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Title:

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, 'Vote100/Vótáil100. Die Erinnerung an das Frauenwahlrecht in Großbritannien und Irland' (Vote100/Vótáil100. Women's Suffrage Commemorations in Britain and Ireland)¹

Article:

1. A Fair and Fitting Exchange?

In July 2018, a portrait of Constance Markievicz (1868-1927) was gifted to the UK parliament by the *Oireachtas* (the Irish parliament).² The presentation of the painting (a reproduction of a 1901 oil painting of Markievicz owned by Dublin City Gallery) was part of the *Vótáil100* (Vote100) initiative marking the centenary of women's suffrage across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, now the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK).³ Markievicz was the first women ever elected to the British House of Commons (1918). Therefore, this seemed a fitting act of diplomacy as two states came together to commemorate the centenary of the passing of the Representation of the People Act of 1918 when women over 30 years old, meeting property qualifications, were granted the right to vote in British parliament.⁴

However, the nature of this international exchange was more complicated than it first appeared: The woman to be honoured by this act of diplomacy had been a declared enemy of the British state. In 1916, Markievicz had been sentenced to be executed for her leading role in an unsuccessful armed insurrection against the British presence in Ireland (commuted to life imprisonment on account of her sex). She was still in prison in England when she was elected to Westminster – and periodically imprisoned during the Anglo-Irish War (1919-1921) and the ensuing Irish Civil War (1922-1923). When Ireland was partitioned into two self-governing units through the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, then later the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921, she opposed the legitimacy of those states and continued to agitate for a republic on the

¹ Acknowledgements: I would like to thank the editors and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

² Constance Markievicz portrait presented to UK House of Commons', Decade of Centenaries, at: <https://decadeofcentenaries.com/constance-markievicz-portrait-presented-to-uk-house-of-commons>; access: 26 April 2020.

³ 'Portrait of Constance Countess Markievicz' by Boleslaw von Szankowski (1873-1953), oil on canvas, 1901, Collection: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.

⁴ For details of the Representation of the People Act (1918) see the UK parliamentary website, at: <https://parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/case-study-the-right-to-vote/the-right-to-vote/birmingham-and-the-equal-franchise/1918-representation-of-the-people-act/>; access: 9 May 2020.

whole island of Ireland. Even more significantly in terms of understanding this commemorative occasion, Markievicz never took her seat in British parliament. As a candidate for the republican party, *Sinn Féin* (translating from the Irish as We Ourselves), she followed the party's abstentionist policies. She refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the British parliament's role in directing affairs in Ireland. Instead, she became the first Minister for Labour in the newly created *Dáil Éireann* (Irish House of Representatives). Therefore, despite it being highly unlikely that she would have consented to her representation being placed in the parliament she refused to enter, it was deemed appropriate to mark the centenary of women's enfranchisement by handing over her portrait. The fact that there was only minor opposition from some members of the Northern Irish Unionist community, and that feminist politicians like Senator Ivana Bacik attended the ceremony, suggests that this transaction was regarded as relatively uncontentious.⁵

This gifting of Markievicz's portrait helps to reveal some of the limitations of gendered and national memory. While performing a dual celebratory function – commemorating the success of the women's suffrage campaign in the early twentieth century and granting official recognition to the first woman ever elected to British parliament – this exchange also brought two previously oppositional narratives about nationalism and democracy into contact. It worked to ease over a century of tense relations between two states divided by histories of nationalism and imperialism, but it did so through a problematic model of reconciliation – an armed insurrectionist and politician who died unreconciled to the idea of the two-state solution. It also overlooked a historic woman's political allegiances to effect a cross-border commemoration of feminism.

This article uses the Markievicz portrait ceremony as a departure point for investigating some of the major themes emerging from acts of remembering suffragists across Britain and Ireland, focusing especially on England and the Republic of Ireland. It pays particular attention to the relatively small number of women who defined themselves as patriotic militant suffragists and who, therefore, at times struggled to reconcile competing nationalist and feminist goals. This was especially apparent when nationalist feeling was high, for example, in wartime. The article traces how far these tensions are reflected in centenary suffrage commemorations. Through examining major themes emerging from these acts of remembering, it seeks to understand why those memories are considered relevant in the early twenty-first century.

2. Connections and Disconnections: The British and Irish Suffrage Campaigns

⁵ For an example of opposition, see 'Inclusion of Sinn Fein MP's portrait in Westminster exhibition branded "distasteful"', in: News Letter, (18 July 2018), at: <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/inclusion-sinn-fein-mps-portrait-westminster-exhibition-branded-distasteful-1013069>; access: 8 October 2020.

British and Irish women started campaigning for the vote in the same parliament in the 1860s. Their campaigns unfolded over stages. In Britain, the period from 1866 – when the first mass petitions were collected and presented to parliament – to 1870 has been labelled the first phase of the organized movement when, for example, the National Society for Women’s Suffrage formed (1867). These years were characterized by “optimism and spirited activity”.⁶ Many individual suffrage societies were established during what has been termed the second phase – stretching from the 1870s until 1905. This was a time when feminist activists helped to enact substantial reform within the wider women’s rights movement. These included reforms affecting property rights, access to higher education and the professions, and the repeal of repressive measures designed to curb the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.⁷ In response to the lack of progress made during this period, from 1897 many of these individual groups collected under the umbrella organisation, the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) which was later led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847–1929) – feminist reformer and co-founder of Newnham College, Cambridge, the first English university college for women.

The third stage of the campaign became its most notorious. From 1905, sections of the suffrage movement began adopting more aggressive or militant tactics. They became known as ‘suffragettes’ and although there were a number of militant organisations, the most well-known was by the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), a society formed in 1903 by the militant feminist Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) and her daughter Christabel Pankhurst (1880–1958) who were frustrated with the NUWSS’s lack of progress.⁸ The tactics of the WSPU were characterised by heckling politicians, noisily disrupting meetings and going to prison rather than paying fines for disorderly behaviour. Later, these tactics morphed into more violent and often illegal forms of activity such as mass window-breaking raids, vandalizing post boxes, attacking public property, setting fire to buildings, and going on hunger strikes while imprisoned.⁹ The period from 1912 to the outbreak of World War One (WWI) in 1914 was the WSPU’s most militant phase. The British suffrage movement, with its links to international pacifist organisations, was divided on the issue of pacifism or support for the war effort (a division not evident in suffrage commemorations).¹⁰ However, at the onset of

⁶ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860–1914*, Princeton 1987, 184.

