

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Liverpool Hope University		
Unit of Assessment: 28 History		
Title of case study: Informing policy-centred debate on Irish constitutional questions		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Sonja Tiernan Stephen Kelly	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professors in History	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: Kelly 2012 – present Tiernan 2011-2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>This case study shows how research by Liverpool Hope historians has informed the understanding of the policy-making and policy-informed public in Ireland during a key juncture of public consultation in modern Irish history (2015 to 2018). It focuses specifically on the impact of research by Kelly and Tiernan on policy-centred debate affecting three major referenda held in these Isles across this time period: the Irish vote on equal marriage (2015), Brexit (2016) and Irish abortion law (2018).</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The constitutional situation in Ireland has been amended and scrutinised in the light of three key recent referenda. In 2015 Ireland became the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage by popular vote and in 2018 the country voted to overturn its constitutional ban on abortion. Tiernan's research on lesbian political activist Eva Gore-Booth (1870-1926) stimulated policy debate around both public votes. In 2016, the Brexit vote produced serious constitutional questions over Northern Ireland for the first time since the Belfast (Good Friday Agreement) of 1998. A notable consequence has been the discussions around Irish unity within 'moderate' nationalist party politics, which has been informed by Kelly's research.</p> <p>Tiernan's research documented the pioneering activism of Irishwoman Eva Gore-Booth (women's and labour rights activist and sister of Constance Markiewicz, the first woman to be elected to the UK House of Commons) and her long-time partner Esther Roper, an English suffragist and social justice campaigner. Tiernan's research focused on the couple's contribution to movements for political change, particularly their promotion of views on gender and sexuality deemed radical at the time. In the last exercise, Sonja Tiernan's research was used as the historical basis for a play on Eva Gore-Booth by playwright Alan Flanagan, performed at the 2013 Dublin Gay Theatre Festival, an annual gathering with the key aims of 'developing channels of communication to the gay community' and 'promoting youth integration and participation'. She carried forward this work in the aftermath of the May 2015 same-sex marriage referendum, in November 2015 delivering a research master class entitled 'The Theatrical Politics of Eva Gore-Booth' to graduate drama students at University College Cork concerning Eva Gore-Booth's play <i>Fiametta</i>, which advocated gender equality and was not performed until 2010 due to its subject matter. In February 2015, just prior to the referendum on same-sex marriage, she shared her research on 'Women's activism and sexuality, suffrage to Greenham' at the First National LGBT History Festival at the People's History Museum, Manchester. At the</p>		

same event, she addressed the question of documenting the 2015 referendum, discussing appropriate methods, subjects and approaches to record the history of the landmark vote. Tiernan's research emphasised how Gore-Booth's same-sex relationship was both personal and political, as she explained on BBC Radio 4's 'Women's Hour' on 13 October 2016, in the wake of the 2015 referendum result. She was subsequently commissioned to write the official history of the campaign, later published as *History of marriage equality in Ireland: A social revolution begins* (Manchester University Press, 2020)

Irish political understanding of the impact of the key UK policy issue 2016-2020, Brexit, has been enhanced through Kelly's exploration of the impact of the vote on the interrelationship between Ireland's two states. The Brexit referendum of 2016 raised much discussion around the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, with the UK's exit from the EU leaving the 310-mile Irish border the only land border between the UK and the EU and casting doubt on the sustainability of the Good Friday Agreement. The Brexit referendum and resultant frenzy of policy-centred debate raised questions about the 'moderate' nationalist response, in particular that of the largest social-democratic nationalist party in Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and the Republic of Ireland's largest republican party, Fianna Fáil: two political parties which traditionally favour peaceful Irish reunification. Stephen Kelly, whose 2016 monograph *A failed political entity: Charles Haughey and the Northern Ireland question* addressed the topic (and whose *Fianna Fáil, Partition and Northern Ireland*, published in 2013 offered a critical perspective on Fianna Fáil's aspirations to be an 'all Ireland party') was widely consulted on what Brexit meant for the party's attitude to Northern Ireland, the potential of Brexit hastening a united Ireland, and the prospect of an electoral alliance between Fianna Fáil and the SDLP.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- Sonja Tiernan, *The Political Writings of Eva Gore-Booth* (Manchester University Press, 2015) DOI <https://dx.doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719088742.003.0004>
- Stephen Kelly *A Failed Political Entity: Charles Haughey and the Northern Ireland question, 1945-1992* (Merrion Press, 2016)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The beneficiaries of the impact can be summarised as:

- a) politicians and legislators
- b) the policy-informed public and
- c) civic campaign groups

Politicians and Legislators

Both Tiernan and Kelly have been invited to address leading fora of politicians and legislators. In 2018 Tiernan addressed the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly on the role of women in British and Irish democracy. In November 2019 Kelly addressed the Embassy of Ireland to Great Britain

on 'Anglo-Irish relations: from St John Henry Newman and the Catholic University of Ireland to Brexit'. Both academics helped to highlight issues of concern to parliamentarians and equipped politicians and their teams with historical analysis of issues relevant to the 2015, 2016 and 2018 referenda.

