"Remember, Reflect, Reimagine": The 2016 State Commemorations of the Easter Rising in Ireland and Abroad

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Abstract

The 1916 Easter Rising was a turning point in Irish history, triggering an era of changes and turmoil that would result in the creation of the first Irish State. It has become enshrined in both collective memory and the State's own self-narrative as a moment of almost mythic ideological magnitude. Consequently, commemoration of the Rising often results in clashes of contested meaning and "ownership." Contemporary socio-political conditions have had a profound influence on these processes; *Ireland 2016*, the State programme launched to the Rising's centenary, was no exception.

This thesis examines the Irish State's centenary commemorations of the Rising and how it "re-packaged" 1916 for the Ireland of 2016. It argues that the State attempted to update its model of remembrance by incorporating previously neglected women's histories of the Rising, giving greater historical contextualisation to the event, and improving public accessibility via digitisation. It also argues that *Ireland 2016* was, nonetheless, a typical instance of state sponsored history. Increasing globalisation, the experience of austerity, and changed relations with Britain guided the State's commemorative approach as it sought to reimagine Irish national identity in a way that would meet present concerns. The thesis will conclude with a brief survey of public responses to the commemoration.

Contents

0.0 Introduction

Commemoration, collective memory, and public history are three distinct modes by which people in the present relate to the past. Modern states often employ the first for political purposes; on these occasions, supporting pre-existing popular narratives *about* and interest *in* the past improves their prospects of success.[1] It allows them to style themselves as the curators of the national present and guarantors of its future, historically authorised to carry out these functions on behalf of the people they purport to serve. This approach increasingly characterises state commemorative practice; grassroots, decentralised public memorialisation is now often co-opted and reproduced "from above" rather than the reverse.[2] Although not infallible, it represents a means by which states can narrate a version of the past that meets popular expectations and their own needs at once. States can also use this opportunity to faciliate genuine public engagement with and interest in history: a "bridge" between the past and contemporary life that recharges it with new meaning for modern audiences.[3]

This thesis considers an example from the national context of Ireland, a country steeped in what Guy Beiner calls "deep memory": multilayered, reflexive remembrance that both provides a framework for the construction of new memories and colours the perception of contemporary events.[4] A cultural fixation with recalling the past has shaped Ireland almost as much as the past itself; rival interpretations of history have helped stoke socio-political

[1] Berber Bevernage and Nico Wouters, eds., "State-Sponsored History After 1945: An Introduction," in *The Palgrave Handbook of State-Sponsored History After 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 12.
[2] Jennifer L. Allen, "National Commemoration in an Age of Transnationalism," *The Journal of Modern History* 9 (2019): 143-144. https://doi.org/10.1086/701580.
[3] Guy Beiner, "Commemorative Heritage and the Dialectics of Memory," in *Ireland's Heritages: Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity*, ed. Mark McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2005), 60.
[4] Beiner conceptualises this as memory "embedded in traditions that predate remembered events"; these "prememories" provide mnemonic templates for later remembrance and influence the interpretation of current experiences. "Deep" memory is a hallmark of the Irish nationalist tradition, in which the memory of successive failed rebellions was invoked by each new generation of nationalists and constantly refreshed and recycled in subsequent memorialisation. Guy Beiner, "Between Trauma and Triumphalism: The Easter Rising, the Somme, and the Crux of Deep Memory in Modern Ireland," *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 2 (2007): 370. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/510892.

conflict on the island, the aftershocks of which still reverberate.[5] Many collective identities in the country are welded to a particular past and are likely to remain so for some time, given growing sensitivity to issues of memory and memorialisation.[6] For these reasons, state commemoration in Ireland has been a charged and often volatile affair that has caused considerable controversy.[7] The scale and tone of state commemorations have varied over time in reaction both to these critiques and to changing socio-political circumstances; as such, they constitute ritualised forms of transmission that may give the illusion of continuity, but are constructed anew with each occurrance.[8]

Ireland's "official" memorial record is therefore a quintessential example of state utilisation of the past: self-serving, and molded by the specific cultural and national milieu in which it takes place. In recent years, this has driven it to adapt its narrative of Irish history to make it more accessible and inclusive; an approach that relied on the flexibility of memory and public initiative, while serving as a platform for other ambitions. This latest stage in Ireland's comemmorative tradition, the "Decade of Centenaries", is an ongoing official programme marking a series of centennial anniversaries between 2012 and 2023. The historical episodes encompassed by the programme include war, civil conflict, and revolution: moments of extreme turbulence in early 20th-century Ireland that impacted it in permanent ways. Arguably the most defining of these in terms of socio-political legacy and cultural import was the 1916 Easter Rising.

