irish Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, when he visited London to fundraise for his party amongst the diasporic Irish community there in 2014.[3] The video of that short intervention was viewed (over 70,000 times) throughout Ireland and in Irish communities in the USA and Australia. The use of ‘knickers’ and the associated knickers for choice campaign[4] illustrate how performance and arts can break through the state’s defensive sidelining of issues. (For more on this subject see Ruth Fletcher on *Cheeky Witnessing*[5]. The pool of IMELDAs also included feminists from Spain, Italy, Sweden, the Indian subcontinent and Hong Kong as well as women like Steph Hanlon and Sarah O’Toole, who were based in Ireland and joined IMELDA activities there. We viewed Ireland through an international lens and this helped us to break taboos such as intervening during the first ever official state visit to Britain and again at the 2015 event in Dublin “The Road to 1916”.

Speaking of IMELDA was invited to give a keynote performance lecture at the multidisciplinary arts and academic project '1916 Home 2016'[6] in October 2016. This gave us the opportunity to place the Magdalene Laundries as part of Ireland's architecture of control of women alongside mother & baby homes, cruel adoption practices, child labour in orphanages, symphisiotomy, denial of abortion rights and the current treatment of Asylum Seekers, in the context of Ireland's century of independence. Our performance of 'Terminal' presented various ways in which the biopolitics of containing women in the Irish state was policed in the century to 2016. It referenced various incidents (either specific or typical), where laws on contraception, censorship and abortion and extra-judicial practices such as detaining women in Magdalene Laundries and trafficking children from mother and baby homes, were enforced.

The performance was composed of vignettes, in Brecht's epic style of showing women in various copromised situations in their attempt to live their lives. 'Terminal' starts and finishes at a modern day airport as a typical space from which women seeking to get to Britain (characterised as England) to access abortions were routinely forced to do until January 2019. Scenographically, the accident of poor weather draws attention to their dependence on England, while the reading of a section of the 1916 Proclamation highlights the fact that while the Irish state was created to separate Ireland from the alien rule of Britain, the new state developed in such a way as to force the female citizenry to rely mainly on Ireland's colonial oppressor for access to abortion

We created 'Terminal', as both a modern busy airport where contemporary Irish abortion seekers were waiting to fly to Britain to access legal services and as a site of control by the Irish state over the past century. The performance took place in the lobby of the Library Building in NUI Galway on 8 October 2016. The row of

security gates, where students and staff scan their cards to gain access to the library, added to the airport aesthetic. Our performance occurred both on the ground floor opposite the entrance to the library and also on a glass-walled balcony that stretches across the lobby. On the balcony we set up an airport security check-point with a table and a tray, which was policed by an airport security guard. The performance revolved around a series of encounters with the security guard. Each brief encounter with the security guard referenced an episode of shameful or repressive state behaviour and provided an opportunity to reference a wider context. These encounters were merged with readings from newspapers, feminist publications and public commentary around the specific histories and actual events referenced in the performance. The performance actions were further combined with a number of sound pieces, including the sound of flight announcements mirroring an airport tannoy system, again adding to the development of an airport atmosphere in the space.

This multi-voiced chapter gathers personal reflections from a number of the performers involved in the devising and staging of 'The Terminal.' The performers reflect on the roles they played within the performance and the broader contexts relating to these roles, including issues concerning the politics of representation that arose within our creative process. As a collective we value the diversity of voices that contribute to our public performance interventions. Our approach in this chapter celebrates this diversity, demonstrating the ways in which our work is the sum of different perspectives and experiences that come together in a collective response to the restrictive laws that govern pregnant people's bodies.

Below, the eight of the participants reflect on aspects of 'Terminal' and its context. The first illustrates the way that IMELDA was a work in progress that relied