⁷ For more on feminist activism surrounding repealing the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s, see Margaret Hamilton, *Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864–1886*, in: *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 10, 1 (1978), 14–27.

⁸ The term ‘suffragette’ was coined by a “Daily Mail” journalist, Charles E. Hands, in 1907 and was applied to militant suffragists. Sandra Stanley Holton, *Manliness and Militancy: The Political Protest of Male Suffragists and the Gendering of the ‘Suffragette’ Identity*, in: Angela V. Johns and Claire Eustance (eds.), *The Men’s Share? Masculinities, Male Support and Women’s Suffrage in Britain, 1890–1920*, London/New York 1997, 110–134, 129.

⁹ See June Purvis, *Fighting the Double Moral Standard in Edwardian Britain*, in: Francesca de Haan, Margaret Allen, June Purvis and Krassimira Daskalova (eds.), *Women’s Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present*, London 2012, 121–135, 121.

¹⁰ For an extended discussion of how the war split branches of the British suffrage movement, including the NUWSS, see Jo Vellacott, *Pacifists, Patriots and the Vote. The Erosion of Democratic Suffragism in Britain During the First World War*, Basingstoke/Hampshire 2007.

war, the WSPU came out firmly in favour of wartime patriotism. Hence, from 1914 until the granting of the limited franchise in 1918, this militant group swapped its staunch militancy for a passionate blend of war work and suffrage propaganda.

Ireland followed a similar path. Some Irish women were involved in the same early petitioning activities as their British counterparts. They also organised more formally in response to the failure of those early mass petitions. In 1871 the North of Ireland Society for Women's Suffrage was formed. Five years later the country's longest-lived suffrage society, the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association (DWSA), was established. Mary Cullen notes that these early Irish women activists were virtually all middle class, Protestant in religion and Unionist rather than nationalist in politics (like the Presbyterian Isabella Tod (1836-1896) and the Quaker Anna Haslam (1829–1922) who desired to maintain the union with Britain rather than strike out alone). They maintained close connections with their English peers with whom they shared similar disabilities under the common law, largely similar discrimination in education, employment and sexual double standards, and equal exclusion from political representation in the same parliament.¹¹ In the final decades of the nineteenth century, Irish women benefited from feminist advancements, for example in education and employment. Many more women, including Catholics, became active in the suffrage movement. More suffrage societies were established – some of which were branches of British organisations like the NUWSS, WSPU and the Church League for Women's Suffrage, established in Ireland – and by 1912, membership of the DWSA (now the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA)) had expanded from around 40 in the 1890s to over 700.¹²

Not unlike in England, early twentieth-century Irish suffragists grew increasingly frustrated with the movement's lack of progress and in response they formed a minority militant organisation: the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) established in 1908 by a group led by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington (1877-1946) and Margaret Cousins (1878-1954). By 1912, when the nationalist Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) blocked a bill enfranchising women from passing through British parliament in favour of one supporting the establishment of a home rule parliament back in Ireland, the IWFL retaliated by adopting the disruptive tactics of the WSPU.¹³ At this stage, Irish and British militants still had a lot in common. They shared ideals, funding, speaking platforms, tactics, even imprisonment.¹⁴ However, by 1912 when the IPP blocked the Conciliation Bill, they began to exhibit dramatic differences on the issue of British and Irish

¹¹ See Mary Cullen, *Anna Haslam's Contribution to the Cause of Women's Rights in Ireland*, Irish National Archives, at: https://nationalarchives.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Anna-Haslam-Essay_MaryCullen.pdf; access: 18 May 2020.

¹² Cullen, *Anna Haslam's*, see note 11.

¹³ For a detailed analysis of the strategies and tactics of the IWFL, see Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, *Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash: Britain, Ireland and Australia, 1890-1920*, New York 2018.

¹⁴ See William Murphy, *Political Imprisonment and the Irish, 1912-1921*, Oxford 2016, 14.

politics. These differences were to exacerbate as World War I developed and British and Irish nationalist priorities diverged. For example, the WSPU increasingly declared in favour of maintaining the integrity of the UK, while the IWFL became increasingly Irish nationalist, even republican, in outlook.¹⁵ The irreconcilable nature of these differences was confirmed at the onset of violent conflict between Britain and Ireland – the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) – which ultimately led to the partition of the island into the Irish Free State (*Saorstát Éireann*, later *Éire* or the Republic of Ireland) and the Northern Irish state which remained within the UK.

In 1918, before the instatement of the Irish border, a small section of British and Irish women – those over 30 years old who met property qualifications – received the franchise. British women had to campaign for another decade before those over 21 years old were granted the same voting rights as men in 1928. In Ireland, however, matters were further complicated by the politics of post-coloniality in the South and the ongoing legacies of settler-colonialism in the North.¹⁶ Irish women had achieved the right to vote. However, the long-awaited Free State failed to guarantee civil rights to women. Its first constitution ruled out discrimination on the basis of sex. However, its 1937 constitution appealed to ‘a national character rooted in a rural Irish tradition’, embedded in Catholic social doctrine, confining women to the roles of wives and mothers as it enabled legislation that curtailed the rights of working women.¹⁷ As representatives, and indeed embodiments, of Ireland’s conservative past, Irish women were rendered second-class citizens.¹⁸ In Northern Ireland religious conservatism – Presbyterian as well as Catholic – ensured that women were not afforded equal rights to their peers in the rest of the UK. These different trajectories taken by Britain and Ireland were to have implications for how their feminist campaigns were to be remembered subsequently.