[5] Brian Walker, *Irish History Matters: Politics, Identities and Commemoration* (Stroud: The History Press, 2019).
[6] Ian McBride, "Introduction: Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3. The enduring link between history and social identity in Ireland is particularly evident in Northern Ireland, where entire communities associate themselves with popular memory of historical events. Commemoration in Northern Ireland is a frequent and often incendiary practice outside the scope of this thesis.
[7] The emergence of the field of memory studies in Ireland in the 1990s coincided with a spate of official commemorations of events such as the 1798 rebellion and the Great Famine, which fed into these debates. Guy Beiner, "Probing the Boundaries of Irish Memory: From Postmemory to Prememory and Back," *Irish Historical Studies* 39, no. 154 (2014): 296. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021121400019106.
[8] Dominic Bryan, "Ritual, Identity and Nation: When the Historian Becomes the High Priest of Commemoration," in *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Modern Ireland*, eds. Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 34.

The Irish State's programme to mark its centenary – entitled "*Ireland 2016*" – is the primary focus of this thesis: by analysing source material, scholarly critiques, and public reactions, it contends that the programme was both:

a) a serious attempt to amend a commemorative canon that has often been exclusive and de-historicised, and
b) a self-serving narrativising project typical of state commemorative practice.

With respect to the former, this thesis argues that the State succeeded in adopting a more diversified, critical approach than those of previous years, "updating" its model of remembrance to incorporate long-marginalised women's history, give greater historical contextualisation to the event, and improve public accessibility via digitisation. With respect to the latter, this thesis contends that increasing globalisation, the experience of austerity, and changed relations with Britain guided the State's commemorative approach as it sought to reimagine Irish national identity in a way that would meet present concerns.

The remainder of this introductory chapter offers a brief discussion of some theoretical issues, and contextual commentary on the Irish diaspora and the Easter Rising itself.

0.1 Commemoration, History, Memory

The innate complexity of commemoration has made its study a multidisciplinary undertaking. It falls within the bounds of "memory studies", a field that has established itself as a crucible for new perspectives on the past and provides the interpretative tools with which to form them. Under this umbrella discipline, scholars from multiple backgrounds explore commemoration from diverse disciplinary perspectives; accordingly, current understanding of the phenomenon is built on composite and evolving theoretical ground. Maurice Halbwachs

formulates commemoration as a ritual through which historical knowledge is transformed into collective memory, employing mnemonic schema and objects to assign meaning to past events; subsequently, these events become loci of a collective identity that is grounded in belief in a shared historical experience.[9] A short overview of some of the terms and concepts referenced herein follows.

Foremost among these concepts is collective memory, central to the theory and practice of commemoration; it is the natural purview of sociology because it is constructed upon a fundamentally social framework.[10] Although it is the subject of extensive debate, it has yet to be unanimously defined; its inherent social nature is perhaps the only point upon which there is broad scholarly agreement.[11] Sociologist Barry Schwartz conceptualises it as follows: collective memory

1. exists in and between social groups,
2. describes how these groups *feel* about the past, rather than what objectively happened in it, and
3. connects a "remembered past" to a "lived present" and "imagined future."[12]

This "memory" is constructed using a wide array of mnemonic devices and schema such as memorial ceremonies, museums, and historical media. It is here where the thematic link between commemoration and collective memory can be traced: in commemoration, similar material and techniques are employed in order to present a vision of the past that is inextricably bound up with the present. However, the two concepts remain ontologically distinguishable; unlike commemoration, a *practice*, collective memory is a socially-

[9] Hiro Saito, "From Collective Memory to Commemoration," *Memory Studies* 4, no. 2 (2011): 629. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1750698011399526.
[10] Brian Conway, "New Directions in the Sociology of Collective Memory and Comemmoration," *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 7 (2010): 442. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00300.x.
[11] James V. Wertsch and Henry L. Roediger III, "Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches," *Memory* 16, no. 3 (2008): 318. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701801434.
[12] Conway, "New Directions," 443.

constructed "*state of mind*" that is temporally oriented towards the past, present, and future.[13] Commemoration relies heavily on this "state of mind" to function: as memory is constructed in variable ways and can assume a multitude of forms, it is an endlessly-replenishing source from which commemoration can draw when representing the past in the present.[14]

The discipline of history is also associated with commemoration. There is widespread consensus that these two concepts are also distinct - if not, as some argue, antithetically so: the process of reshaping and reinventing the past in the construction of memory is at odds with the impartial, "detached" methodology to which historians subscribe.[15] Traditionally, the work of history has been to attempt to "transcend" personal or social reconstructions of the past and arrive as close as possible to the idea of a "timeless historical truth."[16] Historical knowledge is the product of contextualisation, synthesisation and clarification of the past through careful evaluation of evidence and sources; its core function is to add to our understanding of what happened, why, and how.[17] Neither commemoration nor the memory it employs stems from the same processes; nor, importantly, do they usually profess to play the same role. Each can (and does) absorb some of the historical knowledge produced by professional history, but otherwise remains a separate phenomenon.