on the willingness of others to partcipate. The second examines the portrayal of the virgin mother and Mariolatry's role in 1920-50s Ireland. This signals the importance of rendering visible the symbolism of the systemic erasure in Irish society of the facts of women and abortion in Ireland. The third looks at how individual characters are portrayed, contrasting the roles of vulnerable women with those of powerful societal figures such as Judges and 'neutral' commentators. The fourth looks at why it was important to reference the Irish state's current regime for Asylum Seekers and its similarities to the Magdalene system. It examines the difficulties in deciding what would be an appropriate portrayal and retrospectively acknowledges the importance of finding a way to do so. The role of rebellion and attempts to breach the 'fence of the powerful' is the subject of the fourth reflection, which looks at the portrayal of a long line of protest and the means used to embody them in 'Terminal'. This is followed by reflections on the guard's personification of a border, of institutional power, of undeserved power, and of the uniform who carries out the dirty work of the state. The seventh piece reflects on silences relating to enforced child-bearing and how gains for women in Ireland hit a roadblock at the right to control their fertility, ultimately driving Irish women into the arms of the colonising power that the state was so keen to be independent of. The last reflection extends the story of Irish reproductive nationalism to the feminist geography that abortion generates for women in Ireland.

Sarah O'Toole:

In October 2016, I was in my second year of a PhD in Theatre Studies at NUI Galway, my topic being representations of femininity in Ireland from 1916 to the Decade of Commemorations. I was also helping the theatre department to organise 1916: Home:

2016, an event to celebrate the centenary of the 1916 Rising and also to mark 30 years since the closure of Ireland's last Magdalen Laundry.

I was working on a couple of different projects that explored different facets of my topic. "Maud and the Pikeman", a collaboration with theatre maker Caroline Lynch, and performed as part of NUIG's Arts in Action series, was a dramatisation of a speech made by Maud Gonne filtered through the presentation of a lecturer who finds her subject - Maud herself - increasingly more unwieldy and difficult to fit to the picture of history she would like to present. Then, as part of Cúirt International Festival of Literature, I brought the poetry of six female Irish poets who had been written out of history to life, with a talented ensemble of women, as a kind of performed anthology.

I had already heard of Speaking of IMELDA, having really appreciated the action where they served knickers to Enda Kenny in London, and having enjoyed the suffragette aesthetic they had created outside the GPO in a separate action. This latter one provided a spark of inspiration for an action myself, Mary McGill and Elaine Mears under took at the Galway Races in 2015 - where we went to Ladies Day, dressed as suffragettes and wearing sashes with slogans such as "What Century Are We Living In?", "Choice for Women" and "Repeal the 8th". The picture was taken up by several news outlets and there was some lively debate in the comments section. The whole escapade really filled us up with a strong belief in the power of performance as political resistance.

So I was very excited when I was asked to take part in Speaking of IMELDA's performance at NUIG as part of 1916: Home: 2016. "Terminal" was set in an airport terminal and the location tied together a myriad of scenes of different women crossing the border between Ireland and Britain, each situation calling a different instance in Irish history where women were let down in terms of their human rights. I helped out with setting up the sound, and took part in two of the scenes.

The first one (Scene 6) involved the censorship of magazines in which women might inform themselves on matters to do with contraception, and where a young woman is going to work in Britain for the Summer but isn't afraid of missing her friends because they'll all be going over too. This scene highlighted two different kinds of Irish hypocrisy - information on female bodily autonomy was seen as immoral, while pornographic images which demeaned and dehumanised women were still allowed through. Also, it tied into the overall mixed messages around our relationship with Britain which we were supposed to be independent from, but towards which so many of our youth were bound. In the second one (Scene 10), I read out a section on the more recent Miss Y case, which involved a an asylum seeker who arrived in Ireland and became suicidal after discovering she was pregnant as a result of a rape in her home country and unsuccessfully sought to have an abortion in Ireland.

I was impressed at the ability of the script to tie together such a panoply of incidents and shine a light on so many forgotten or ignored corners of Irish history through the choice of such a symbolic location. There was a lovely camaraderie among the group, and while I would love to say it would be great to work with them, I am happy to say this is no longer necessary, as on 25 May 2018, a referendum was passed to remove the constitutional ban on abortion, and after an unsuccessful legal challenge, was signed in to law on 18 September 2018.

Steph Hanlon:

In 2016, Speaking of IMELDA delivered a keynote performance lecture "Homing in on the States we are in" as part of 1916 Home 2016, in the Hardiman Research Building, NUI Galway. The performance explored the prevailing tensions between the consistent undermining of the ideals of equality as set out in the 1916 Proclamation and the ideals themselves. It examines public discourse around control of and access to

reproductive health and the relationship between the ongoing policing of reproductive autonomy in Irish archives of the "disavowed", through a lens of feminist rehearsal, in understanding women's belonging and power, connecting them to the sexual and political economies of 'Home'.