3. Commemorating Suffrage Success in Britain

It is hardly surprising that England – as home of the Westminster parliament which granted women the right to vote – played host to a whole range of commemorative activities leading up to and during the 2018 centenary celebrations of women’s suffrage. This section of the paper will discuss two dominant themes that have emerged from English acts of remembering – scholarly and public – including: militancy versus non-militancy; and the imperative of un-gendering the vote and political participation today. However, before

¹⁵ Further complicating the picture, some Irish militant feminists, like Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, simultaneously opposed WWI thereby siding with international pacifist organisations, while also supporting violent conflict in aid of Irish independence. For an in-depth analysis of the connections and disconnections between the WSPU and the IWFL, see Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, *Divided Sisterhood? Nationalist Feminism and Feminist Militancy in England and Ireland*, in: *Contemporary British History*, 32, 4 (2018), 448-469.

¹⁶ While all of Ireland was under colonial rule at some stage, only the northern region is considered a settler-colonial state. For the definition of settler-colonialism, see Lorenzo Veracini, “Settler Colonialism”: Career of a Concept, in: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41, 2 (2013), 313-333.

¹⁷ Begoña Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*, Princeton 1997, 147.

¹⁸ Aretxaga, *Shattering*, see note 17, 147.

doing so, it will briefly outline the process by which feminists preserved their own memory, which was essential for any commemorative activities to take place, before or during the centenary celebrations.

3.1 Preserving their own Memory

In the years following the suffrage campaigns, suffragists went to considerable lengths to preserve the memory of the movement. Through collecting, preserving, and displaying the material culture of their movement, they acted as public historians. The success of this large-scale process, however, was dependent on more than the sheer dedication of the suffragists themselves. It was also dependent on financial support. Finding institutions willing and able to archive and make accessible such collections was not an easy task. Rather, this project was contingent on the social, economic, and political priorities of later periods. Suffragists at the time collated the material culture of their movement – which would help them to tell the story of themselves – and attempted to preserve these for a time when the public would be amenable to exploring them.

For the non-militant NUWSS, for example, housing the records of as many as 400 connected societies was a substantial and expensive feat.¹⁹ In 1926, in order to do so, Millicent Fawcett founded the library of the London Society for Women's Service (previously the society had been called the London Society for Women's Suffrage). In the 1950s, the organization became the Fawcett Society and the library was named the Fawcett Library. By the 1970s, the Fawcett Society found that it could no longer afford to keep the collection. This period saw the emergence of women's and feminist history as an academic discipline. The Fawcett Library then moved to the City of London Polytechnic, and then to Guildhall University. It served as a crucial resource centre for those feminist scholars emerging from the Women's Liberation movement of the 1970s.²⁰ As valuable as this resource was, it has struggled to survive. In the early 2000s, it was renamed The Women's Library and moved into a purpose-built building connected to London Metropolitan University (previously Guildhall University), a move made possible by a £4.2 million Heritage Lottery Fund award. A decade later, when London Metropolitan University announced that it could no longer afford the upkeep of the library, closure was threatened again. The 'Save the Women's Library' campaign resulted in the archive moving to the London School of Economics (LSE) where it was preserved as a distinctive collection for the public and scholars alike. In November 2018, to commemorate the historical link between LSE and the suffrage movement – to celebrate the fact that the university not only houses The Women's

¹⁹ See Kingsley Kent, see note 6, 197.

²⁰ Jill Liddington, Fawcett Saga: Remembering the Women's Library across Four Decades, in: *History Workshop Journal*, 76, 1 (2013), 266–280.

Library but that it also owns buildings used by the WSPU – many of those buildings were renamed in honour of the suffragists.²¹

The Suffragette Fellowship, an organization charged with the task of preserving the memory of militant suffragists – members of the WSPU and the Women’s Freedom League (WFL) which split from the WSPU in 1907 – was also formed in 1926.²² From its inception, the Suffragette Fellowship hosted annual lectures designed to disseminate knowledge about notable feminists. It campaigned for different forms of public commemoration, including a statue of WSPU leader, Emmeline Pankhurst, erected in Victoria Tower Gardens, alongside the Houses of Parliament in 1930.²³ Capitalizing on a major facet of the militant campaign – its dedication to spectacle – as well as collecting documents, the Fellowship gathered suffrage memorabilia (including WSPU crockery, and banners, posters, postcards, badges, jewellery, ribbons and rosettes in the iconic green, white, and purple).²⁴ In the 1940s, however, the Fellowship found that it could no longer afford to house its collection and accordingly was compelled to donate it to the Museum of London – with the proviso that the entire collection remain intact.²⁵ A substantial part of that collection is still on display in the Museum’s city site. Other forms of memorabilia have made their way into overseas repositories.

3.2 Militants v Non-Militants

At the time, militant and non-militant suffragists were divided over both the acceptability and the efficacy of their respective methods. In remembering the British suffrage movement today, it is apparent that scholars and the public alike continue to mirror this division.

Historians June Purvis and June Hannam argue that ongoing discussions about the success of the suffrage campaign continue to be dominated by the question: Which branch of the movement – disruptive militancy

²¹ On 23 November 2018, the Towers at Clement’s Inn on LSE Campus were renamed Pankhurst House, Fawcett House and Pethick-Lawrence House after three important suffrage campaigners with specific connections to the School. See, Rose Deller, Book Extract: Preserving Their Own Memory: Constitutional Suffragism and the Fawcett Society from Remembering Women’s Activism by Sharon Crozier De-Rosa and Vera Mackie, LSE Review of Books, at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseviewofbooks/2018/11/23/feature-essay-preserving-their-own-memory-constitutional-suffragism-and-the-fawcett-society-by-sharon-crozier-de-rosa-and-vera-mackie/#comments>; access: 14 June 2020.

²² See Hilda Kean, Public Histories of Australian and British Women’s Suffrage: Some Comparative Issues, in: *Public History Review*, 14 (2007), 1-24, 5.

²³ Sculpted by A. G. Walker (1861–1939). See Statue of Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst, Historic England, National Heritage List for England, at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1357336>; access: 14 June 2020.