Nevertheless, most theorists acknowledge that the distinctions between memory, history, and commemoration do not forbid their being functionally proximate.[18] As Halbwachs's theory of commemoration suggests, they may even work in tandem. The frequency with which the term "memory" appears in recent historical discourse seems to suggest a growing awareness among historians that these concepts need not be studied in isolation from each

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid, 446.
[15] Wertsch and Roediger, "Collective Memory," 321.
[16] Frank R. Ankersmit, "Commemoration and National Identity," *Memória, Identitade e Historiographia* 10, no. 1-2 (2002): 35. https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/textos/article/view/27826/23922.
[17] Ankersmit, "Commemoration and National Identity," 33.
[18] Barry Schwartz, "Rethinking the Concept of Collective Memory," in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, eds. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen (New York: Routledge, 2016), 10-11.

other as rival interpretative models[19]; in fact, it is perhaps more useful to understand them as different but complementary modes of consuming the past.[20]

This is particularly true with respect to public history. It - like collective memory - remains a somewhat nebulous concept; however, most scholars agree that its defining characteristic is its pursuit of wider audiences than traditional, "academic" history.[21] Its position in the field of professional history is still contested for that reason; for some historians, seeking to engage with different audiences carries an inherent risk of distorting or simplifying the historical record.[22] For others, public history represents a more participatory way of approaching the past; a process of production, mediation, and democratisation capable of "involving people as well as nations and communities in the creation of their own histories."[23] Still others argue that it can (or could) be capable of much more: if grounded in a belief in history as "central to progressive social reform and developing stronger historical consciousness", it could be deployed towards the improvement of regional and ethnic relations.[24]

The pursuit of public audiences and the potential to have significant socio-political impact are traits commemoration and public history share; they are especially pronounced when the former is sanctioned, sponsored, or mandated by a state authority. State commemoration is a phenomenon "quarried from the protean resource of public history": it allows states to select, appropriate, and claim elements of the past to fulfill the needs of

[19] Victor Roudometof, "Beyond Commemoration: The Politics of Collective Memory," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 31, no.2 (2008): 162. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45293737.
[20] Aleida Assmann, "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (2006): 263. doi 10.1215/03335372-2005-003.
[21] Peter Claus and John Marriott, *History: An Introduction to Theory, Method and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 274.
[22] James B. Gardner and Paula Hamilton, eds., "Introduction: The Past and Future of Public History – Developments and Challengers," in *The Oxford Handbook of Public History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 8.
[23] Hilda Kean and Paul Martin, eds., *The Public History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2013), xiii.
[24] Gardner and Hamilton, "Introduction," 6-7.

contemporary generations and their own agendas.[25] The result is the construction of historical metanarratives that are not only shaped by states, but are also frequently *about* them.[26] With these metanarratives in place, national collective identities can be molded and affirmed to support the imaginary of nations and nationhood through which nation-states exist. The state-building potential of this process is considerable; unsurprisingly, it has become a key tool with which states attempt to legitimise their current authority with reference to the past.[27] The Irish State, as a relatively young political entitiy, is no exception to this paradigm. It makes recurring reference to aspects of the history of Ireland for its own narrative purposes, one of which is the long struggle for independence in which the Rising proved decisive; another is the island's famous record of emigration, which has produced a diaspora of unique (and useful) proportions.