Between "Sister" and "Virgin Mother":

Each of my roles reads a different conception of the feminine ideal, on one hand as "the "Religious Sister" - as the representative of the Mother and Baby Homes in 1922, and in the 1930s, (re)locating a young woman to a Magdalene Laundry - and on the other as the statue of the "Virgin Mother". There were challenges in portraying the statue of the "Virgin Mother" in the 1980's Anne Lovett scene, focusing on reconciling the Virgin Mother, and going beyond romantic representations of the statue. I attempted to depict an inscrutable expression, allowing the audience to interpret her role and expression depending on their situation and feelings, for example comfort, emotionless, regret, heartache, grief. The historicized conception of the body throughout the decades in Irish society – as a canvass on which different regimes of power write their meanings and effects - highlights the disjuncture behind the entrenchment of stereotypical gender roles.

This culminates in the bitter poignancy of the Anne Lovett scene, which juxtaposes these roles in Irish Catholic Ireland., Here, the notions of idealised bodies and Mariolatry intersect to give significance to subordinate women and define their roles as solely maternal and chaste, accenting women's lack of reproductive control.A key part of the performance was to make the invisible visible. It drew out the various ways that the criminal body has been produced throughout decades of punishment regimes in Ireland. In earlier periods, punishment included forms of

institutionalization in the 1920's and 1930's, reproduced at the level of individuals, bodies and gestures in the 1940s – 1950s, and with this, new strategies of control and resistance, conversations, training regimes for security officers, legal appeals and medical advice in efforts to control sexuality.

In rendering visible hidden experiences, this performance highlights the symbolism of the systemic erasure in Irish society of the facts of women and abortion in Ireland, the histories of hidden migration, and people who have not been able to access facts or information, or had the means to travel. Practices of which are public and visible to everyone through other forms of disciplinary regulation by contrast are private and individualized; where the body has become the site of a new disciplinary regime. This is parallel to the many women who were involved in the Easter Rising of 1916, whose stories and experiences have been effectively airbrushed from accounts of the rising.

Anna Carnegie: Playing the tragic cases

Speaking of IMELDA are known for our striking use of visual imagery and 'Terminal' was no exception. Indeed, my core contributions to the performance were almost entirely devoid of dialogue and instead reliant on the use of visual signals.

Stumbling slowly onto the makeshift red carpeted stage in school stockings and a tartan skirt, my portrayal of school girl Ann Lovett, collapsing in front of a fellow IMELDA portraying a statue of the virgin Mary was a particularly powerful and disturbing image within the performance, the staged portrayal tragically in tandem with the lived reality of Lovatt's passing. Later, I once again took on a tragic role, this time of Ms X, the fourteen year old rape victim prevented from travelling

outside the state. Again, visual images spoke louder than words. Hair in pigtails, dressed in a school coat and clutching a teddy bear to emphasise Ms X's childlike state (the latter also referencing Martyn Turner's political cartoon in the *Irish Times*), I walk onstage and look powerlessly to the crowd, my mouth bound by red tape in the shape of an X.

The emphasis on youth and innocence was a thread running through my performance contributions. As one of the younger members of the group, it made sense that I should embody these roles. My contribution to the airport scene at the beginning of the performance similarly drew on connotations of innocence and inexperience, as an abortion-seeker somewhat helplessly asking passers-by (in the form of audience members) 'do you know where gate 1992[7] is? I've never been to this airport before'. These references, subtle and overt, to youth and naiveté serve to emphasise the injustice attached to the wider practices of state sanctioned restrictions to bodily autonomy.

The identities of the vulnerable and tragic cases were something of a departure from my other Speaking of IMELDA performances[8], in which I have adopted the position of an uncaring and out-of-touch Irish state, for example through the guise of 'Ms Moral High Ground' in the 'Game of Shame', a response to the prosecution of Northern Irish women for taking abortion pills. These roles contrasted starkly with that of the newsreader, the persona I embodied to deliver a sombre comment on the Direct Provision system (for Asylum Seekers) The emotionless style in which the script was delivered worked to sharply contrast and emphasise the emotiveness of the topic being discussed. The tying together of the treatment of women in the Magdalene Laundries with that of Asylum Seekers in Direct Provision, highlighted by figures such as Judge Catherine McGuinness and Francis Timmons, was a crucial element

within the performance. The portrayal of the asylum system brought its own challenges, some of which are discussed below. It remains for me one of the most important and valuable elements of the performance.

