

Trauma Stories as Resilience: Armenian and Irish National Identity in a Century of Remembering

Sevan Beukian, Rebecca Graff-McRae

University of Alberta (<beurkibe@ualberta.ca>; <rgraff@ualberta.ca>)

Abstract:

This paper explores the intersection of trauma, memory, and identity through the lens of resilience. Here we take resilience in its multiple, even conflicting meanings and resonances – encompassing continuity, persistence, and adaptation. Through the case studies of centenary commemorations in Armenia and Ireland and Northern Ireland, we highlight the ways in which the memory of traumatic historical events both reproduces and challenges dominant narratives of identity. The resilience of memory – its ability to adapt and evolve even as it lays claim to continuity – marks commemoration as a form of haunting, a return with difference that always disrupts the very borders it is deployed to secure. By focusing on resilience understood as the counter-memory that challenges the silencing and overshadowing of mainstream memory, we conclude that it manifests differently in such different cases, and find a surprising point of similarity: the resilience of memory is that it *remains*. Regardless of claims to timelessness or modernization, the vital function of memory is to persist, to linger, as the trace of the ashes of the conflicted past. In the two cases we look at, the resilience is expressed through counter-memory politics. Through this reflection on two very different cases, we gesture towards a theory of commemoration as resilience that has political implications for post-conflict and post-trauma states.

Keywords: Armenian Genocide, Centennial Commemoration, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Resilience

1. Introduction

Two small nations that have lived under colonial and imperial pressures have shown resilience in their national identity maintenance and expressions

throughout centuries. National identity stories, however, are not always embedded in glorified imageries and victories from wars. They often entail traumatic events and shape the national expression(s) for the generations to come. As Jabri contends, conflict is often

A constitutive element of collective identity, reproduced in collective memory through national narratives of past glories in the face of threats against national sovereignty and survival. A self-image based on notions of heroism, valour, and justice draws upon such collective memories and is actively reproduced in times of conflict. (1996, 139)

The collective memory of the conflict is at once an expression of resilience in the wake of trauma, and a vehicle for reifying and reinforcing the divisions at the heart of the conflict itself. Focusing on the cases of Armenian and Irish collective identities, our paper challenges national identity narratives expressed as stories of heroic struggles and glorified victories, often emphasized in the national identity literature. Here we start from the premise that “official” commemorations reflect a dominant, widely taken-as-given narrative of the past and its meaning in the present. Our usage here is akin to Olick’s conception of “frameworks of memory”: long-term structures of memory that resist individual’s attempts to escape them (2002). The pervasiveness of these frameworks or narratives is well-evidenced in the cases we consider.

We argue that despite the differences in the traumatic event, and the consequences of the trauma on national identity making, both collective identities, as the hegemonic national memory-makers, were disrupted by the counter-narratives and counter-memory that became more pronounced at the symbolic “moment” of 2015-2016. The representation of the experience of the trauma as a totalizing atrocity, and the need to strongly advocate a discourse of unity and maintenance of national identity was a necessary call for many nationalist leaders who wanted to preserve national identity against the project of annihilation by the Ottoman Empire in the case of Armenia, or against the possibility of being absorbed by imperial Britain and its proponents. But, over the years, this discourse of national identity has shown to be partial in both senses of the term – incomplete and biased – and thus, exclusive in its representation of the diversity of “Armenianness” or “Irishness”. As such, the boundaries of identity to strengthen the “we” are rigidly constructed against the “other” (Beukian 2014; 2018a) in order to recollect the violent disruptions from the atrocities of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the 1916 Easter Rising into a unified identity. These mainstream narratives propagated by the state, leading political parties, community organizations, and the Church(es) in both cases have obscured and overshadowed diverse considerations of what it means to be Armenian and Irish.

We look at the contemporary narratives of national identity around the one hundred year mark for both cases. Both nations’ postcolonial and post-

traumatic experiences have heavily shaped their own perceptions of national identity. Both national identity constructions have been somewhat ingrained in victim identity as survivors of those atrocities – war and genocide, and (forced) diasporization on the one hand, and insurrection, civil war, and partition on the other. In Armenia and in Ireland and Northern Ireland, this national identity has also been set in opposition to competing claims of identification (Ottoman or Soviet, on the one hand, and British, Ulster, or Northern Irish on the other) rather than allowing for multivalent conceptions of national, ethnic, religious, and cultural expression. In this sense, the two cases represent small nations that continuously struggle to find their own voices and identities in a postcolonial global context and posttraumatic nation building context. Their aim is to be recognized and reconciled. Therefore, in both cases, the extent of the presence of the trauma due to the events that took place one hundred years ago in the context of World War I (World War I) is significant and strongly shapes the national discourse in Armenia and on the island of Ireland. The centennial commemoration in Armenia reinforced the attention on the open wounds (Cheterian 2015), as denialism of the Genocide and the inability to reconcile memories and recognize the other continue to cause pain and extend the intergenerational trauma. In Ireland and Northern Ireland, the unresolved legacy of the Troubles serves to continually re-open the wounds left by the revolutionary period a century ago.

We undertake this comparative endeavour by applying the methodology of most different cases: at first instance, the case of Irish and Armenian identity formation and post-trauma transition may seem very different to the reader. The difference lies in considerations of 1) the scale of the trauma itself 2) the socio-historical context (despite the similar timeframe around the World War I), and 3) the post-traumatic identity shaping was different as well, 4) the scale of loss and death is also different in each case: between 1 and 1.5 million Armenians were deported and massacred during the period of 1915-1923. Our comparative timeframe of trauma, constructed at around one hundred years, whereby the commemorations were planned at a large scale for both cases, can shed light on the trajectory and changes in the discourse of the trauma and post-memory. This is therefore the point of comparative discussion that can lead to productive conclusions around trauma, commemoration, memory and counter-memory as resistance.

The Irish case will analyse the various commemorations stemming from the “Decade of Centenaries” in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with particular focus on the World War I and the 1916 Easter Rising. The conflicts of memory perpetuated north and south of the border will be explored comparatively with the case of the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. The Armenian Genocide memory will be examined through narrative memory of the younger generations to show how Arme-

nianness is reimagined as a site of resisting the trauma through diversity and inclusiveness and a transformation of trauma expressions to break the silence of the private spaces of trauma. The paper aims to juxtapose experiences of shifting narratives of identity from survival to resilience in the context of the changing global environment and the increasing popular demands around meanings of Armenianness and Irishness.

2. Collective Memory, Trauma, and Counter-Memory as Resilience

The concept of resilience offers a bridge between trauma and memory; like memory and trauma, however, it is a term loaded with implication and contested meanings. What is resilience in both cases? How does it connect to post-traumatic nations and post-memory of the younger generations who are commemorating the one hundred year anniversary?

There is a lack of research surrounding resilience in the context of collective trauma and memory on the national scale, meaning how national identity discourses engage with resilience, especially in the context of a collective traumatic memory. We define resilience as the expression of counter-memory that engages with a critical rethinking of national identity or the memory of the traumatic event. Contesting the hegemonic and mainstream forms of nationalism and national identity, therefore bringing to light the need to break away from the idea of national identity as a single collective memory, Jeffrey K. Olick explains that, “[...] the origins of the concept of collective memory [is] in the crucible of statist agendas”, which leaves “reductionist tendencies” in the field for those working on the concepts of memory-nation (2003, 5). In addition, by rewriting these “traumas into a linear narrative of national heroism, [...] the state conceals the trauma that it has, necessarily, produced. Resistance to this rescripting – resistance to state narratives of commemoration – constitutes resistance to sovereign power” (Edkins 2003, xv; see also 5-6). Similarly, resistance to the mainstream memory transmission that silences and overshadows other expressions of remembering counters that linearity with national identity constructions in post-traumatic societies. Through the interplay of narratives and counter-narratives of memory, we explore discourses of trauma and the way in which resilience, understood as survival after trauma and existing and surviving despite trauma, is being redefined through memory in both the Irish and Armenian contexts.