0.2 The Irish Diaspora

As with the other phenomena discussed in the previous section, efforts to conceptualise diaspora have yielded wide-ranging theories. Some of these view diaspora membership as primarily rooted in the memory of "ruptures of loss, exile, and journeying", but not necessarily concerned with the recovery of a lost past; in contrast, other theorists conceive of it as a "simultaneously parasitical and neglectful" relationship, mostly shaped by political needs and willfully manipulative of historical realities and continuities.[28] More generally, popular understandings of diaspora associate it with feelings of nostalgia and a desire for

[25] Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, "Commemoration, Public History and the Professional Historian: An Irish Perspective," *Estudios Irlandeses*, no 9 (2014): 144. https://www.estudiosirlandeses.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/GOTuathaigh_9.pdf.
[26] Bevernage and Wouters, "State-Sponsored History After 1945," 4.
[27] Bevernage and Wouters, "State-Sponsored History After 1945," 11.
[28] Sonali Thakkar, "Foreign Correspondence," in *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, eds. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 204.

connection; a framework within which communities sharing cultural, historical, or religious links maintain a sense of collectivity that is tied to a certain homeland and represents a "new type of globalised existence, within which belonging is compatible with distance."[29] It is a fluid, unfixed phenomenon, shaped by factors such as the "host" countries in which members of a particular diaspora live, those countries' historic relationships with the "homeland", and the temporal and spatial distances involved. A more flexible interpretation of diaspora, therefore, is that it is not a longing for "replacement" to somewhere else but rather a state of *orientation*: a "turning towards" the homeland "as a referent, one that may be mediated, diluted or transformed into virtuality" depending on social, cultural, and individual circumstances.[30]

Commemoration of history in diasporic communities is as political as it is within national contexts: it is very often guided by the triangulated relations between the diaspora and sending and receiving countries, as well as by the broader socio-political environment in which these relations take place.[31] In cases where the sending government sponsors or is otherwise involved in the process of commemorating historical events among the diaspora, political motivations can be even more critical. They have profound implications for the interaction of memory, history, and identity through which commemoration operates, particularly commemoration of a "national" historic event that is carried beyond national borders. Accordingly, scholars are beginning to broaden their interrogations of public remembrance to account for the existence of diasporas; conventional understandings of "the

[29] Stéphane Dufoix, *The Dispersion: A History of the Word Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2017), 1.
[30] Khatharya Um, "Diasporas and the Politics of Memory and Commemoration," in *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies*, eds. Robin Cohen and Carolin Fischer (New York: Routledge, 2020), 331.
[31] Ibid, 332.

boundaries of the nation, the state, or the local community" in commemorative practice now occasionally acknowledge and analyse its "unbounded quality."[32]

The potential of such an approach is especially relevant to the commemoration of Irish history: the experience of emigration has been an enduring and defining one for the whole island, historically associated with failure, loss, and "myths of authenticity."[33] While emigration from Ireland has occurred since the early Middle Ages, under British colonial rule and during the Great Famine of the 1840s it increased dramatically and became a fixture of Irish life.[34] By the 1870s, it had escalated to "a massive, rentless, and efficiently managed national enterprise."[35] As a result, the Irish diaspora is often purported to be one of the largest in the world, with upper estimates of its size ranging as high as 70 million people.[36] This record of emigration has formed a deep reservoir of cultural memory, inspiring centuries of music, literature, and other media through which traumas of displacement and loss have found expression among both the "displaced" and the communities left behind.

By its nature, a diaspora can never be "fully known, nor can it be represented from only one location or perspective"; this is particularly true of one so extensive.[37] Nevertheless, since the latter decades of the 20th century the Irish State has made it a policy to strengthen

[32] Jenny Wüstenberg, "Locating Transnational Memory," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 34, no. 4 (2019): 371. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-019-09327-6.
[33] Johanne Devlin Trew and Michael Pierse, eds., "Introduction: Gathering Tensions," in *Rethinking the Irish Diaspora: After the Gathering* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1.
[34] The Famine was a period of mass starvation, disease, and extreme socio-economic hardship in Ireland between 1847-1849. It began as the result of a blight affecting the potato crop; the potato formed the staple diet of the majority of the impoverished Catholic population. Over a million died and double that number were compelled to leave the island for survival and in search of better fortune elsewhere. The Famine caused permanent democraphic change in Ireland from which it has never recovered (the population has yet to return to pre-famine levels), inflicted deep cultural trauma, and became a turning point in Irish nationalism, worsening relations between Ireland and Britain.
[35] David Fitzpatrick, "Emigration, 1871-1921," in *A New History of Ireland VI: Ireland Under the Union II, 1870-1921,* ed. W. E. Vaughan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 607.
[36] The Government of Ireland qualifies that this oft-repeated figure is a broad one: it takes into account those of Irish ancestry living abroad who feel some connection with their heritage, along with Irish citizens themselves who have emigrated. Irish Department of Foreign Affairs. *Minister's Brief. Global Irish in Numbers* (Dublin: DFA, 2017). https://dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/newspress/publications/ministersbrief-june2017/1--Global-Irish-in-Numbers.pdf.
[37] Breda Gray, "The Irish Diaspora: Globalised Belonging(s)," *Irish Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 2 (2002): 135. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/079160350201100207.

relations with the Irish diaspora. Beginning in the 1990s, the State began to seek ways of integrating the diaspora as part of a "wider symbolic horizon of Irish belonging"[38]; a process which led to the creation of a Ministry for Diaspora, increased government interaction with and addressing of diaspora communities, and the inclusion of diaspora audiences in official commemoration of Irish history. This provided the impetus behind the incorporation of the diaspora in the Decade of Centenaries and, in particular, the centennial of the Easter Rising.