Tina McCloskey

Thinking back on the performance what springs to mind was how some of us struggled with knowing whether to put in sections about migrant women in the piece. We didn't want to ignore their plight but also worried about not doing it appropriately. Ireland's law has affected migrant and refugee women even more punishingly than other women. We tried to have an Asylum Seeker in the performance so as not to be talking for migrant women, but failed to get anyone. In the end we decided that we couldn't leave their stories out, but wanted to be sensitive to the fact that we were white Irish women telling the story. We covered a section where an asylum seeking woman cannot leave the country to have access to abortion and stated the rules governing the conditions Ireland's Asylum Seekers live in whilst awaiting a decision. We wanted to convey how Migrant X (in fact an Asylum Seeker, subsequently referred to as Ms Y), despite her expressed wish to abort a pregnancy resulting from rape, was effectively ignored as her Asylum Seeker status meant that she was bandied about between different government bodies, medics and lawyers, driven to hunger strike and virtually coerced into a caesarean section[9]. She was not a meek victim. She tried to influence events, but various institutions combined to undermine her refusal of forced pregnancy. We represented her growing distress by showing her being thrown around in literal red tape, for which we used red lycra, held

in triangle formation by people who aggressively used the red tape to push her around.

As our performance was in a public place where students could pass by and stop to watch, a passing student joined the Q&A that followed immediately after it. She was the first person to speak and told us that she was a grade A student at NUI Galway. She and her family went through the asylum process, eventually being recognised as Refugees. She said that she was so pleased and touched that we had raised these issues as she had been through what we had described, having been kept in one room with her brother and parents, voiceless amongst the red tape. I explained our concern about taking the right to speak on behalf of Asylum Seekers. She said that staying silent would have been worse as silence is complicity. That student saw issues being raised rather than ignored and got to share her story and her pride in being a student at Galway university. Although now she has the right to remain, those two years in that room will stay with her always. Her pride in being able to say to people I went through that and here I am, made me feel very emotional and less afraid to speak of these things in future actions.

<u>Helena Walsh:</u> On Confiscations

I played the role of the rogue woman who attempts to breach the airport security barriers bringing censored items related to the prevention of pregnancy, that are each confiscated. My character appeared throughout the performance at different intervals, donning a red Zapatista scarf around her neck, referencing broader histories of rebellion and the 'rebel voices' that 'breach the fence of the powerful'[10].

The first confiscation from my suitcase was a packet of condoms, which were thrown over the balcony with the security guard shouting 'you can't be bringing these in here, they are banned.' Until 1993, condoms were not legally available without prescription in the Republic, marking a progressive shift in the long battle to undo the complete ban on contraception, including the advertisement and importation of contraceptives, which was implemented by the fledging Irish state as part of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1935). Relevant to the crack down on knowledge concerning fertility control, the second item confiscated from my luggage was a copy of the British feminist magazine Spare Rib. The security guard offered a Maeve Binchy book instead, seemingly suggesting that I limit myself to innocuous and wholesome material, a nod towards the banning of literature, such as Edna O'Brien's novel *The Country Girls*[11], which charts the story of two girls coming of age in Ireland.

The third and final confiscation demonstrates the continuance of feminist activities that operate to fight the 'assault' on women's 'rights at every level.' The final item confiscated from my luggage was a packet of abortion pills. Throwing the offending item over the balcony the guard loudly proclaimed 'You can't bring these in here. This is a Catholic country you know.' This declaration repeated a statement in 2012, to Savita Halappanavar of a midwife[12] at University Hospital Galway where she presented with the beginning of a miscarriage at seventeen weeks gestation. Despite her request to end the unviable pregnancy, the miscarriage was not accelerated and Savita died of septic shock. The fear and rage at her unnecessary death ignited a campaign to repeal the 8th amendment to Bunreacht na hEireann, that charges the state with vindicating the equal right to life of the foetus from conception, a position heavily promoted as a Catholic moral teaching when it was voted on in 1983.