Traumatic experiences that are engraved in the collective (and individual) historical memory of a nation do not “disappear” or “dissipate” over time (Beukian 2018a). As Dominick LaCapra explains, “Trauma brings out in a striking way the importance of affect and its impact on memory” (2016, 377), making it a necessary examination of historical events, especially in terms of understanding the ways in which the past is continuously within the present when a traumatic past lives in the nation’s memory. As such, the

“traumatic dimension of the political” to use Jenny Edkins’ phrase (2003, 8; on emotions and politics, see Ahmed 2014). In this paper, we argue that these traumatic memories articulate themselves in the constructions of the nation continuously over time, especially at a juncture of one hundred years that was given such importance in the sense of the international scope of its symbolic value for recognition (or its absence).

Collective memory is socially constructed over several generations and becomes the “homogenizing” element that binds individuals within a social context together by creating historic *lieux de memoire*, or sites of memory, such as monuments, school history textbooks, national flags, commemorative or remembrance dates, museums, national songs, and so on (Nora 1984). The national identity is constructed around symbolic sites and events that become engraved in the history of the nation, that is what constitutes the “us”. The shared collective memory, as Marianne Hirsch correctly concludes, may be the result of the need of people to feel included and bonded in a group or in a “collective membrane forged by a shared inheritance of multiple traumatic histories and the individual and social responsibility we feel toward a persistent and traumatic past” (Hirsch 2012, 33-34).

But collective memory is neither static nor monolithic. Our exploration of the discourses of memory in Ireland and Armenia asks, of necessity, how they evolve and change, how they are challenged and resisted, what politics they serve, and what power dynamics are at play in these discursive negotiations. This approach can be taken as a kind of hauntology, in which “Hauntology, rather than taking for granted what it means to be political, asks after the processes by which it is constructed” (Auchter 2014, 17). With the haunting resurgence of counter-memory that always co-exists with collective mainstream memory explicitly focused on the losses, silences, and absences in the dominant commemorative narratives of the Armenian Genocide and the Decade of Centenaries, we aim to foreground the disjunctions of time, history, and ontology, the undecidability of presence and absence, present and past, that is at the heart of discourses of collective memory. Both Ireland and Armenia have constructed their national stories “out of the ashes” of tragedy, albeit on widely different scales and in different social, historical, political, and cultural contexts. But within the ashes of the past, there remains a trace – what Derrida also calls “the cinder” (1991) – of that which cannot be erased, the forgotten that insists upon remembrance. Bringing together the spectre and the cinder provokes a reconfiguration of the memory of these events. Reading memory as a spectral expression of resilience exposes the ways in which memory functions in post-conflict and post-trauma states: simultaneously as a unifying force, bringing linear order to the violence and uncertainty at the heart of the polity; and as a troubling and troublesome reminder of difference, discontinuity, and disruption.

Hirsch's study on the role of memory and its different forms of expressions reveals that post-memory is yet another way to bridge the historical traumatic events in one's lives to the younger generations in a family or community, through various symbolic systems. As Hirsch correctly and astutely observes, "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up" (2012, 5). The transmission of these experiences left such powerful images and stories in the minds of the younger generations, that they almost "[seemed] to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 1999, 8). But as Gabriele Schwab perceptively highlights regarding the transmitted post-memory, the second and later generations whose parents lived through a traumatic event "become avid readers of silences and memory traces hidden in a face that is frozen in grief [...] The second generation thus received violent histories not only through the actual memories or stories of parents (postmemory) but also through the traces of affect, particularly affect that remains unintegrated and unassimilable" (2010, 14).

These counter-narratives by individuals, groups and collectives, or dissident political parties, who have, sometimes with important risks, challenged the homogeneity, heteronormative, and unity claims, and have created spaces to talk about potentials and possibilities of what it (could) mean to be Armenian, and Irish (or British, or Northern Irish), are what make the nations resilient. Counter-memory (or a resilient memory) is a form of resilience in that *it remains*. It persists, despite often being drowned out by the dominant voices. To develop this theoretical framework, we refer to the concept of the spectre/ghost by Derrida (1994); in its dual meanings of "remain" (to endure and persist) and "remains" (the corpse, the ashes), the ghosts of memory remind us that the resilient past is haunting in its absence even as it is recalled into the present/presence. As such, we posit that resilience is not about simply creating an absolute opposite of mainstream memory, on the one hand, and an opposing counter-memory, on the other; rather, we show that possibilities of memory-making inhere even within silences, erasures, and forgettings. Derrida conceptualizes this trace, this "remnant within the remainder" (1991, 13), as a cinder – what remains when even the ashes have been destroyed or swept away. *Something remains* even when there is an attempt to obliterate and erase – and that *something* can be discerned in memory.

These counter-memories are important because they help to ask questions about that framework, and help to locate voices and perspectives that contribute to a more inclusive identity, with porous boundaries. It is after all impossible to claim that Armenianness or Irishness constitute a similar criterion of identity through the "linear" time. Thinking about memories and the strength of the transmission of memories in families and collectives, the past could be viewed not as countering the present or the future, or regress-

ing them, but as simultaneously coexisting with them. As these traumatic and painful histories seem to be persistently intermingled, they exist in some simultaneity with the present. As such, the linearity of time is challenged in understanding the way trauma shapes national identity and the way it is transmitted through time and space to the younger generations (Suny 1993; Parekh 1999; Craps 2013; Assmann 2016). As Jenny Edkins argues in *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*:

Memorialisation that does not return to a linear narrative but rather retains the trace of another notion of temporality does occur. It is found when the political struggle between linear and trauma time is resolved not by a forgetting of trauma and a return to linearity, nor by attempting the impossible opposite – speaking from within trauma – but by a recognition and *surrounding* of the trauma at the heart of any social or symbolic order. (2003, 16; emphasis in the original)

The non-linear trauma time – or queer time to borrow from Kulpa and Mizielińska (2016) – therefore assists in uncovering the silences and blurring the private and public spaces of memory. In the collective memory of conflict, resilience means that memory remains, even as it adapts and transforms to reinvent itself in each changed political moment (Graff-McRae 2010). Commemorations are ritualized events that are repeated with difference: “It is this gap between the repetition and the redefinition [...] that creates a political space for the contestation of conflicted memory narratives” (Graff-McRae 2014, 20). The centennial is especially important to think about resilience in this context – younger generations who carry the post-memory remember the genocide, trauma, and memory of their grandparents and history, but with difference. We argue that counter-memory exists in parallel to mainstream memory, and is always present to challenge its boundaries. For example, as will be demonstrated below in each case study, the ethnic boundaries of what constitutes Armenianness or Irishness have been contested and are increasingly more porous. Gendered identity constructions have also presented important challenges to each collective memory, and whose memory is being remembered.