0.3 The 1916 Easter Rising:

> "You must have something striking in order to appeal to the imagination of the world...of course, we shall all be wiped out."
>
> Tom Clarke, executed rebel leader[39]

The Easter Rising was a failed insurrection against British rule devised by a covert revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB).[40] It began at midday on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, when an armed cohort of members of the paramilitary group known as the Irish Citizen Army approached Dublin Castle and ineffectually tried to seize it from British officials.[41] Across the city, small bands of other republican groups – the Irish Volunteers and the women's paramilitary organisation, Cumann na mBan – launched more

[38] Ibid, 124.

[39] Tom Clarke is reported by Min Ryan, a female rebel stationed with him in the GPO, to have responded thus to her question as to why the notion of a Republic and the shedding of their own blood was necessary in the greater scheme of Ireland's campaign for independence. This language of self-sacrifice left the Rising a potent narrative legacy. Fearghal McGarry, "1916 and Irish Republicanism: Between Myth and History," in *Towards Commemoration: Ireland in War and Revolution 1912-1923*, eds. John Horne and Edward Madigan (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2013), 50-51.

[40] Although serious planning for the Rising only began in 1914, the IRB was inspired by the "deep memory" of successive rebellions since the end of the 18th century. These rebellions, though each ended in defeat, left behind powerful symbolic legacies for the nationalist movement to claim and reproduce. Michael T. Foy and Brian Barton, *The Easter Rising* (Stroud: The History Press, 2014), 11.

[41] Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland: Easter 1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1. Dublin Castle was the seat of British administrative power in Ireland; its capture, had it transpired, would have been of enormous practical as well as symbolic significance to the rebels.

successful attacks on other strategic sites, gradually establishing outposts from which to defend themselves from British retaliation. One of these was the General Post Office (GPO) on Dublin's main thoroughfare, Sackville Street; it provided the backdrop for what would become the most enduring image of the rebellion in national memory when Patrick Pearse, one of a number of the Rising's leaders, stood on the street before it and read the Proclamation of the Irish Republic. In the document, the rebels declared the establishment of a Republic of Ireland, announced their commitment to adopting universal suffrage, and on Ireland's behalf exhorted all "Irishmen and Irishwomen...in the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood..." to join their revolt.[42]

As a consequence of poor organisation, insufficient training, lack of arms, and logistical mishaps, the Rising became a short-lived affair.[43] After the small groups of participants – numbering 800 at the beginning of the week and swelling to around 1600 by the middle – seized control of their target buildings, they did not progress further. British retaliation was swift and decisive; rebel strongholds were surrounded and quickly subdued, while Sackville Street was subjected to intense bombardment from an artillery gunboat that sailed up the river Liffey. Under increasingly futile circumstances and in recognition of rising civilian casualties, the rebels surrendered after 6 days of fighting. In that time, 450 people had been killed (300

[42] Although the reading of the Proclamation from the steps of the GPO is now one of the most defining images of the Rising in popular memory, in reality it was an underwhelming moment. Although a small crowd of bemused spectators assembled to listen to Pearse, they did not perceive it to be anything worth taking seriously; in fact, some laughed. However, the Proclamation has since become the preeminent document in Irish history and, through its reference to the "dead generations" of previous nationalists, demonstrates the power of the "deep memory" ideology so central to Irish romantic nationalism. See Róisín Higgins, "'The Irish Public was Proclaimed by Poster': The Politics of Commemorating the Easter Rising," in Grayson and McGarry, eds., *Remembering 1916.*

[43] Originally, it was to be a country-wide uprising supported by arms delivered from Germany. However, confusion about whether the plan was going ahead (Eoin MacNeill, leader of the Irish Volunteers, issued a counterorder immediately before Easter Monday instructing members not to take part, but was ignored by Pearse and others) and a lack of sufficient arms (the shipment from Germany was discovered by British authorities before it could reach the rebels) meant that the rebellion was largely confined to Dublin and had far from enough man- or firepower to pose a credible threat.