²⁴ Marian Sawyer, Purple, Green and White: An Australian History, Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences, (October 2015), at: <https://maas.museum/magazine/2015/10/purple-green-and-white-an-australian-history>; access: 14 June 2020. See also Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14*, Chicago 1988.

²⁵ GB 389 Suffragette Fellowship Collection (1839-1970), Museum of London. See Museum of London, *The Suffragettes*, at: <https://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/group/18146.html>; access: 27 November 2015.

or respectable non-militancy – was most responsible for the campaign’s ultimate success?²⁶ Purvis further comments that generations of historians have tended to favour documenting the more dramatic activities of the militant branch of the women’s rights campaign over the law-abiding methods of the constitutional wing.²⁷ Whether this attention has been positively framed or not is another matter.²⁸ While it is hardly desirable that the memory of one arm of the feminist movement should utterly overshadow the other, it is also not surprising that the history of the militant movement commands so much attention. In their time, the suffragettes attracted mass and divergent public attention. To proponents, their radical actions and subsequent willingness to go to prison signified the heroism of selfless and courageous sacrifice. To opponents, their disruptive and dangerous tactics revealed a dire lack of self-control, discipline, and political perspective. Today, many experience both an aversion to and fascination with female-generated acts of militancy and violence.²⁹ Historians, biographers, and the general public are also captivated by the harsh treatment of suffragettes meted out by the state, as exemplified by the brutal force-feeding of hunger striking prisoners and the cruel 1913 Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act, commonly known as the Cat and Mouse Act, which allowed for the early release of hunger-striking prisoners who were at risk of death, followed by their rearrest once their health was recovered.³⁰ The militant story was a sensational one.³¹

In 2015, the controversy around the ‘militancy versus non-militancy’ issue was given new impetus when the feature film “Suffragette” was released.³² “Suffragette” – which traces the experiences of the fictional Maud Watts, a working-class woman working in a London laundry, who joined the WSPU – sparked a flurry of debate. In the UK, feminists debated the appropriateness of using one of the few international films devoted to the history of British feminism to depict the disruptive exploits of a minority group of controversial

²⁶ See June Purvis and June Hannam, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: New Perspectives*, in: *Women’s History Review*, 29, 6 (2020), special issue edited by Purvis and Hannam, 911-915, online (April 2020), 911. Purvis herself is at the forefront of this scholarly debate. See June Purvis, *Did Militancy Help or Hinder the Granting of Women’s Suffrage in Britain?*, in: *Women’s History Review*, 28, 7 (2019), 1200-1234.

²⁷ See June Purvis, *Gendering the Historiography of the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Britain: Some Reflections*, in: *Women’s History Review*, 22, 4 (2013), 576-590, 577.

²⁸ For a detailed discussion of some of the more negative appraisals of the militant suffragist, see Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Vera Mackie, *Remembering Women’s Activism*, Oxford 2019, chapter 1: ‘Suffragists and Suffragettes’, 19-78.

²⁹ Fascination with suffrage violence specifically has manifested in multiple formats. See, for example, Justin Parkinson, *Suffrajitsu: How the Suffragettes Fought Back Using Martial Arts*, in: *BBC News Magazine*, (5 October 2015), at: <https://bbc.com/news/magazine-34425615>; access: 5 January 2016. For examples of graphic novels, see Mary Talbot, Kate Charlesworth, and Bryan Talbot, *Suffragette*, London 2014, and the trilogy of graphic novels by Tony Wolf and Joao Vieira, *Suffrajitsu. Mrs Pankhurst’s Amazons*, New York 2015. For a discussion of early-twentieth-century attitudes to politically violent women, see the chapter on ‘The Shame of the Violent Woman’, in Crozier-De Rosa, *Shame*, see note 13, 193–230.

³⁰ For a discussion of the hunger striking and force feeding of suffragette prisoners, see Martha Vicinus, *Male Space and Women’s Bodies: The English Suffragette Movement*, in: Judith Friedlander, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Alice Kessler-Harris and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (eds.), *Women in Culture and Politics. A Century of Change*, Bloomington 1986, 209-222.

³¹ This sense of drama is supported by Fern Riddell’s *Death in Ten Minutes. The Forgotten Life of Radical Suffragette Kitty Marion*, London 2018.

³² Sarah Gavron, *Suffragette* [motion picture], Focus et al., 2015. Directed by Sarah Gavron and scripted by Abi Morgan.

activists over the less contentious strategies of their non-militant peers. The film also shone a light on the questionable ethics of deploying militant and violent tactics for feminist ends. Sara Sligar claimed that highlighting suffrage violence, as the film did, was historically misleading. She exhorted her audience not to be fooled by claims that violence won the vote and to instead turn the focus to the much larger and long-running constitutional campaign.³³ On the other hand, Fern Riddell ridiculed feminist historians who shied away from acknowledging the uncomfortable truth that suffragists had indeed been complicit in what she termed acts of terror and violence.³⁴

Indeed, the words ‘terror’ and ‘terrorism’ when associated with the tactics of British suffragists raised the consternation of many twenty-first century scholars and public commentators. Terrorism was a highly emotive term, not simply because of the prevalence of global terror campaigns from the beginning of the twenty-first century but also, of course, because of Britain’s own historic association with terror. Memories of the thirty-year Troubles in the north of Ireland were extremely recent and, for some, raw across the UK. In 2012, Melissa Hogenboom had opened the door for leading female commentators to deliberate on the legitimacy of violence as a component of the female protestor’s toolbox via her article ‘Were extreme suffragettes regarded as terrorists?’³⁵ In 2018, June Purvis and Simon Webb conducted a highly publicised exchange in “The Guardian”, with Purvis denying terrorist intent (suffragettes were charged with malicious damage not terrorism) and Webb arguing that it was suffragists, not the Irish Republican Army (IRA), who were responsible for the first terrorist bomb in Ireland itself (he refers here to the suffragist bombing of Lisburn’s Christ Church Cathedral in August 1914). If bombing and setting fire to theatres is not terrorism, ‘what is?’ he asked.³⁶ In 2019, in a collection of articles on ‘Terrorism in London’, Rebecca Walker too claimed that suffragette techniques resembled those of the IRA and that this comparison was also noted at the time of their campaign. In doing so, she attempted to disrupt historical narratives that valorised the work of the WSPU.³⁷ Still, and whether considered terrorism or not, the WSPU’s reputation for disruptive militancy has been somewhat overshadowed by their supposed conversion from waylaid agitators to loyal citizens, as signified by the fervent pro-war stance.³⁸

³³ Sara Sligar, Don’t be Fooled by “Suffragette”: Violence Alone Did Not Secure the Women’s Vote, in: Quartz, 30 October 2015, at: <https://qz.com/535662/dont-be-fooled-by-suffragette-violence-alone-did-not-secure-the-womens-vote/>; access: 19 November 2015.