In the aftermath of trauma, conflict, war or genocide, memory is what remains, persists despite attempts at its erasure. The endurance of memory as a collective connection to touchstones of identity (nation, state, community, language, religion) that have been undermined, damaged, or destroyed, contributes to a sense of resilience or fortitude, of survival in the face of an existential threat. Memory, through processes of commemoration and memorialization, is often seen as providing the basis for group cohesion, unity, and consensus. Through memory, the group lays claim to continuity and political legitimacy. Yet, as Derrida reminds us, memory not only remains: conceptualized as “the remnant of the remainder” (1991, 13), or the “remains of the

remains”, memory can be read as a type of *cinder*: “the remains of a burning” (2), an alternative paradigm for “the trace – something that erases itself totally, radically, while presenting itself” (1). For Derrida, “cinders name both the extreme fragility and the uncanny tenacity of the relation” between truth and its impossibility (2) – between language and the storytelling, between history and memory. As multiple, competing narratives of memory emerge to contest the discursive boundaries of the past and the present, the cinders of memory remain as a space of possibility, in which the political can be re-imagined. Thus, “cinders also name the resilience and intractability of what is most delicate and most vulnerable” (2), in that marginalized memories are never entirely obliterated. Even amidst dominant narratives that claim privilege, continuity, teleology, and endurance, the memories on the remainder contain the possibility to not only disrupt these claims, but persist to establish their own. What is important for our cases as well is to consider how counter-narrative is sometimes contained within the officially sanctioned or dominant discourse.

Resilience, as such, is to counter the mainstream views around the memory of the event, highlighting these counter-memories that are unsilenced; the moment of the centennial presented an important context for this resilience to be brought to light. But as memory, and its cognates commemoration and memorialization, is deployed as a bulwark against trauma, it functions in the same binary way as the so-called Peace Walls that separate Protestant from Catholic communities: as a form of defense, and as a means of exclusion. In other ways, the resilience of memory can either undermine or enable denialism by perpetrators. Thus in the resilience of memory there lies an inherent paradox: it serves both the continual process of adapting to trauma and the persistent re-production of conflict (Graff-McRae 2010; McGrattan 2013; McDowell, Braniff 2014). “[T]he past and its retrieval in memory hold a curious place in our identities, one that simultaneously stabilizes those identities in continuity and threatens to disrupt them” (Antze, Lambek 1996, XVI; see also Beukian 2018a). This dual, ghostly element of commemoration – memory simultaneously called into the present and contained in the past – enables a critical reading of the centenaries of the Armenian Genocide and the Decade of Centenaries in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

3. Armenian National Identity: 100 Years after the Genocide

“I wanted us to be able to celebrate our survival at the same time that we were mourning our losses, and that yes, this has been one hundred years of exile, but it’s also been one hundred years of survival, and a hundred years of strength [...]”¹. “I don’t really know how to answer this question. I like who

¹ These are Scout Tufankjian’s words during an interview, see Khandikian (2017).

it makes me. I like that I'm a fighter and I'm righteous and passionate and I feel like I have a century of survival in me"².

If there is one particular tragedy that Armenians collectively remember and (to a large extent) unite under, it is the memory of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, when the Ottoman Turkish state organized and executed the killings of Armenians and their deportation to Der Zor. The Genocide is considered to be a national traumatic and tragic experience engraved in the collective consciousness of Armenians (Bakalian 1993; Bjorklund 1993; Pattie 1999; Marutyan 2005, 2009; Panossian 2006; Hovannisian 2007; MacDonald 2008). The Armenian Genocide memory constitutes a central essence of Armenian diasporic identity, making the official recognition of the Genocide “the sine qua non of the Armenian experience in the twentieth [and twenty-first] century,” as Anny Bakalian’s detailed study on the American Armenians reveals (1993, 154, qtd. from Ayanian, Ayanian 1987, 5; also see Panossian 2006; Hovannisian 2007; MacDonald 2008). Schools, community organizations, the Church(es), and “official” commemorations play the role of transmitting collective stories of suffering and the collective history of the Genocide (in history books for example). The importance and strength of the Armenian community organization is well emphasized in the literature (see for example Panossian 1998; Tölölyan 2000, 2007; Sahakyan 2015; also see the essay by Tchilingirian 2018). As Tölölyan explains in his study of diaspora organization and their sustainability: “In each post-Genocide diasporic community there was a varying but, on the whole, impressive level of commitment to rebuilding institutions that had existed in the prosperous old diasporic communities of the great imperial centres, especially Istanbul” (2000, 16). The Genocide of 1915 is in many ways the beginning of contemporary Armenian history that has shaped the conception of Armenianness for both the Armenian diaspora and the Armenians in Armenia, especially after 1965 for the latter, as a strongly unifying factor that defines the “us” – the Armenian imagined community – despite the historical, social, ideological, cultural differences that shape each Armenian community. But within this seemingly unified nation, the complexities of difference are striking and significant for the construction of the imagined community.

3.1 Memory as Resilience

The one-hundred-year anniversary brought forward a renewed look at the memory of Genocide and the feelings of victim identity, critically rethinking about agency and resistance as necessary focus points in addition to the con-

² Danielle Tcholakian’s words, mentioned next to one of the photos from *The Armenian Diaspora Project*, by Scout Tufankjian (*The Armenian Diaspora Project* 2015). Also see Tufankjian 2015.

ceptions of victimhood. The 2015 centennial anniversary of the Armenian Genocide was not a turning point in terms of developing more reconciliatory relations with Turkey. The latter's position on the Armenian Genocide however much softened over the years, has not yielded a significant discourse of change toward reconciliation or recognition of the crimes that the Ottoman Empire has committed against its own population in 1915-1923. However, 2015 marked an important point of discursive shift in Armenian collective identity related to the self-perception from victims of the crime against their people, to the self-image of empowered generation who are ready to confront the past with a renewed look at the role of memory for the Armenian people. The struggles associated with post-memory in the case of the Armenian Genocide descendants, and what ultimately could be said that the centennial commemoration brought to the fore, is not that there are necessarily some discrepancies in the interpretation of what happened during the Genocide (the historical details), but the mnemohistorical memory is what was contested: how we remember, who we remember, how we think about the post-traumatic justice and reconciliation. Kasbarian's recent article on the 2015 Centennial commemoration addresses similarly this point of bifurcation in Armenian identity, as she posits that "The commemorations were an impetus for many diasporans, individually and collectively, to reflect upon wider questions about who has the responsibility and authority to represent and mediate the collective past and present" (2018, 137; also see Beukian 2015)³. However, as we show in this paper and section on the Armenian Genocide, the contestation is more than the authority to represent, and is connected to the type of representation, the message of the commemoration, and how it shapes constructions of Armenianness through that. The contestation therefore lies in the variations of the commemorative moment itself, reflecting the increasingly strong presence of voices from the Armenian communities that counter the hegemonic discourse of the genocide as a totalizing experience that unifies Armenians or as an only-Armenian cause, due to the need to maintain the national identity and its existence, its survival. Critical engagement with the conception of Armenianness, who is included/excluded, who constitutes the "we" and under what terms, did/does not define the mainstream discourse of Armenianness, though is inevitably has to engage with it.

3.2 Resilience and Counter-Memory Making

An important instance that the time of the centennial – in this case the past five-ten years – seems to have brought to the fore is more attention to the question

³ Indeed, this is precisely the question whereby the Centennial was the "moment" of challenging the mainstream memory "makers" despite the internal competition of who owns this memory and who has the right to speak for all Armenians (see Beukian 2015; Kasbarian 2018).

of women's and children's fate in the Genocide and what that means for the nation and its history, and also what it means to the understanding of the Armenian Genocide. Therefore after a century has passed since April 1915, research on the Genocide more notably pays more attention to the particular suffering of women and children in the Genocide and the hidden Armenians' existence and identity (Çetin 2012; Altınay, Çetin 2014), and also the question of feminism – Armenian feminism in the Genocide era and at the brink of the establishment of the Turkish state, and even in the Armenian Republic (Beukian 2014, endnote 1). In the case of the Armenian tragedy, the role of the “hegemonic” and masculinized post-Genocide national identity building within and by diasporan organizations and institutions have emphasized that the collective tragedy of the genocide is a unifying trauma for all Armenians. However, the reality is different, and women and children/orphans experienced the atrocities in very different ways. The experience of women in the post-traumatic stages has also been marked by the burden of post-traumatic national reconstruction they carried, by marrying and giving birth to the new generation of Armenians, after suffering rape, slavery, and sometimes even after having to abandon their own children from their Turkish or Kurdish captors (and saviours). There was no psychological healing for these women. These stories and experiences have not surfaced in the recollections of the lived experiences, and are only coming to light today, particularly in the past decade or so, as the scholarship on the topic and documentaries reflect. It is for this reason that the emphasis on women is necessary here, without dismissing the idea that collective memory of a trauma has a strong impact on all members of the community, beyond gendered or religious differentiations.