of whom were civilians), another 2500 injured, and the city centre shelled to the point of ruin.[44]

Although it was a clear military failure, the true significance of the Rising lay in its aftermath. In the wake of the surrender, 16 of the rebellion's leaders were court martialled in secret and summarily executed by firing squad. Strict martial law was imposed throughout the country and 3400 men suspected of radical republicanism were interned, many in prison camps in Britain.[45] Very quickly, public opinion - which at first denounced the rebels for their violent methods and the destruction of the city - pivoted in their favour.[46] This tidal change in the people's response to the Rising was the rebellion's most significant contribution to Irish history; it forced the island abruptly onto a very different trajectory than that which it had expected to follow. Prior to 1916, Home Rule – a constitutional arrangement that would grant Ireland some degree of independence but would keep it within the United Kingdom and the wider British Empire – was the primary goal of mainstream Irish nationalism.[47] The brutal response of the British authorities to the Rising and the subsequent shift in the Irish socio-political landscape ensured that that alternative future "went up in flames"; in its place, the physical-force tradition of republicanism was revived, and republicanism in general became the dominant ideology of Irish nationalism.[48] This had enormous significance for the island's

[44] Robert Lynch, *Revolutionary Ireland: 1912-1925* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 41.
[45] Ironically, many of these prisoners were not radical republicans at the time of their arrest but became radicalised by their experience of internment. Richard McElligott, "1916 and the Radicalization of the Gaelic Athletic Association," *Éire-Ireland* 48, no. 1-2 (2013): 101. https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2013.0003.
[46] Participants in the Rising who were surrounded by hostile crowds as they were led to gaol following their surrender found that on their journey to the docks to be deported to Britain a mere three months later, the crowd that appeared to see them off was visibly and vocally supportive. Some onlookers even passed the prisoners food and money. Richard S. Grayson, *Dublin's Great Wars: The First World War, the Easter Rising and the Irish Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 167.
[47] Limited as the independence it would give Ireland was, even the granting of Home Rule was a deeply contentious, protracted issue in British politics. From the founding of the Home Rule movement in the 1870s until the outbreak of the First World War, the British Houses of Parliament introduced and rejected a number of legislative proposals before finally enacting the third Home Rule bill. However, its implementation was suspended until the war was over; in the event, of course, the post-war relationship between Ireland and Britain evolved in a very different direction, and the third Home Rule bill was made redundant.A fourth Home Rule bill was enacted in 1920, formally partitioning Ireland during the Irish War of Independence.
[48] McGarry, "1916 and Irish Republicanism," 46.

future: Sinn Féin, a nationalist party campaigning for a more independent form of Home Rule that had not participated in the Rising, nonetheless found itself reaping the rewards of public support when British authorities, quick to assume its involvement, dubbed the event "the Sinn Féin rebellion" and thus formed a lasting association between the two. With the public rallying behind it, Sinn Féin won a sweeping victory in the general election of 1918, whereapon it refused to take its seats in Westminster and announced in January 1919 the establishment of the first Dáil Éireann (Irish parliament). This in turn triggered the War of Independence and set the stage for the outbreak of the Irish Civil War.

In the years and decades that followed, the Rising became a quasi-mythical moment in Irish cultural and national memory. The executed rebels were enshrined in "a well-established pantheon of national martyrs" and the event itself hailed as a moment in which "defeat finally resulted in triumph"; a "vindication" of the deep memory of the romantic nationalist tradition.[49] This mythologisation owed much to the Rising's compelling narrative of blood-sacrifice, carefully crafted by the rebels – many of whom appear to have been fully aware before the insurrection began that it was unlikely to succeed, but, as gifted writers, were also deeply familiar with the latent power of language and symbolism.[50] The enduring imagery of the event has given rise to a profusion of narratives, both articulated and inarticulated: these narratives have developed and circulated in Irish culture, forming a solid bedrock of cultural memory.[51]

[49] Beiner, "Between Trauma and Triumphalism," 378.

[50] The rhetoric of rebel leaders such as Pearse and the choice of Easter as the moment for an uprising were, to the predominantly Catholic population, strikingly symbolic. Most of the rebel leaders were fixtures in the Irish national cultural scene; as a result, the Rising is sometimes referred to as the "Poets' rebellion." Many scholars argue that it represented a kind of theatre, designed and carried out in the hope of capturing the nationalist imagination rather than achieving the immediate overthrow of British rule itself. Maciej Ruczaj, "Litury of Nation Formation: Patrick Pearse and the Theological Background of the Easter Rising of 1916," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 13, no. 3 (2013): 414. https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12056.