³⁴ Fern Riddell, The Weaker Sex? Violence and the Suffragette Movement, in: *History Today*, 65, 3 (2015), 18-24.

³⁵ Melissa Hogenboom, Were Extreme Suffragettes Regarded as Terrorists?, in: *BBC News Magazine* (11 February 2012).

³⁶ See June Purvis, Suffragette Actions were not Terrorism, in: *The Guardian*, (7 June 2018); and, Simon Webb, ‘Suffragettes did Commit Terrorist Acts’, in: *The Guardian*, (11 June 2018).

³⁷ Rebecca Walker, Deeds, Not Words: The Suffragettes and Early Terrorism in the City of London, in: *The London Journal Trust* 45, 1 (2020), 53-64.

³⁸ This conversion story is discussed in detail in Crozier-De Rosa and Mackie, *Remembering*, see note 28, 26-30.

Claims that the tactics of British feminists were akin to those of early twentieth century Irish nationalists were not the only discomfiting aspects of British history to be raised via suffrage commemorations. Representations of the British suffrage movement, most notably through the “Suffragette” film, were attacked on the international stage for racial exclusion. In the US, the debate centred mostly on intersectional politics. Non-white women were largely absent from the film which, they said, further erased them from white-dominated histories of feminism.³⁹ In many ways, these passionate debates overshadowed the less controversial history of mainstream suffragism. However, scholarly moves are under way to turn attention away from the divisive and distracting issue of militant/non-militant rivalry and towards uncovering new aspects of this wide and varied political campaign. Forthcoming collections on British suffrage concentrate on region and connections, exploring local, national and international or transnational perspectives. Some turn the focus inward, analysing localised issues of class, community and place. Others look outwards, tracing how the British movement connected with, influenced, was influenced by, and differed from other movements taking place internationally, both internal and external to the British empire.⁴⁰

3.3 *Vote100*

There has also been a concerted effort to use the suffrage centenary to turn attention away from the divisions inherent within feminism – past and present – and towards the issue of women voting and standing for parliament more generally. One very visible manifestation of this is the statue dedicated to leader of the non-militant campaign Millicent Fawcett, which was erected London’s Parliament Square in April 2018. Designed by Gillian Wearing, Fawcett is raised on a plinth and holding a banner that reads: ‘Courage calls to courage everywhere’. Fifty-nine other women and men who supported suffrage adorn the monument.⁴¹ Significantly, it took the centenary of suffrage for activists and authorities to address the fact that, until 2018, there was no statue of a female in the Square. Fawcett now occupies an even more prominent position than her much more notorious contemporary, the militant Emmeline Pankhurst; although, it took close to a century for her to join Pankhurst in view of Westminster.⁴²

³⁹ This debate was fuelled by the film’s publicity campaign which saw the actors don t-shirts with the slogan ‘I’d rather be a rebel than a slave’. See Ana Stevenson, ‘The Suffragettes were Rebels, Certainly, but not Slaves’, in: *The Conversation*, (9 October 2015), at: <https://theconversation.com/the-suffragettes-were-rebels-certainly-but-not-slaves-48673>; access: 14 June 2020.

⁴⁰ For example, June Purvis and June Hannam (eds.), *The British Women’s Suffrage Campaign: National and International Perspectives*, London forthcoming; Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Lyndsey Jenkins (eds.), *Women’s Suffrage and Beyond: Local, National and International Perspectives*, London forthcoming.

⁴¹ See ‘Millicent Fawcett statue unveiled in Parliament Square’, *News and Opinion*, University of London, at: <https://london.ac.uk/news-and-opinion/millicent-fawcett-statue-unveiled-parliament-square>; access 14 June 2020.

⁴² It should be noted that memorialising suffrage is a regional exercise in the UK. As I have co-written elsewhere, but do not have space to go into here, Emmeline Pankhurst and the WSPU hold a special place in the memory of woman suffrage in Manchester, in the so-called Radical North, because it was from there that they launched their militant movement. Indeed, complicating the story of the balancing of militant and non-militant memories experienced in London, is the fact that a statue to Pankhurst was erected in Manchester just before the unveiling of Fawcett’s Westminster monument. For more on regional memory, see Crozier-De Rosa and Mackie, *Remembering*, see note 28, 19-78.

In 2018, across the entirety of the UK, national newspapers, television, radio programmes and community gatherings all celebrated the centenary of the passing of the Representation of the People Act. Purvis and Hannam comment that this is indicative of the extent to which the history of the suffrage movement still has the power to fire public interest and imagination.⁴³ Accordingly, public commentators – including curators and politicians – took the opportunity of using public enthusiasm to motivate redress of the continuing gender imbalance in Britain’s political life. British parliament’s Vote100 campaign exemplifies this approach. As a series of exhibitions and events, it had the professed aim of engaging the British public with parliament and with the history of the struggle for the vote.⁴⁴