In addition, gendered perspectives and analyses of the Armenian Genocide are not part of the national discourse and community discussions. This is quite noticeable when looking at the centennial commemorations of the Armenian Genocide in April 2015 and the various conferences held on that occasion. Only one major conference addressed the topic of gendered memories. The conference entitled “Gender, Memory and Genocide: An International Conference Marking 100 Years Since the Armenian Genocide” took place in Berlin in June 2015. Several prominent scholars of Armenian Genocide were featured on the programme as keynote speakers. In 2016, a conference entitled “Critical Approaches to Armenian Identity in the 21st century” was organized by the Hrant Dink Foundation, which, apart from traditional discussion topics on Armenian identity and diasporization, included presentations that tackled perspectives on gender and memory, by tackling feminist perspectives and postcolonial views. However, the mainstream literature on the Armenian Genocide continues to present a “unified and non-distinguishing” perspective of the impact of the Genocide. Instead, one can argue that the effect of the (often sexual) violence against women and children has a strong, often unexplored, impact in the Armenian post-Genocide national identity making (also see Tachjian 2009 on this point). Much of the work on women has also been

studied through the focus of post-Genocide feminist writers and the discourses produced through the publications of the Bolis (Istanbul) Armenian women who paved the way to make their voices heard (Ekmekçiöglü 2016). While their works may be misinterpreted or scrutinized as “non-feminist” by many western feminist authors, Lerna Ekmekçiöglü presents an important analytical perspective of Armenian feminism in light of the patriarchy of the Armenian community where these women were writing from and for, and also the patriarchal and oppressive Turkish State formed after 1923, upon the denialism of the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923 and other minorities and the appropriation of their wealth (*ibidem*). These play a significant role in thinking about community building, especially in a post-Genocide context, where women had to be the cultural transmitters, reproducers, and carriers of the memory (Yuval-Davis, Anthias 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997; Beukian 2014; Shahnazarian, Ziemer 2014). In addition to the silence on the particular suffering of women, the absence of academic work on Armenians who converted to Islam raises serious questions about who is included in the conception of Armenianness, and, controversial as this may be, of who is included in the category of Armenian victim. In the recent years, with the opening up of the discussion on the question of the “hidden” Armenians in Turkey, especially due to the efforts and activism of Hrant Dink (Balancar 2012; Bedrosyan 2013; Altınay, Çetin 2014), has led many to visit and learn more closely about their history⁴.

The continued stubborn and persistent denial by the Turkish state of the Armenian Genocide, the pain and emotions of remembering the suffering of grandparents and parents for Armenians, and the generation of orphaned children that eventually built their lives in new lands, have moulded the Armenian national psyche, as reflected in the perceptions of Armenianness⁵. More specifically, the collective memory and traumatic recollections of the Armenian Genocide that are transmitted intergenerationally continue to play an important role in determining the collective identity of Armenians. The emotional, traumatic, and psychological impact of the Genocide then, is an important lens through which to examine and understand the transmission of identity and memory within a community or nation. Jenny Edkins similarly argues that the collective remembering of traumatic events shapes and moulds the construction of national identity and foreign policy-making (Edkins 2003; Langenbacher, Shain 2010; Becker 2014; Beukian 2015).

⁴ This silence on the Muslim Armenians has been noticed not only in Turkish scholarship, but strikingly in Armenian scholarship on the Genocide of 1915 – so in this sense, there is a dual silencing, both of women and Islamized Armenians from the “official” narratives of the Armenian Genocide (Altınay, Çetin 2014).

⁵ The Armenian diasporas attempted to recover their identity and maintain it through stages of purification imposed on the survivors, on the “saved” Armenian women from their Turkish and Kurdish saviors and/or abductors, and on the homogenizing habit uses of Armenianness.

3.2 Resilience as Counter-Memory: Rethinking and Resisting

While the mainstream national identity preserves the narratives of the Armenian Genocide as discussed, the one-hundred-year mark also created the space for the counter-memory of various individuals and groups to surface more strongly either to challenge or to become recognized by the mainstream narrative. For example, while previously the discussion around the Genocide focused on the universal suffering of all under this crime against humanity and the destruction of the national culture and the cultural networks, religious structures, and people, there is much more focus today on capturing the suffering of women and children, the variations of experiences of victims of the atrocity (including those who had to live alongside “perpetrators” in the “aftermath” of the events) and understanding the ways in which intergenerational trauma transmission continues to impact the nation. As Aleida Assmann posits through the concept of “shadows of trauma”, the “involuntariness and inaccessibility in the experience of those who engage with the traumatic past, both of those who are directly affected by it as well as those who come after” (2016, 5), reflecting how much the previous traumas continue to shape the national identity construction of a nation. This section will cover the particular case of the Armenian Genocide remembrance around the moment of the 2015 centennial. We argue that this moment has created the space for a rethinking on what the genocide memory means for Armenians: this includes questioning whose memory is going to be remembered and how, and in what ways this transmitted memory to the younger generations is meaningful in their pursuit for justice.

While it is difficult to capture all the complexities entailed in understanding how the counter-narratives function in the case of the Armenian communities that have long been led by Armenian political parties and organizations, and the Armenian Churches, the section will attempt to present the narratives of resistance also as taking place outside those “formal” structures of Armenian diasporic communities. This section shows how these counter-narratives have paved and claimed their way and right to the “public” arena of political action. We argue that the recent turn to mnemohistories and micro-narratives of family or personal suffering of grandparents has shed light on the intergenerational transmission of the trauma and the younger generations’ way of remembering the genocide – and these are discussed as counter-memory, as resilience, in the face of the Turkish state denialism.

Armenian scholars have long argued for a need to rethink of Armenianness and Armenian identity as the younger generations in the Diaspora are more globalized agents and respond differently to the essentializing calls for Armenian identity. Even though the boundaries of diaspora groups are in a constant process of change as they become increasingly porous, they require a redefinition and reframing of Armenianness (Bakalian 1993, for the case of Armenian Americans, for example). Turkish state’s refusal to recognize the Ar-

menian Genocide. The latter is a significant factor that continues to strengthen Armenianness in the diaspora despite the gradual loss of the spoken Armenian language among the third generation diasporans (Bakalian 1993).

Armenianness becomes the symbolic capital of being Armenian – meaning the elements of what makes one Armenian shift, transform, and present more agency in determining one’s “ethnic” and cultural identity. In a reflective essay on Armenian culture and identity, Kyle Khandikian (2017), a Salvadoran-Armenian-American writer and LGBTI activist currently living in Yerevan, wrote that:

There is a very false myth surrounding Armenian identity. It is the myth that we, regardless of religious creeds, national identities, political leanings, spoken languages, etc., are all Armenians. The truth, however, is that to deviate from the mainstream in this community means to be shunned and persecuted for not living up to fabricated norms and expectations. Identifying as LGBTQ is one such deviation, arguably the most abhorred by our fiercely patriarchal and heteronormative culture. Armenians are a diverse people, and that diversity does not suddenly end when it comes to sexuality or gender. There is an undeniable taboo surrounding homosexuality, and that taboo is just one part of a larger system of oppression that is fuelled, in my opinion, by shame.