[51] Oona Frawley, ed., "Toward a Theory of Cultural Memory in the Irish Postcolonial Context," in Memory Ireland: History and Modernity, Volume I (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 24.

The mythologisation of the Rising has also owed much to its recurring and elevated commemorative profile; a manifestation of the Irish State's interests in capitalising on its symbolic value. For the relatively young State, faced with the task of constructing a new national identity, the Rising was "a creation story as good as any it was ever likely to get."[52]

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the history of Irish State commemoration of the Rising. The three commemorative years discussed saw the State's approach vacillate widely as socio-political circumstances evolved; they provided a template for *Ireland 2016*, which sought to update the narrative of remembrance they had established and was likewise adapted to contemporary conditions.

Chapter 2 discusses the ways *Ireland 2016* achieved this "update", which also responded to current public interests and concerns. It did so by including women's histories of the Rising more than ever before, contextualising the event within a global framework, and improving accessibility for interested members of the public via digitisation.

Finally, Chapter 3 outlines how *Ireland 2016*, while a serious attempt to improve the commemorative record and foster engagement with history, was also a typical instance of state commemoration; its approach to certain narratives and groups were designed to address the State's contemporary concerns.

The conclusion offers a summary of the thesis and briefly surveys public responses to the programme.

[52] Mark McCarthy, *Ireland's 1916 Rising: Explorations of History-Making, Commemoration and Heritage in Modern Times* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 4.

1.0 "Triumph and Trauma": Commemorating the Rising, 1966-2006

"Temporal self-definition" is an ongoing project for most nations, and Ireland is no exception: it is continually reconfiguring and reimagining its national identity with reference to its past, present, and future.[53] For these purposes, commemoration of the Easter Rising is a key tool in the State's arsenal; it offers symbolic capital of a kind that has reliably held currency with the Irish public.[54] Through memorialisation in art and song, the transformation of historical knowledge of the Rising into collective memory has already been achieved: it now occupies a position in the national psyche to which few other events in Irish history can claim. By formally commemorating the Rising itself, therefore, the State has been able to "broadcast on a wavelength to which the public (is) ready to tune in", absorbing and reusing existing popular narratives to fortify its own.[55]

The modern Irish political landscape has been dominated by parties for whom association with the Rising in this way has historically been an asset: on the whole, it has been in their interests to ensure that the event is embedded in national memory as both the genesis of modern Ireland and a definitive moment in their own mythologies.[56] Moreover, the Rising's aura of "heroic resistance" has made it the ideal starting point from which to foster a sense of shared history and belonging, constitutive elements of nationhood and thus of the State's existence itself.[57] The event has also proved conveniently malleable: as it "became more profoundly potent in Irish culture, it also became less real", mythologised to

[53] Charles Turner, "Nation and Commemoration," in *The SAGE Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, eds. Gerard Delanty and Krishnan Kumar (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 206.
[54] Róisín Higgins, "'The Irish Public was Proclaimed by Poster'," 51.
[55] Bevernage and Wouters, "State-Sponsored History After 1945," 12.
[56] McCarthy, *Ireland's 1916 Rising*, 4.
[57] Turner, "Nation and Comemmoration," 206. Turner notes that for nations in which a past struggle for political autonomy produced narratives of "heroic resistance", the fact of defeat is of little relevance. This is reflected in Ireland's "deep memory" of romantic republicanism, in which the memory of recurring defeat became a core part of its identity.

an extent that its memory could be adapted to meet evolving political needs.[58] As such, the State's construction of a commemorative tradition so heavily centred on the Easter Rising was perhaps a foregone conclusion; however, while external socio-political conditions always dictate the form and content of state commemoration, in this case they have also determined its political value.

In order to critically assess the *Ireland 2016* programme as both an example of state utilisation of history and an expression of Ireland's current temporal identity, it is first necessary to review the established commemorative tradition from which it emerged. Mapping this contextual background highlights the elements and themes which have recurred; correspondingly, it illuminates the changes in the State's commemorative approach over time in reaction to dynamic social and political developments. This is necessary because the centenary programme was a composite creation, both reflective of the contemporary socio-political circumstances under which it was fashioned and containing echoes of those before it; in other words, more "palimpsest than replica."[59] In its centenary offerings, the State retained those elements which had previously proven useful for its purposes and jettisoned – or simply reshaped – those which hadn't. It achieved this under the guise of rectifying past mistakes, creating a programme that strove to meet present demands while also anticipating those of the future .