One of these Vote100 events, the “Voice and Vote: Women’s Place in Parliament” Exhibition, curated by Mari Takayanagi and Melanie Unwin, and held in Westminster Hall from June to October 2018, exemplified this move for redress. The interactive exhibition covered the long history of women’s engagements with parliamentary politics in Britain, from the obscurity of pre-nineteenth century attic viewing galleries (which women were once restricted to if they wished to observe debates) through to the energy of nineteenth- and early twentieth century suffrage protests to the growing presence of women in the corridors and chambers of parliament during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁴⁵ Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of this centenary exhibition – apart from some remarkable exhibits from suffragettes’ restraining belts and bolt clippers to a wooden doll representing the suffragette as a shouting harridan – was its denial of a celebratory ending to the story of British feminism.⁴⁶ Instead, “Voice and Vote” drew visitors’ attention to the fact that the UK was “ranked 49th out of 193 countries globally by percentage of women MPs”. It further pointed to an apparent level of apathy or disenfranchisement among British women voters; “A third of women did not vote in the 2017 UK general election”.⁴⁷ In a newspaper article, Takayanagi expressed her desire that the exhibition would have a tangible outcome: “We want everyone to be more likely to vote when they leave than when they arrived.”⁴⁸ The British parliament was not yet representative of the British people, the exhibition proclaimed. More women and minority groups voting and standing for parliament – despite the obstacles before them – might help to set that right.

4. Commemorating Suffrage Success in Ireland

⁴³ Purvis and Hannam, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement*, see note 26, 1.

⁴⁴ What was Vote 100?, UK Parliament, at: <https://parliament.uk/get-involved/vote-100/what-is-vote-100/>; access: 14 June 2020.

⁴⁵ The author extends heartfelt thanks to Dr. Mari Takayanagi for her very generous offer of a personal tour of the exhibition while visiting the UK in 2018. ‘Voice & Vote: Women's Place in Parliament exhibition’, UK Parliament, at: <https://parliament.uk/get-involved/vote-100/voice-and-vote/>; access: 14 June 2020.

⁴⁶ Mari Takayanagi (ed.), *Voice and Vote. Celebrating 100 Years of Votes for Women*, London 2018.

⁴⁷ Display Note, ‘Voice & Vote: Women's Place in Parliament exhibition’, UK Parliament, September 2018.

⁴⁸ Anne Perkins, ‘Westminster Exhibition Charts 100 Years of Women's Suffrage’, in: *The Guardian*, (27 June 2018).

The situation in Ireland was, in some ways, similar. For example, in 2014, major Irish political party *Fianna Fáil* (translating from the Gaelic as Soldiers of Destiny) established the Markievicz Commission in response to Irish government regulations stipulating that all political parties risked losing a significant amount of taxpayers' funding if they failed to field at least 30 per cent women candidates in the next general election. Over the previous three decades, the highest point in women's candidacies across the country was only 20 per cent. In each of the general elections taking place during that time, women had made up less than 15 per cent of *Fianna Fáil's* candidates.⁴⁹ In many ways, Markievicz was an obvious choice for the Inquiry's namesake. As stated earlier, she was the first woman ever elected to both the Irish and British parliaments, Europe's first-ever female government minister, and the first Minister for Labour in the Irish parliament. She was also a founding member of *Fianna Fáil*, successfully standing for parliament in their inaugural campaign (1927).

4.1 Vótáil100

Markievicz served as an inspiration to many of her fellow revolutionary women at the time, yet, as President of the Republic of Ireland Michael D. Higgins pointed out in 2014, "it took six more decades [from Markievicz's election] for Ireland to see a woman – Maire Geoghegan Quinn – appointed as Cabinet Minister, in 1979".⁵⁰ By 2018, many feminist commentators did not feel that the situation had improved enough for women in the country. At a "Politics Needs Women" Conference in Dublin in December 2018, female participants aired grievances about male chauvinism within the Irish political system. Women politicians had a much more difficult time than their male peers as they navigated a sexist terrain.⁵¹

Chairperson of the *Vótáil100* committee, Senator Ivana Bacik, clarified that, similar to Britain, commemorations in Ireland would have a dual function: they would throw a spotlight on the lives of those early twentieth century women who were most closely involved with the suffrage campaign in the lead up to its success; and, they would also focus on "the representation of women in parliament, leading up to the present day".⁵² She pointed out that there was a disproportionate number of male and female *Teachtaí Dála* (TDs, Irish for members of parliament) today. In 2018, there were only 35 women out of 158 TDs in the *Dáil* (22 per cent) and only 19 women out of a total of 60 Senators (32 per cent). More needed to be done to bring women into politics. Bacik's hope was that the *Vótáil100* program would encourage more women to become politically involved, while reminding all about the importance of the right to vote, more generally.⁵³

⁴⁹ Figures drawn from Markievicz Commission Report. Gender Equality Document, *Fianna Fáil*, 2015, 14–16.

⁵⁰ Brian Hutton, 'Higgins: Fight for Equality Goes On', in: *Irish News*, (3 April 2014).

⁵¹ See Jennifer Bray, Conference Hears of Challenges Faced by Women in Politics, in: *The Irish Times*, (14 December 2018).

⁵² *Vótáil100*, Women in Politics, Senator Ivanna Bacik, at: <https://ivanabacik.com/womeninpolitics/votail100.html>; access: 21 June 2020. For more information about the *Vótáil100* schedule, see oireachtas.ie/en/visit-and-learn/votail-100/; accessed: 21 June 2020.

⁵³ Bacik, *Vótáil100*, see note 52.

While there were similarities between suffrage commemorations in Ireland and in Britain, there were also some stark differences. The principle of these was that Irish suffrage memorials mingled with those staged to remember the 100-year anniversary of the Irish revolutionary years, namely the Decade of Centenaries program. Another is that, in direct contrast to the situation in England, curators of Irish suffrage exhibitions stated that they encountered significant difficulties trying to find material memorabilia to put on show. For example, Donna Gilligan, curator of the National Print Museum's 2018 "Print, Protest, and The Polls: The Irish Women's Suffrage Campaign and The Power Of Print Media, 1908 – 1918" exhibition admitted to a reporter that she cobbled together her modest number of displays from private holdings (70 for the period 1908-1918). While the newspaper article did not resolve its question – "Why did we keep so little?" – it is possible that this scarcity of material archives is attributable to two things: the physical destruction of property during the Anglo-Irish War and the Civil War (for example, the printing presses of the suffrage paper, the "Irish Citizen", were destroyed by British forces in 1920); and, the aforementioned postcolonial politics of gender where women's militant actions were deemed shameful, and therefore to be hidden, in the turn to conservatism in the new Irish Free State.