Despite the calls for more inclusion, fluidity, and agency in the diaspora Armenian communities and in the Armenian diaspora media, Armenian community leaders continue to determine the role of what a “good” Armenian is – one is accepted within Armenian communities as an Armenian if they fulfil their role fighting for Armenian related Causes – which incidentally do not include questions of diversity and equality *within* Armenian communities (Beukian 2018b).

What we suggest the centennial really brought to the fore, is a call for justice in more transnationally located experiences and intersectional identities that mark the resilience of the Armenians, especially in the younger generation postmemory to express their own views on what and how to remember their grandparents’ suffering. For example, Stefanie Kundakjian (2016) attempts to link the Armenians’ history of Genocide to other situations of oppression: “Armenians must enliven our social movements and cultural losses by rising in solidarity with the Indigenous tribes and allies that are currently demanding the protection of Standing Rock against the Dakota Access pipeline”. This is therefore an indication on how the younger generation’s memory is not only driven by the narrative of surviving the Armenian Genocide, but is also inspired by the conceptions of struggle and survival as tied to various forms of oppressions and (settler) colonialism.

What we can notice around the time of the centennial is that such critical voices have become more engaged with a re-imagining of what it means to be Armenian – diaspora, post-Soviet, postcolonial, racialized, gendered, non-binary gender, and inclusive of those who identify as LGBTQ. While these instances are captured through blogs, novels, what we want to focus on in this part of the brief exploration on the way in which cultural trauma is expressed in digital

magazines, blogs, websites – overall digital platforms – as a way of expressing resilience in the face of the hegemonic discourses on memory and reflecting how the intergenerational transmission of memory occurs in ways that call for the trauma of genocide to be connected to other sufferings, actions and activism. Such resilience helps to more seriously reflect upon the call for more inclusion – gender, race, religion – by making Armenian intersectional identities the more inclusive alternative of post-Genocide Armenianness.

What seems to really be highlighted in the past five years or so is the increased visibility of voices that disrupt the heteronormative and heteropatriarchal Armenian identity that essentialized the Armenian experiences through its adoption of “whiteness” as a determined positioning of Armenian subjectivity. Instead these voices challenge those constructions and reposition Armenianness within a racialized experiential and postcolonial subjectivity to capture the realities of the younger generation(s), and reflect the need to reconnect with the past through the formation of alliances with those suffering within the white heteropatriarchal system. The digital format has been an important way the younger generations have relied on to create platforms of expression in forms of blogs, articles, artistic representations, videos on their oral history, and photographic representations of post-Genocide survivors – “beyond 1915” to use Scout Tufankjian’s words. One important example of such a critical way of connecting the Armenian Genocide trauma to other social justice issues is represented by The Hye Phen Magazine and Collective, who issued a statement on their website expressing the importance of connecting the survivor identity with the experience of diasporization and genocide, and in their words (2016):

As a community of genocide survivors still struggling with ongoing systems of erasure, imperialism, and marginalization, we understand that fighting for the recognition of our people’s genocide also means fighting against the United States’ and Canada’s genocidal systems against Black, Indigenous, and Chican@ bodies on Turtle Island (now called North America), as well as ongoing American/Western imperial military and capitalist corporate campaigns on other lands in the Global South, etc.

It is therefore the affective shift in genocide memory and trauma that concerns the newer generation of Armenians who attempt to make sense of not just how the events unfolded, the factual historical details, but perhaps more importantly, how that memory shapes their identity and their own intersectional self-identifications as Armenians and members of other ethnic/religious/racial “groups”. As Raffi Wartanian (2017) explains in his analysis on the ways in which identities are accepted and rejected based *vis-à-vis* the memory of the genocide:

Dispersion, assimilation, globalization, and liberalization have wrought a new chapter in Armenianness [...]. This dynamic stokes fears that the identity’s expan-

sion may cause its demise, spurring the marginalization of elements who objectively have much to offer the community. [...] One critical aspect [...] is the oppression of minority Armenians who represent religious, sexual, and political orientations that challenge (patriarchal) assumptions about Armenianness. This marks an unconscious extension of what the genocide attempted to carry out: a silencing of elements perceived as threatening to rigid identity formations coupled with an attempt to distract from corrupt and ineffectual leadership.

While the Armenian identity is emphasized, since the subjective experience is reflected through that identity, the reimagination of Armenianness is what is noticeable in the post-memory expressions. The younger generations also recollect their memory of the trauma in indirect ways that tie that traumatic experience to more universal claims of injustices committed against humanity (Kaya 2018). It is by the way Armenians position their trauma and suffering as a social justice issue, that is of global concern – association with Black movements, Indigenous peoples' struggles, feminist and queer movements, etc. – that the memory becomes more real to them. This is an important shift that is observed in the way in which post-memory is shaped and shapes the younger generation through Derrida's conceptualization of the ghost of memory that continues the haunt even in its absence – in this case one hundred years later, a denied trauma and suffering continues to shape the memory of the younger generation, not only in thinking about their own history and trauma, but in reclaiming their remains through the alliances with those who have suffered and continue to suffer imperialism/colonialism, heteronormative patriarchal system, and the denialism of the committed act against peoples. This powerful resilience is therefore (of course) not about objecting the mainstream narratives of the Armenian Genocide, instead it is about the understanding of the possibilities, as mentioned in our theoretical segment in the previous section, the possibilities of memory within the erasures and the silences. As such, these voices, we argue are what Derrida terms the remnant after cinder, whereby the post-memory survives the ashes and reclaims its presence through resilience as counter-memory.

These fragmented, yet very real, violent, stories are often incomplete, meaning one cannot trace family history or the particular path of the family members during the trauma, and constitute "haunting legacies". It is also important to think of the concept of survival, often used by mainstream identity constructions to highlight the unified experience of Armenians, and it is used here to show how we can in fact challenge the mainstream and capture the fragmented identities of Armenians that need to be reimagined through intersectional and postcolonial terms: what language they use, that they are thus able to make sense of their history and past in today's geopolitical and global realities, facing denialism, politics of recognition, and the perpetuation of the abuses of their memory by national and international politics.

3.4 Resilience as Remains

As such resilience today is strongly identified through the possibilities of thinking of the Armenian Genocide memory through that global struggle. Homophobic and exclusionary discourses have marginalized many Armenians. This moment of 2015 can help to question the heteropatriarchal and “white” Armenian identities to situate the Armenian experience within the postcolonial and post-Genocide context (Beukian 2018b). This is also the moment of potentiality that is expressed and that becomes evident through the agency of Armenian activists and individuals who have long resisted the official memory, or the mainstream memory that has excluded difference at the expense of conformity and exclusion. The moment of the possibility of achieving the shift in the collective mainstream memory that is heteropatriarchal, technically more bound rather than porous, and conscriptive of Armenian identity, precisely what activists want to achieve represents refusal of the older order of things by looking to the future (Muñoz 2009; Sargsyan 2018)⁶. Thinking of Armenianness in intersectional terms – in terms of race, sexuality, gender, nation, and diaspora – can more strongly reflect the Armenian experience in multilocal and transnational locations (Beukian 2018b). More importantly, and related to the main argument of this paper, intersectionality embedded in counter-memory can present an important challenge and potentiality to Armenian identity in thinking of the struggle for the recognition of the Genocide as not only an Armenian-focused cause but one that is more connected to other struggles and causes for justice and recognition. What ultimately *remains*, is not in the past or the present only, but is powerfully located in its futurity, in José Muñoz’s terms, for rethinking Armenianness in the post-centennial queer time.