Kelly's research has informed the 'moderate' nationalist parties on the island of Ireland (Fianna Fáil and the SDLP) on historical approaches to Irish unity (increasingly a possibility following Brexit). In 2014 General Secretary of Fianna Fáil, Seán Dorgan, called Kelly's work 'interesting' and forwarded it to party leader – and present Taoiseach – Micheál Martin; Pat McParland, Director of Communications, Fianna Fáil, subsequently requested that Kelly address Fianna Fáil's national executive on how history could inform future approaches to unification. In 2017, Micheál Martin accepted Kelly's invitation to deliver a public lecture in Liverpool around Brexit and Irish unity. The contents of Mr Martin's address linked directly to Kelly's research vis-à-vis Fianna Fáil's historical attitude to Northern Ireland. In 2018 Lisa Chambers, Fianna Fáil spokesperson on Brexit, invited Kelly to address the parliamentary party on the historical context informing a potential merger with Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). In 2019, the SDLP announced an electoral merger with Fianna Fáil.

A 2020 testimony from Irish head of state President Michael D. Higgins, in the wake of the 2015 and 2018 votes and in the context of the debate around gender and the Irish constitution, praised Tiernan's research for bringing to light a hidden history of a radical pioneer of equal rights. Higgins was responsible for signing the legislative change into law, and declared himself "indebted" to her work.

The Policy-informed Public

On 22 May 2015, the thirty-fourth amendment to the Constitution of Ireland was passed by popular vote, permitting marriage between two persons without regard to their sex. The move was, according to *The Guardian*, 'hailed as a social revolution and welcomed around the world'. On the back of this historic vote, Tiernan wrote in the *Irish Post* and *Irish Times* newspapers urging further Irish constitutional change to respect women's rights, citing her research on Gore-Booth and with reference to the 'Repeal the Eighth' campaign, the movement to overturn the eighth amendment to the Irish constitution of 1983, which made abortion illegal in nearly all circumstances. Increasingly a public voice for Irish women's rights and women's history, as the 2018 referendum loomed Tiernan was interviewed on BBC's *Woman's Hour* (3.7 million weekly listeners); *Pantisocracy*, RTÉ national radio chat show hosted by drag queen Panti Bliss aka Rory O'Neil (31 July 2017); and RTÉ's *Morning Ireland* (average daily listenership 448,000, February 2018). She commented on the 100th anniversary of the votes for women campaign in the context of the referendum on the eighth amendment, framing the debate around women's rights.

President Higgins' 'indebtedness' to Tiernan is significant in terms of the constitutional position of the Irish President: as official representative of the Irish people, Higgins was expressing the indebtedness of all Irish citizens.

In a series of interviews and opinion pieces with Ireland's national broadcaster RTÉ, Kelly, too, has established himself as a leading public voice, in his case on unification.

Civic Campaign Groups

As mentioned, Kelly's work in communicating historical perspective on Irish unity impacted not only political leaders but also rank-and-file party membership and campaigners. Similarly, the referendum victories of 2015 and 2018 were the result of many years of campaigning by civil society groups and citizen's assemblies as a prelude to the public vote.

Tiernan was commissioned to write the history of the 'Repeal the Eighth' campaign. In the foreword to that book, long-time women's rights and LGBT campaigner Senator Ivana Bacik praised Tiernan's 'invaluable contribution' to the struggle. Tiernan was prominent in public campaigns, too, including supporting a lobby by LGBTQ+ community activists for a pillar commemorating Esther Roper in her hometown of Manchester in 2015. Tiernan's work with civic campaign groups indicates the reach and significance of her research. She has continued her public-facing research into women's and gender rights, in 2019 delivering a public lecture at National Museums Liverpool on Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper to mark LGBT History month and in 2020 a Facebook reading and Q&A hosted by campaign group LGBT Ireland.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- Letter from Irish President Michael D. Higgins praising Tiernan's contribution to the debate around gender and the Irish constitution
- Introduction by President Michael D. Higgins, in Sonja Tiernan ed., *Eva Gore-Booth: Collected Poetry* (Dublin: Arlen House Press, 2018).
- Correspondence between Kelly and Sean Dorgan, Fianna Fáil General Secretary, Pat McParland, Director of Communications, Fianna Fáil, and Lisa Chambers, Fianna Fáil Brexit Spokesperson, 2014-2018.
- Stephen Kelly, 1. *RTE's The Week in Politics*, 'The 50th anniversary of the Arms, Crisis', broadcast 3 May 2020; *RTE's Lifeline* with Joe Duffy, 'The Arms Trial 50 years on', broadcast 22 Sept. 2020.
- Foreword by Ivana Bacik to Sonja Tiernan, *The history of marriage equality in Ireland: A social revolution begins* (Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. xxi-xxvi.
- Sonja Tiernan, 'Constitution must align with values of Markievicz, not de Valera,' *Irish Times*, 15 August 2018.
- Sonja Tiernan, 'Time to examine the Irish state's attitude to women,' *Irish Post*, 20 March 2015.
- Government of Ireland, Constitution of Ireland: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d5bd8c-constitution-of-ireland/?referrer=/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution
- RTÉ's Brainstorm, Opinion Piece, online article, 'How and why Fianna Fáil and the SDLP became best buddies, 7 Feb. 2019. <https://www.rte.ie/eile/brainstorm/2019/0207/1028106-how-and-why-fianna-fail-and-the-sdlp-became-best-buddies/>.
- *Irish Times* Opinion Piece, print article, 'Fianna Fáil's move North is a long time coming', 23 Aug. 2018. www.irishtimes.com/opinion/fianna-fail-s-move-north-is-a-long-time-coming-1.3604413?mode=amp