In light of the trajectory Irish society and politics took from 1918, this final section of the paper will discuss two dominant themes that have emerged from Irish acts of remembering the woman vote, including: the intersections of nationalist and feminist pasts; and, using the pro-abortion campaign to roll back decades of religious dominance in post-partition Ireland.

4.2 Feminist and nationalist pasts intersect

Irish suffrage commemorations took place during the Decade of Centenaries, a program of activities scheduled to commemorate events taking place during the Irish Revolution (1912 to 1923), including World War One, the 1916 Easter Rising, the Irish War of Independence, Irish Civil War and the eventual partition of the country. This meant that celebrating the woman vote mingled with commemorating nationalism. A catalogue of scheduled events for 2018 exemplifies this intersection. In its guide to historical events taking place during the year, the *Irish Times* listed, among other activities: historian Fionnuala Walsh's public lecture on Irish women and World War I; a two-day seminar "Interrogating Markievicz@Richmond Barracks", the site where the leaders of the 1916 Rising, including Markievicz, were court-martialled, many before their execution; an exhibition on women's suffrage and citizenship at the National Museum of Ireland; historian Liz Gillis' military seminar on women in the struggle for Irish freedom; a *Vótáil100* "culture night" at Leinster House, home of the Irish parliament; an exhibition of Markievicz's artwork at the National Gallery of Ireland; and, "Queen Medbh's Shadow: The legacy of 1918, empowerment and women

today”, a discussion panel featuring female academics and politicians.⁵⁴ Here, histories of feminist and nationalist protests, struggles and successes merged.

In many ways, feminist scholarship mirrored this amalgamation. As stated earlier, the Irish suffrage movement was divided between nationalists and republicans who supported various degrees of separation from Britain and Unionists who pledged allegiance to the UK. However, as the 1910s progressed, many suffragists on the island increasingly adopted a radical nationalist perspective, an outlook that was not always easy to align with feminist priorities. For example, while feminist nationalists endeavoured to secure the right to vote in a British parliament and then use that power to help fellow nationalists gain victory over Britain, nationalist feminists sought to withdraw from British parliament, instead seeking to establish an independent Irish parliament which would then grant Irish women the right to vote in a free Ireland.⁵⁵ As feminist historians have repeatedly affirmed, Irish women were often compelled to experience the discomfort of prioritising either the feminist or the nationalist movement at a time when many of them desperately desired a positive outcome for both.⁵⁶ The mix of scholarship published or re-issued amid the Decade of Centenaries and woman vote commemorations reflects the intertwining of feminist and nationalist aspirations. For example, Margaret Ward’s and Louise Ryan’s 2004 and 2007 edited collections, “Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags” (2018) and “Irish Women and the Vote. Becoming Citizens” (2019), were re-published to coincide with the centenary, as was an edited collection of Markievicz’s prison writings (2018).⁵⁷ At the same time, new biographical studies and compendiums of the writings of leading feminists and/or nationalists were issued, including Ward’s biography and her edited collection of the memoirs and political writings of “Fearless Woman” and “Suffragette and Sinn Féiner” Hanna Sheehy Skeffington (2017 and 2019).⁵⁸ As this publishing scene attests, feminist scholars did not feel the need to extricate Suffragettes from Sinn Féiners when recovering Irish women’s history. To commemorate both together was an accurate reflection of the reality of co-existing nationalist and feminist allegiances.

⁵⁴ Ronan McGreevy, Calendar of Events: A Guide to Historical Happenings around the Country this Year, in: *The Irish Times*, (24 April 2018). Medbh refers to Queen Medbh (or Maeve) of Connaught, a legendary figure in Irish mythology.

⁵⁵ For a summary of this scholarship, see Crozier-De Rosa, *Divided*, see note 15.

⁵⁶ For discussions of the competing national and gendered loyalties, see Margaret Ward, *Conflicting Interests: The British and Irish Suffrage Movements*, in: *Feminist Review*, 50 (1995), 127-147; Cliona Murphy, *Suffragists and Nationalism in Early Twentieth-Century Ireland*, *History of European Ideas*, 16, 4-6 (1993), 1009-1015; Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918*, Cambridge 2013. Jason Knirck argues that decisions about whether to pursue nationalist or feminist goals first was not about the ultimate desirability of one over the other but about “timing and priority”. See Jason Knirck, *Women of the Dáil. Gender, Republicanism and the Anglo-Irish Treaty*, Dublin 2006, 12.

⁵⁷ Margaret Ward and Louise Ryan, *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags*, Newbridge, Ireland 2019; Margaret Ward and Louise Ryan, *Irish Women and the Vote. Becoming Citizens*, Newbridge, Ireland 2018; Lindie Naughton (ed.), *Markievicz: Prison Letters and Rebel Writings*, Newbridge, Ireland 2018. First published as *The Prison Writings of Countess Markievicz* in 1934 and re-issued by Virago in 1986.

⁵⁸ Margaret Ward (ed.), *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Suffragette and Sinn Féiner. Her Memoirs and Political Writings*, Dublin 2017; Margaret Ward, *Fearless Woman. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Feminism and the Irish Revolution*, Dublin 2019.

4.3 Repeal the 8th

Twenty-first century feminist activists also used the 2018 commemorations of the decades-long Irish and British suffrage movement in their campaign to reverse some of the gender inequities imposed on women in post-colonial Catholic Ireland's notorious anti-feminist turn; an anti-feminist backlash that continued well into the twentieth century. Specifically, they pulled 'the spirit' of the suffragettes into Repeal the 8th, the 2018 campaign to remove the 1982 clause inserted into the constitution which made the right to life of the "unborn" and the pregnant woman equal. Removing the clause would pave the way for abortion reform (when in place, for example, it prohibited abortion "even in cases of rape, risk to women's health or fatal foetal abnormality").⁵⁹ Writer Martina Devlin drew a direct analogy between the suffrage and Repeal the 8th movements: How apt it was that a referendum on abortion would be held in 2018, "the centenary of women's right to vote", she wrote. The vote was not easily won. Women mobilised and worked hard for decades. "That direct action spirit of the suffrage movement" was needed again for this referendum to be a success.⁶⁰

That strategy was a success, not just regarding abortion but also in terms of mobilising women politically.