4. Irish National Identities: Conflicting Centenaries in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

“The memory of the Easter Rising [...] has long been haunted by an anxious question: is it over yet?” (O’Toole 2016).

What does it mean to consider resilience in the context of post-conflict transition in Ireland and Northern Ireland? The self-proclaimed “Decade of Centenaries”, held concurrently but not identically in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland from 2012-2022, offers a unique case study through which to examine two states which have experienced two very different trajectories emerging from conflict, and their responses to contested com-

⁶ For more works on the conception of futurity applied in various theoretical frameworks, see the forthcoming special issue of *The Armenian Review*, due to appear in Spring-Summer 2018, volume 56, issue 1-2, titled “Queering Armenian Studies”.

memorative events over time. Officially framed as an opportunity for ten years of collective reflection and engagement with the tumultuous decade that witnessed the foundation of both states, fittingly the decade in which it is being remembered has also proven to be fraught with international political and economic upheaval. Using the multiple connotations of resilience as frames, we explore the recent centenary commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme (a narrow, but crucial victory during the World War I) to excavate these points of divergence and the potential for a “shared history”. To conclude the section, we ask how these narratives may be reinforced or challenged through the upcoming anniversaries of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Partition, and the Irish Civil War. In doing so, we expose the ways in which the anniversaries and the discourses of memory embedded within them have been shaped by – and continue to shape – the complex political dynamics in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.

4.1 Resilience as Endurance: Republicanism, the Republic, and the Rising

In Catholic-Nationalist-Republican histories, the concept of resilience is deeply intertwined with mythologies of overcoming: the mantra “It is not those who can inflict the most but those who can endure [suffer] the most who will conquer” (attributed to republican prisoner Terence MacSwiney, prior to his death while on hunger strike in 1920), is echoed in the teleological (but grammatically awkward) “our day will come” (*tiocfaidh ar lá*). The Easter Rising of 1916 has not only been inserted into this tradition over the last hundred years; its proponents actively modelled the event as an act of myth-making and a call-back to the long series of failed rebellions on the island. “Clinging tight to Easter 1916 – told as a heroic saga of national resurrection, of good v evil – has therefore been a convenient, even necessary, narrative in Ireland” (Reynolds 2015).

The point of access to the dominant memory of each event is still exclusive. Both communities explicitly deploy partial narratives of the past to legitimize and mobilize resilience as a political strategy, contributing to the frequent, and protracted, political stalemates in the post-peace process era. As Jonathan Evershed points out, “Loyalist commemoration of the World War I provides a contestational subscript to the prevailing orthodoxies of Northern Ireland’s post-Agreement politics” (2017, 25). Unionism has used commemoration as a way of closing off spaces in order to reaffirm aspects of identity under challenge; the 2012-13 flags protests, and the often hostile parading confrontations of that period, were deeply intertwined with narratives of commemoration surrounding the Ulster Covenant and the founding of the Ulster Volunteer Force. Meanwhile, the political backlash that accompanied any attempts to include northern Unionists in the 1916 centenary indicate that Unionism is still unable to fully engage with the Easter Rising on even a superficial level.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, milestone anniversaries were deployed as tools to construct and solidify an emerging narrative of shared and inclusive history among nationalists and unionists on either side of the border (Graff-McRae 2010, 61). The 1998 bicentenary of the 1798 United Irishmen's Rebellion involved a deliberative process to foster an all-island consensus on the past (see Dunne 2013), and official statements by elected officials sought to make explicit linkages between the anniversary and the peace process (see Dáil Éireann 1998). Similarly, the 90th anniversary commemorations of the Battle of the Somme – which had traditionally been perceived as an exclusively unionist history – foregrounded a narrative of inclusiveness. However, while the remembrance of the Somme (and the World War I generally) has slowly become more of an open house, as the nationalist/republican community in the North cautiously began to challenge communal taboos surrounding any linkages to the British armed forces, and the Republic of Ireland overcame decades of neglect surrounding Irishmen who had fought in the World War I, it still sits somewhat uneasily alongside commemoration of the other formative battle of 1916: the Easter Rising (see Leonard 1996; Canavan 2004; Graff-McRae 2010, 78-113). Instead, the two events, and the discourses of memory that surround them, have become reified “as a crossroads of remembrance in modern Ireland, both for Catholic nationalists and for Protestant unionists” (Beiner 2007, 368), with few points of convergence. Rather than the “all-island” approach to inclusivity professed during the 1798 anniversary, the commemorations of 1916 continued to diverge into parallel events: the Somme at the heart of unionist remembrance, and the Rising celebrated as the seminal event in the nationalist version of history.

Constructed not only as foundational narratives of the two states, but also as mirror images or as parallel history, the commemorative discourses of the Rising and the Somme rarely intersect. When they do, they disrupt and undermine each other's claim to foundations, even as they attempt to construct a shared history (see Longley 1991, Graff-McRae 2010). The Somme has often been read as a foil or equivalent to the Easter Rising – as parallel origin stories for the respective states of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Yet, since the lead-up to the 90th anniversary, a narrative of inclusivity and shared experience has opened up⁷. Yet despite the gradual acknowledgement of a degree of shared experience, this inclusive space was limited to “official” narratives, and more particularly, to sites of commemoration in Belgium or France.

⁷ In some ways this has been carefully choreographed – such as the meeting between then-President Mary McAleese and Queen Elizabeth II, and the balance of British, Irish, and Northern Irish representation at recent centenaries at Thiepval and Messines.

While the centenary of the Somme appeared to continue the progress towards inclusivity seen in 2006, the anniversary of the Easter Rising appeared to remain a step too far for northern unionists. Then Taoiseach Enda Kenny asserted that “These (commemorations) have been put together in a very sensitive, comprehensive, inclusive way – both north and south” (*Belfast Telegraph* 2016a). While the Irish government was praised by the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for ensuring that the centenary events emphasized inclusivity and fostered reconciliation (*Irish News* 2016), the reconciliation to which she referred was between the Irish state and the its British counterparts, not between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland. Newly appointed First Minister (and Democratic Unionist Party leader) Arlene Foster initially refused to attend any events associated with the anniversary of the Rising, deeming it a celebration of violence:

Easter 1916 was a very violent attack on the state. And it wasn't just an attack on the state. It was an attack against democracy at that time. When you look at the history of commemorations of Easter 1916 it is only relatively recently that the government of the Republic of Ireland have commemorated that occasion because actually it gave succour to violent republicanism here in Northern Ireland over many years. It would be wrong for me as the leader of Northern Ireland to give any succour to those sorts of people. (*Belfast Telegraph* 2016a)

When she later appeared to relent by attending an ecumenical service in Dublin billed as a commemoration of the Rising, Ms. Foster went on record to deny that it was a commemoration at all, asserting that the event was merely a historical discussion (*Belfast Telegraph* 2016b). The careful rhetorical manoeuvres deployed by the First Minister hinged on differentiating commemoration as “celebration” from “historical debate”. This unusual denial served to frame remembrance as condoning the event and forgetting (refusing to recognise) the event as a form of contestation, underscored the persistent reticence of the unionist community to acknowledge the significance of the Rising's legacy for Northern Ireland. The legacy of the Rising remains polarized, as the dominant commemorative discourse places the Rising at the heart of the “Republic” both real and imagined (Greenlaw 2004).