The confiscation of the abortion pills also references the work of contemporary activists who breach Ireland's borders to get the abortion pill to those who need it. The recipients of the abortion pill are often those in the most vulnerable and precarious circumstances. In Northern Ireland, one woman was convicted and others have been charged with attempting to obtain or assist illegal termination by importing such pills. In both parts of Ireland, those who cannot afford to travel abroad to obtain an abortion and those who are not permitted to travel due to their residency status, for instance, asylum seekers and refugees often illegally import abortion pills. On having the abortion pill confiscated from my luggage, my character reminds the security guard, that 'this is on the World Health Organisation's list of recommended medication.'[13] Just as censorship of information and items central to women's sexual wellbeing - limiting their ability to make reproductive choices, has a long history in Ireland, so too has there been a long line of feminist activists who voice their reasoned discontent and fight to counter the assault on women's rights at every level. My character pays tribute to these 'rebel voices' that dare to 'breach the fence of the powerful.'

<u>Treasa O'Brien:</u> Playing the guard

When my fellow IMELDAs proposed trying to represent the history of a hundred years of policing of women's bodies in a dramatic way, I thought it too ambitious! Looking back, I realise that by trying to temper and reign in the exuberant IMELDA spirit of invention, I was already playing the security guard with my unconscious cop in the head. The guard was a personification of a border, of institutional power, of undeserved power, of the uniform who carries out the dirty work of the state; I was to stand at the 'terminal' we made in the Hardiman Library and decide who got through

this border and who did not.

We rehearsed all day, but I couldn't get into the part, I felt mediocre and featherlike, lacking in authority. I decided I needed a hat. I went to the security office at NUI Galway and rogued a hat out of them. I told them I'd already arranged with their colleague the day before that I would borrow a hat. The officer says 'oh right so' and gave me a nice authorative-looking hat with a good stiff peak. Using a little mischief and brass neck to get that hat put me in the mood and, putting it on had that transformative effect that costume and disguise can have for the taking on of a role. It was a shamanic hat. It conferred a power, the privilege of the institutional uniform.

I confiscated copies of Spare Rib magazine, condoms and abortion pills in my performance. I let the X case back through the border and stopped Migrant Y from passing through the terminal. I chastised and patronised and grunted and judged with the impunity of the faceless uniform 'just doing my job'. I both reveled and abhorred that feeling of power, over people I identified with. But I also recognised the security guard within me. The one internalised by growing up in a patriarchal culture, even if I had now learned how to critique it, I still had it in me too. During the performance, I remember feeling that our rudimentary play was a ritual of gestures, honouring so many anonymous women, their bodies, their lives, their lifetimes and the way the state and society had put the guilt unto them. I was angered and also incredibly moved. I felt connected to them as an Irish woman living today. I remember feeling the shame of the Irish state and how I'm implicated in that and then feeling the strength and solidarity of resistance.

One of the most striking moments of the performance was when I, as the

guard, took a balloon representing a baby being taken off a woman and sent to the USA for adoption. What struck me was the time it took for the balloon to fall. It was a violent act and yet it floated so gently and rested on the ground. It somehow resisted the violence of the act with its own grace and dignity. Or was that the gloss that was put on child trafficking portraying forced adoptions as romantic rescues.

Marian Larragy

We asked the audience to contemplate the Ireland in which much was obscured, hidden and partial, hence difficult to comprehend clearly or interpret. That incessant childbearing through lack of contraception caused deaths of women until the 1960s and trapped daughters in their mothers' domestic role was not then openly discussed. In 'Terminal' the 'Mrs Brown' audio tried to resurrect the unspoken awareness of past tragedies in a specific location (Finglas) and connect them with the campaign to repeal the eighth amendment. This was followed by (Beckett-inspired) half-spoken conversations between three women, where information travels more by guessing, innuendo and information-after-the-fact than by any direct speech, illustrating the culture of silence that helped to trap, isolate and shame unmarried women into giving up their babies.

In the 1970s, as public discourse acknowledged that unmarried pregnant young women should be socially accepted and an organisation called 'Cherish' went a step further advocating the acceptability of lone parenthood and single mothers, 'Mother and Baby Homes' started to disappear. While I was a member of Irishwomen United[14] (1975-1977), the Magdalene Laundries never crossed my consciousness. I

campaigned on women's employment rights without ever countenancing the slavery at the Magdalene Laundries despite having put bedsheets in baskets that went to 'the nuns' in the early 1970s. Only in 2014, did the wide-scale institutional abuse register[15], highlighting how Ireland mediated its wide societal acceptance of widespread institutional abuse.