The Irish Times noted that:

'One hundred years after women over the age of 30 voted in Ireland for the first time, it was women under 30 who turned out in landmark numbers to repeal the Eighth Amendment, perhaps the most significant vote women in Ireland ever cast, besides their first one a century ago. The increase in turnout among women aged 18 to 24 in the Repeal referendum compared to the 2016 general election was 94 per cent.'⁶¹

More than simply invoking the memory of the suffrage campaign to try to inspire a new generation of women to use their vote, the Irish situation showed that young women needed a relevant issue on which to cast their vote. Abortion reform was one such cause. The Repeal campaign was also labelled a success on other grounds, national as well as gendered. For example, some lauded its ability to inspire cross-border activism. Gender scholar Claire Pierson wrote that "One of the most heartening things to witness in this campaign was the north-south solidarity on the island". She drew attention to the fact that Alliance for Choice (Northern Ireland's key grassroots activist group campaigning for abortion rights) "regularly campaigned for a Yes vote in the Irish counties bordering Northern Ireland".⁶² Northern Ireland, largely

⁵⁹ Ivana Bacik, Ireland has Changed Utterly: The Cruel Eighth Amendment is History, in: *The Guardian*, (26 May 2018).

⁶⁰ Martina Devlin, We Need Spirit of Suffragettes in 8th Debate, in: *Irish Independent*, (13 January 2018).

⁶¹ Una Mullally, Irish Women Continue to Fight, 100 years after 1918, in: *The Irish Times*, (10 December 2018).

⁶² Claire Pierson, Ireland Votes to Repeal the 8th Amendment in Historic Abortion Referendum – and Marks a Huge Cultural Shift, in: *The Conversation*, (27 May 2018), at: <https://theconversation.com/ireland-votes-to-repeal-the-8th-amendment-in-historic-abortion-referendum-and-marks-a-huge-cultural-shift-97297>; access: 24 June 2020.

characterised by religious divisions between Presbyterianism and Catholicism, occupied a unique position in the UK in that it did not permit abortions. At this point, women could travel to Britain and access abortion freely under the National Health Service there, but normal British regulations did not apply in the northern state. Indeed, as Pierson pointed out, the final sentence of the British 1967 Abortion Act states that “This Act does not apply to Northern Ireland”.⁶³

Inspired by events in the Republic of Ireland, and the resulting international gaze which was focused on the island, activists in the North stepped up their pro-abortion campaign. Protesters carried signs with the message: “Human rights shouldn’t stop at the border”.⁶⁴ There were also some high-profile protests. For example, stars in the hit television series set during the Troubles (1969-1998), “Derry Girls”, joined a group of female MPs in a march on Westminster calling for abortion rights to be extended to Northern Ireland. Evoking images of all the women who had to make the journey across to England to have abortions, the group carried suitcases, this time containing sheets of paper with the names of 62,000 people who have called for the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland.⁶⁵ The movement culminated in legislative reform. Backed by Amnesty International, Sarah Ewart – a Northern Irish woman who was forced to travel to England for an abortion “after being told her pregnancy had a fatal foetal diagnosis” – won a landmark case in Belfast’s High Court which found that Northern Ireland’s strict abortion laws were in breach of the UK’s human rights obligations. This followed an earlier parliamentary decision to reform abortion law, through decriminalising the act.⁶⁶ In October 2019, women in the northern state won access to abortion healthcare. Remembering successful feminist activism in the past inspired further successful activism in the present.

5. Concluding Thoughts

Britain and Ireland followed very different pathways after they negotiated a settlement to the bloody anti-colonial conflict that they were engaged in early in the twentieth century. Britain went on to deal with a second global war and the gradual demise of its vast empire. Ireland, divided in two, suffered regressive gender politics and then experienced the tragedy of the long-running violent conflict in the North. While mirroring some common concerns (such as the under-representation of women in politics), suffrage commemorations reflected these different trajectories. In the two Irish states, grassroots activists used the

⁶³ Pierson, Ireland Votes, see note 60.

⁶⁴ Joseph D. Lyons, Why Northern Ireland’s Abortion Law Is In The Spotlight After The Historic “Repeal The 8th” Vote’, in: Bustle, (30 May 2018), at: <https://www.bustle.com/p/why-northern-irelands-abortion-law-is-in-the-spotlight-after-the-historic-repeal-the-8th-vote-9223520>; access: 25 June 2020.

⁶⁵ Mattha Busby, Derry Girls Join Northern Ireland Abortion Protest, in: The Guardian, (27 February 2019).

⁶⁶ ‘Northern Ireland: High Court ruling finds abortion law in breach of UK human rights commitments’, Amnesty International Press Release, (3 October 2019), at: <https://amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/northern-ireland-high-court-ruling-finds-abortion-law-breach-uk-human-rights>; access: 24 June 2020.

memory of successful feminist activism in the past to reject religious domination and to inspire direct action on the issue of women's rights over their own bodies in the present. On the other side of the Irish Sea, some scholars and public commentators alike experienced considerable discomfort at the thought that British suffragettes could be labelled "terrorists" given, among other things, the term's associations with radical Irish republicanism throughout the twentieth century. Given this unease, it is significant that it was deemed a fitting tribute to the history of suffrage, as well as a marker of improved diplomatic relations between two former enemies, to hand over the image of one of those radical Irish nationalists to be placed in British parliament. Despite the regenerative capacity of feminist memories – re-inspiring grassroots feminist movements in the present, for example – some of those memories had the potential to be harnessed for causes the original activists actively opposed. The gifting of Constance Markievicz's portrait is one example of this.