4.2 Resilience as Intransigence: Unionist Refusals to Forget and Refusals to Remember

The Decade of Centenaries began in Northern Ireland in a political environment already primed for conflict. Key legacy issues, from parading, flags, culture, victims, to inclusive community-building had been deferred by the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, displacing the troublesome past into the future. Fourteen years later these remained as significant challenges for both unionism and republicanism. Among the Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist

communities, resilience has historically been equated to resistance, particularly encapsulated by the vehement slogans of the late founder of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Rev. Ian Paisley: “Not an inch; No Surrender”. However, amidst the new framework of consociational government and parity of esteem instituted by the Belfast Agreement, Unionism perceived itself as a community under siege, as its eroding political dominance was mirrored in the cultural arena. Disputes over traditional parade routes and the flying of the Union flag underscored the role of commemorative events as political interventions. In the context of this transformed dynamic, Unionist narratives of resilience shifted between attempts to (re)assert endurance and intransigence while necessitating adaptation. This can be seen through the evolving layers of meaning surrounding the Battle of the Somme and its commemoration in Northern Ireland.

“Unionist and Loyalist commemorative discourse and practice” are neither monolithic nor homogeneous, “mirroring the political fragmentation of Unionism along class lines – a process that has been accelerated since the Good Friday Agreement” (Evershed 2017, 19). “Political conflicts within the Loyalist ‘community’ itself are also embodied through commemorative practice” (20). Parades that appear unified are frequently composed of fragmented, conflicting, and sometimes antagonistic groups. However, there is as much at stake in the Unionist illusion of consensus and unity as there is for their Republican counterparts: as Unionism struggles with the erosion of political, cultural, and economic dominance, the cracks and fissures of difference can be perceived as vulnerabilities. Traditional mythologies of Unionist history represent a residual memory, one of an imagined past in which the call “No Surrender!” was not tainted by compromise or dilution.

Like Republicans’ recent emphasis on the memory of the 1981 Hunger Strikes, the Unionist commemorative calendar was shifted somewhat between two Battles: the Somme and the Boyne. There is substantial political and ideological value in drawing connections between the two events, thus reinforcing the symbolism of Unionists as “holding their ground”. The coincidence of the dates of the two battles is something of a fudge: the Boyne is dated (and celebrated) on the 12th of July in the current calendar, but under the Julian calendar in effect in 1690, the battle took place on the 1st. During the Decade of Centenaries, the narrative of the Somme also sought to reinforce discursive linkages with other key events in Unionism and Loyalism – namely, the signing of the Ulster Covenant in 1912, and the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force a year later.

The inclusive potential of this commemorative discourse has also been limited by (bounded by, bound to) the symbolic and commemorative associations with the Battle of the Boyne and the founding of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). The 2013 UVF centenary commemoration featured men (and women) dressed in the uniforms of the 36th Ulster Division, visually reinforcing the genealogical continuity being claimed. The dominant memory of both events is still exclusive.

Both communities explicitly deploy partial narratives of the past to legitimize and mobilize resilience as a political strategy, contributing to the frequent, and protracted, political stalemates in the post-peace process era. “Loyalist commemoration of the World War I provides a contestational subscript to the prevailing orthodoxies of Northern Ireland’s post-Agreement politics” (Evershed 2017, 25). Where republicanism has adapted and deployed commemorative discourse in order to legitimize its claims to continuity despite splits and fractures (see Graff-McRae 2010, 2014), unionism has used commemoration as a way of closing off spaces in order to reaffirm aspects of identity perceived as under threat.

In the context of the flags protests of 2012-13, the anniversaries of the Ulster Covenant and the founding of the UVF heightened these longstanding tensions and gave them symbolic expression. In this way, the convergence (and symbolic elision) of the political challenges of the past and the present threatened to destabilise both the unionist paradigm and the detente established by the Belfast Agreement. Throughout the first five years of the commemorative decade, talks to resolve these legacy issues have been attempted no fewer than five times, and persist, more or less unchanged, today. Unionist commemorations during the first half of the “decade” can be interpreted as both an attempt to reaffirm and reinforce their traditional cultural touchstones in a time of political upheaval, and as a means of protest at the perceived losses that transformation had dealt their community.

4.3 Resilience as Adaptation: the New and Improved 1916

It is perhaps the president of the Republic of Ireland who has best articulated the necessity for the commemorations to adapt and evolve. In his January 2014 address to the Theatre of Memory symposium at Dublin’s Abbey Theatre, Michael D. Higgins called for the centenaries to acknowledge the people, places, and events that had been written out of the Irish “canon” of memory:

For years the First World War has stood as a blank space in memory for many Irish people – an unspoken gap in the official narratives of this state. Thousands of Irish war dead were erased from official history, denied recognition, because they did not fit the nationalist myth and its “canonical” lines of memory. (Higgins 2014, at 7:30)

Higgins also specifically noted his regret at “the women removed from both mythic constructs” (2014, at 8:00) – the hegemonic narratives of the Rising and the World War I. President Higgins’ call for a commemoration at once more introspective and broadly defined was reflected to a degree in the expansion of the popular discourse on both the Rising and the Somme in the period surrounding the centenaries.

Richard Grayson argues that a gradual reassessment of the historical narrative has taken place within mainstream republicanism, “focused not on the events of the Easter Rising itself, but on the context in which they took place,

namely the First World War” (2010, 326). While I would assert that the centenary of the Rising prompted, if not a wholesale reassessment, but a re-imagining and re-branding of the event and its pivotal place in the republican imagination, Grayson is correct to highlight the significant re-evaluation of World War I within republicanism, parallel to official Somme centenary events which appeared to overturn traditional divisions and exclusions through the participation of government representatives from the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom: Irish President Michael Higgins, Taoiseach Enda Kenny, Northern Ireland Secretary Theresa Villiers and Stormont Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness together marked the one hundredth anniversary at the Irish National War Memorial Gardens at Islandbridge (Dublin). The World War I anniversaries were also constructed to emphasize points of convergence and co-operation between unionist and nationalist soldiers (the 36th and 16th Divisions, respectively); at Messines in Belgium, Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenney laid a wreath alongside the British Prince William, Duke of Cambridge in recognition of the soldiers from the Irish and Ulster Divisions who “fought side by side”⁸.

Thus it appears that the prospect of a shared commemoration of the World War I – one that reflects Irish involvement from different traditions within Ireland – is gaining some momentum in both Ireland and Northern Ireland, although it remains to be seen how far it penetrates beyond official levels (Pennell 2014, 97). As recently as November 2017, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar received equal levels of condemnation and support for his choice to wear a hybrid shamrock poppy in the Dáil. In a more circuitous fashion, Sinn Féin Member of the European Parliament Matt Carthy, speaking at St Finbarr’s Cemetery Cork in April 2017, gave voice to this conflicted equivalence:

Let me just make it clear – it is important that we remember those who fought in world wars; those people who were part of the Irish nation but for whatever reason decided to wear foreign uniforms, it’s absolutely legitimate that they should be remembered and should be commemorated [...]. But in no way can they be equated to the men and women who fought for our country in the GPO and in many cases, North, South, east and west for a free and independent Ireland – these men and women are our heroes; they are national heroes with a special place in our hearts and our history. (Roche 2017)

⁸ Moreover, as part of the wider program of remembrance of the World War I, commemorations of the Somme took place within an international context; along with local vigils in towns across Northern Ireland and an official ceremony in Dublin, remembrance ceremonies were held at the site of the battle in Thiepval, France, as well as across the commonwealth. See Pennell 2017.