While actual Irish women were forced to go to the old colonial power for reproductive rights, the then Taoiseach, implying that contraception was a colonial import not wanted by 'real' Irish people, labelled those who supported its legalisation as 'Blow-Ins', who he said should 'blow back out again'[16]. Before long, large scale emigration, hitherto assumed to be in the past, re-started and, in the 1980s, carried thousands of Irish women to England. Ironically, many of them became supporters of what Ann Rossiter dubbed 'Ireland's Hidden Diaspora[17]' as they started to assist Irish women accessing abortions in England[18]. In Ireland, advances were reversed when the international anti-choice movement played major political parties against one another during the 1980/81 hunger strikes, allowing the eighth amendment to be introduced. Fundamentalist Catholic policy in the constitution[19], partially reversed the removal of the special position of the Catholic Church and other named religions from the Irish constitution by referendum in 1972.[20]

'Terminal' ended with the Security Guard reading the 1916 Proclamation promising to cherish all the children of nation. Just as it gets to the section about differences nurtured by the 'alien Government', we hear another announcement. Disasterously for abortion seekers who have been moving about the space with their suitcases waiting for their plane, access to England is blocked and they face having to deal with the consequences. Starkly, we are reminded that a century of the

‘independent’ Irish state has left women beholden to the colonial power for access to abortion[21].

Lynne McCarthy:

My contribution reflects on the scenographic depiction of the pregnant person at the airport, where the various censorships and restrictions she encountered over the chronological period, 1970 to 2017, were signified in ‘Terminal’ by the presence of an immigration control officer. This officer vetted the property of pregnant persons, contravened their personhood through physical inspections of the body, interrogated their reasons for travel (it was illegal to travel for abortion in Ireland between 1992 and 2001), and, confiscated such illegal and ‘illicit’ materials as condoms and the censored feminist magazine *Spare Rib*. I do not intend to explore the pregnant woman at a site previously theorised a ‘non-place’ or, how that resonates symbolically with the liminal and often time-specific-anxiety-laden durations of pregnancy.[22] Rather, I address the jurisdictions or, the legally binding territories to which women in Ireland find themselves confined or coerced to navigate, and I argue for a feminist geography that would account for the narratives of women in Ireland seeking abortions in the UK and beyond. I argue for one that recognises the continuum of female displacement-belonging and how this is matched to the poles of maternal/social reproduction, and antithetically, ‘anti-social reproduction.’[23] The latter points to how the social spaces of reproduction in the Irish state might show-up instead as hostile spaces when the dispersals of non-reproducing (anti-social) women are hastened along by an Irish reproductive nationalism. The legal scholar, Ruth Fletcher, notices pro-life consensus in Ireland as a postcolonial consolidation of national identity.[24] Pro-reproductive heterosexual spaces express hostility to the abortion-seeking person in moments when the pregnant citizen or the pregnant immigrant detainee in Irish custody, often raped,

appear at airports or other border checkpoints. These figures demonstrate just how the Irish state disperses what they consider a burden to other jursidictions where the difficult ethico-legal problems of termination have already been confronted.[25] Similarly, when a woman anti-socially rejects the quasi official role of her gendered function under the Irish Constitution – to reproduce – and opts for abortion, she is cast out as a no longer useful contributor to the state. Like Thebes to Antigone, Irish hospitality shows its limits.

This irony is not lost on Irish women. A running joke in Ireland, made popular by the online blog, *Waterford Whispers*, reverses the hospitality/hostility[26] dynamic and encourages British women to holiday in Ireland and retreat for the full term of their pregnancies because all of their health whims would be catered for.[27] Yet how could a space of anti-social reproduction be reclaimed for the travelling pregnant person? Perhaps, not so much as a queer space in this instance, but maybe as an anti-social hospitality at the steps of the Marie Stopes clinic in London, where the hostility of pro-reproduction campaigners is starkly contrasted to the hospitality of the members of Abortion Support Network accompanying their sisters from Ireland into the clinic? (quite a long sentence) This is a feminist geography for women in Ireland.