The uneven nature of the commemorations across the island and across political allegiances indicate that, while shared commemorations of the Somme have functioned as a platform for reconciliation between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, the potential for a shared memory to overcome divisions between the two jurisdictions of Ireland or between the two communities in Northern Ireland has not been fully realized⁹. Moreover, despite the proliferation of officially sanctioned commemorative committees and the seemingly careful scripting of official events, the potential for violence still hung at the shadows. Pennell characterizes this as

a level of anxiety about the implications of not taking ownership and control of the narrative. Too much is at stake to let the memory of the war, at its centenary moment, be left unsupervised and vulnerable to appropriation by the ‘wrong’ type of organisations. [...] lest something more unsuitable occur. (2017, 268)

Resistance to these official attempts to construct a shared site of remembrance did manifest in more sinister form: in a no doubt deliberate echo of the 1987 Enniskillen bombing, which killed 11 people attending a Remembrance Sunday ceremony, in November 2017 a viable explosive device was left at the cenotaph in Omagh. While device was destroyed by police and no injuries were incurred, the ghostly trace of the Troubles continues to reinforce the partition of remembrance into distinct Unionist and Nationalist camps.

For its part, the Easter Rising is similarly haunted, for all its attempts to adapt and remain at the heart of national remembrance. Recalling the pledge of the 1916 Proclamation to “cherish all the children of the nation equally”, the 2016 centenary brought to the fore new perspectives on the Rising, particularly highlighting the stories of women (with a focus on members of the Cumann na mBan), LGBTQ figures in the Rising¹⁰, children¹¹, members of

⁹ The dynamic of shared remembrance was also uneven between Northern unionists and Great Britain: despite their mainly shared frame of reference around commemoration of the World Wars, Northern Ireland was not wholly included in the UK-wide centenary programme. This could be interpreted as reflecting the claim that unionist fealty to British culture is not often returned in kind.

¹⁰ See Ciara 2016 and Sheehan 2016. A few journalistic pieces also placed a focus on male gay figures within the independence movement, most prominently Roger Casement, see, for example, Walsh 2016.

¹¹ The Department of Children and Youth Affairs engaged in consultations with school children on how best to commemorate the children killed during the Rising. The report, entitled *Children Seen and Heard 1916-2016*, sought to literally bring children’s voices to fore. In June 2016, O’Higgins also hosted a special children’s commemoration at the President’s official residence. In the lead-up to the Somme anniversary, many schools (in Northern Ireland and in the Republic) engaged in a programme to “adopt” an Irish soldier who had fought in the World War I, prompting students to research the war, the conditions

the Royal Irish Constabulary and British soldiers who put down the insurrection¹², and innocent bystanders. Yet this apparently more evolved and nuanced remembrance also required a forgetting. For the Republic of Ireland, it has been easier to glorify Countess Markievicz than to acknowledge the women victimized by the Magdalen Laundries, or the tiny, unmarked graves of the Tuam mother-and-baby home – or to ask how these tragic remains linger at the heart of the Constitution, in the form of the 8th Amendment. For northern republicans, it is to forget that women’s rights were always subsumed to the “greater” project of securing a united Ireland (see Graff, McRae 2017; see also Olivia O’Leary 2016).

4.4 Resilience as Remains

The upcoming anniversary of the War of Independence and the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which set in motion the trajectories of the emerging Irish and Northern Irish states, will put notions of inclusivity and consensus to the test. President Higgins attempted to convey the challenges inherent in any invocation of the unsettling past:

When the time comes, very soon, to commemorate those events of the early 1920s, we will need to display courage and honesty as we seek to speak the truth of the period, and in recognising that, during the War of Independence, and particularly during the Civil War, no single side had the monopoly of either atrocity or virtue. (*Irish Independent* 2017)

In the current climate of political deadlock and cultural standoff under the shadow of Brexit, it is hard to imagine that either the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland can meaningfully engage with the troubling ambiguities of the events of 1919-1923. Like Derrida’s cinders, the buried but not forgotten memory of partition and civil war remains as remains – the true foundation of both states that neither wants to claim.

5. Conclusions: Lessons From the Past, in the Present, For the Future

This is the time of 1915/6, to borrow from Ahmed Sa’di and Lila Abu-Lughod who argue that the impact of the Nakba catastrophe on Palestinian national imagining is marked by survival; in their words: “The Nakba is of-

soldiers endured, and the reception they faced if they returned home (www.myadopted-soldier.com). The project, is also seeking to expand its mandate to encompass those who participated in the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, and the Irish.

¹² See BBC 2016. As an example of de-commemoration, or attempted erasure or memory, see McGreevy 2016.

ten reckoned as the beginning of contemporary Palestinian history, a history of catastrophic changes, violent suppression, and refusal to disappear. It is the focal point for what might be called Palestinian time” (2007, 5). Similarly, the time of 1915/1916 also shapes the national discourse of our two cases, and the post-trauma comes to symbolize the survival of the Armenian and Irish nations, despite attempts to exterminate it – in this way, it is also “the time of the cinder” (Derrida 1991, 13). This section brings together the two case studies by weaving them through a narrative of resilience, memory, and counter-memory, in the (non)linear imagining of the nation (states).

The two cases are strikingly similar in the ways in which they demonstrate the politics of memory constructed as, and through, frameworks of resilience. While their differences are not minimal, as we explain throughout the paper, such differences can offer important lessons for studying cases related to collective memory and trauma. In both cases the centennial offered us a moment of reflection and thought around the changing narratives of identity from the perspective of the younger generations who are no longer connected to the events in direct lines of survivors. The cases of Armenia and Ireland embody the multiple, complex ways in which memory is implicated in the discursive construction of resilience, even as memory is itself a vehicle for resilience. The events of a century ago lay the foundations of a collective narrative – a shorthand, a code – that allows those events to act as a cultural referent, one that is politically inscribed with differing meanings of resilience. Yet, counter-memories, the ghostly, and the trace have their own claims to resilience that simultaneously demands an expansion of the narrative and threatens to unravel it.

As Jessica Aughter contends, the traumatic past “is invoked by the state in order to legitimate its own crafting, to materialize the very being of the state by removing the spectre of uncertainty” (2014, 19). In both Armenian and Irish contexts, history, memory, and identity have been woven together through narratives of resilience as a bulwark against this spectre of uncertainty. As endurance and continuity, as survival and persistence and adaptation, resilience – or the element of resistance – is also inherent in the counternarrative. We notice that in both cases, resilience by the mainstream groups and state, have adopted the “traditional” narrative, in the aim of creating and maintaining a sense of unity against the struggle of denialism; this is what we can understand as a century-old position of survival. Mainstream commemorations play on strategies of resilience (endurance, continuity, adaptation, intransigence, inclusion) to construct and reinforce dominant narratives that tie together identity and nation. However, conceiving of memory as spectral reminds us that the coherent narrative delineating the boundaries of past and present, us and them, with more rigid boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, is not secure and cannot be taken as given.

While these narratives obscure and marginalize other perspectives on the past, these counter-memories have a resilience of their own; as expressions of

the inexpressible, the trace, the spectre, or cinder, these memory narratives serve to disrupt the illusion of unity and homogeneity upon which exclusive the conception of belonging is founded. Even within the mainstream position, we have outlined the changes that took place within the Armenian and Irish memory narratives that aim toward a more inclusive stance toward the “other”, the women and children’s particular role and suffering during the traumatic events, and the sexual minorities in each context who show their commitment to the cause of fighting denialism within the limited inclusiveness in the essentialized group identity. These spaces of expressions, however, were not “granted” to these subaltern groups, instead, they were claimed and demanded as acts of resilience against the mainstream narratives of memory and trauma. This is what we term as adaptation as resilience: the attempt to adapt and advance one’s position in order to survive the changes in the hundred years, recognizing the challenges that are being brought forth by an evolving process of reconceptualizing the ethnic identity and the trauma narrative and impact itself – how post-memory is reflected after the one hundred year mark necessarily creates those challenges. Most powerfully, their experiences shine a light on the ways in which a century of memory has left open small spaces of resistance. In the discursive shifts that have seen their narratives of the past evolve and fragment even as they seek to claim continuity and unity, what remains of memory is being reclaimed by those who have been silenced or written out of the story.

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