1916: Home 2016, gave Speaking of IMELDA the opportunity to perform a feminist exploration of the histories of coercive control in Ireland. By embodying and bringing to life buried realities, we contributed to making the hidden history visible.

It felt like an enormous privilege for a London–based group to be invited to take part in 1916 Home 2016[28]. It was, for us also, a coming home of sorts. Both the

Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have a rather shrouded relationship with the way their policies have resulted in the emigration of large numbers of Irish women. Ireland's social values were usually reflected in Irish organisations in Britain, so feminists and other people marginalized by practices in Ireland, often formed alliances of alternative Irish voices in Britain.

As Speaking of IMELDA mined the history of the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group, the story of the London Irish Women's Centre[29] and campaigns against strip searching, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the wrongful convictions of Irish people in Britain also emerged and further raised the issue of Ireland's relationship with Britain. These have been amplified more recently as Survivors of the Magdalen Laundries, Mother and Baby homes and of Residential Institutions who emigrated to Britain have been shedding shame and speaking out[30].

In our performance lecture, we tried to draw out the relationship between the ongoing policing of female reproductive autonomy and restrictions placed on women's civic rights in Ireland. We wanted to contrast the high ideals of the 1916 Proclamation, influenced as it was by feminists and socialists, asserting that the Irish Republic would grant equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens and the reality that followed. That those ideals were often abandoned seems to be a difficult thing for the Irish state to contemplate and acknowledge. Mobilising the promises of 1916 as a standard to by which to measure the legacy of the 1916 Rising, allowed us to locate the lack of reproductive rights as part of Ireland's national question. As James Connolly predicted, a carnival of reaction would follow any partition of Ireland[311]. The treatment of women by the postcolonial states undermined the ideals of equality,

pushing women into a place of blame, while allowing social policy to be dominated by Catholic orthodoxies in the Republic and equally fundamentalist Protestantism in Northern Ireland as these religions displaced the politics of Connolly and Markiezvicz and the signatories to the 1916 Proclamation.

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[1] Ann Rossiter, *Ireland's Hidden Diaspora – The Abortion Train and the Making of a London Irish*

[2] Feminist Review, Issue 124, 2020. P. 144–151

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a654qvUJywY&feature=emb_title

[4] https://www.speakingofimelda.org/knickers-for-choice

[5] Feminist Review, Vol 124, Issue 1, March 2020; pp. 124–141

[6] https://1916home2016.wordpress.com

[7] 1992 being the year in which the case of Ms X went to the Supreme Court. See 'The Supreme Court:The Attorney General V X and Others' in Mairead Enright, Julie McCandless and Aoife O'Donoghue *Northern / Irish Feminist Judgements, Judges' Troubles and the Gendered Politics of Identity* (Oxford UK: Hart Publishing, 2017). 379-393.

[8] www.speakingofimelda.org.uk

[9] Amnesty International, *Ms. Y's Case: Denied a Lawful Abortion in Ireland* https://www.amnesty.ie/ms-ys-case/

[10] *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism*, ed. Notes from Nowhere Collective (London: Verso, 2003) p. 20.

[11] Edna O'Brien, *The Country Girls* (London, 1967)

[12] https://www.rte.ie/news/health/2013/0410/380613-savita-halappanavar-inquest/

[13] World Health Organization *Safe abortion: Technical & Policy Considerations: Laws and policies on abortion* WHO/RHR/15.04 (World Health Organization, 2015)

[14] A high profile Dublin-based feminist organization that was extremely active on employment rights, women's right to control their bodies, education, against censorship and more.

[15] '*Institutional abuse in the Republic of Ireland: Survival, Redress and Recovery'* PhD thesis of Dr Mary Lodato, University of East London, 2014

[16] link to audio of Liam Costello http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNuEZFJ1dNk

[17] Ann Rossiter, *Ireland's Hidden Diaspora – The Abortion Train and the Making of a London Irish Underground, 1980-2000'* (Iasc Publishing, 2009)

[18] The Abortion Support Group helped organize the first of five conference of Irish feminists in Britain. See *Irish Women: Our Experience of Emigration* (London Irish Women's Centre, 1984). P. 1

[19] Emily O'Reilly, *Masterminds of the Right*, Emily (Attic Press, 1992)

[20] Removal of Articles 44.1.2 and 44.1.3

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