This chapter briefly outlines the 2016 programme's major predecessors: the programmes marking the 50th, 75th, and 90th anniversaries of the Easter Rising. Each of these occasions was characterised by a distinctive socio-political climate, requiring the programmes designed for them to meet certain criteria; taken together, they formed a blueprint from which the centenary programme both drew inspiration and diverged.

[58] Antoine Guillemette, "Coming Together at Easter: Commemorating the 1916 Rising in Ireland, 1916-1966" (PhD Diss., Concordia University, Montréal, 2013), 4, https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/977023/1/Guillemette_PhD_S2013.pdf.
[59] Higgins, "'The Irish Public was Proclaimed by Poster'," 51.

1.1 1966: The "Golden Jubilee"

In 1966, the semicentennial of the Easter Rising was marked by a major state commemorative programme known as the "Golden Jubilee." It began in inauspicious circumstances: in March of that year, Nelson's Pillar – a statue to Admiral Horatio Nelson on O'Connell Street (formerly Sackville Street) – was bombed by unidentified radical Republicans.[60] The incident was roundly condemned amid concern that such violence would damage the new state's reputation by confirming stereotypes of the "wild Irish" and their destructive impulses.[61] As an act of "de-commemoration", it also signalled the continued existence of deep, pervasive divisions over Irish history, and suggested the level of hostility "official" memorialisation of that history could inspire; a regular source of anxiety for the State in later commmemorative years, including 2016.[62]

The preoccupation with the image of Ireland projected by and during the state commemoration was a particularly striking feature of the Jubilee programme. In this crucial early stage of the Irish State, the 50th anniversary of the Rising was a prime opportunity to consolidate its present status, assert a claim to historical legitimacy, and present an image of itself to the world as an independent nation forging its own identity and future. The last issue was especially pressing: during the State's application for membership of the European Economic Community in 1961, it found itself a "political *terra incognita*" in continental Europe, both to diplomats and officials as well as to average European citizens.[63] The semicentennial commemoration of the Rising presented an opportunity to "get the country on

[60] Now assumed to have been members of the Irish Republican Army.
[61] Róisín Higgins, "Projections and Reflection: Irishness and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Easter Rising," *Éire-Ireland* 42, no. 3 & 4 (2007): 12. https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2007.0034.
[62] Guy Beiner, "A Short History of Irish Memory in the Long Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Ireland: Volume 4, 1880 to the Present*, ed. Thomas Bartlett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 715.
[63] Jérôme aan de Wiel, "The Embarrassments of Irish Nationalist Commemorations for Western Europe, from Fontenoy in 1907 to the Easter Rising in 1966," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 27 (2016): 91. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/810213.

the map of Europe" as its own state and not merely as an "accessory" to Britain's entry into the Common Market.[64] Accordingly, the Jubilee programme was tailored to produce the most elaborate (and expensive) commemoration of the Rising at that point in the State's history; a testament to both its emerging self-identity and desire to express it to a wider audience.[65] The centrepiece commemorative events of the programme included a grand military parade in the city centre attended by veterans of the Rising and some 200,000 spectators, numerous formal wreath-laying ceremonies, and the dedication of new museums and sites of memory.[66] The programme also launched a "historiographical revolution" of the Rising, offering State funding for the publication of independent critical research and analysis.[67] Of particular interest to the programme were Irish youth, who were encouraged to take part in creative competitions reflecting on the meaning of the Rising for a new generation.[68] The Jubilee programme was also the first official commemoration of the Rising in which television media – delivered by the nascent broadcasting service, Telefís Éireann - played a major role: it broadcast much of the formal events on national television and produced a package of documentaries and dramatisations to be transmitted abroad, which (it was hoped) would put Ireland's new technological advancement on display.[69] It was this global projection of an appearance of modernity about which much of the State's energies in the Jubilee programme revolved; the message it sought to impart was that Ireland's current economic prosperity and socio-political progress could not have been possible without the Rising, which had been the

[64] Ann de Wiel, "The Embarrassments of Irish Nationalist Commemorations for Western Europe", 96.
[65] Higgins, "Projections and Reflection", 12. The scale – and budget - of the Jubilee programme has since been eclipsed by Ireland 2016.
[66] "The Golden Jubilee in 1966," Changed Utterly: Ireland and the Easter Rising, Trinitiy College Dublin Library, last modified October 28, 2015, https://www.tcd.ie/library/1916/the-golden-jubilee-in-1966/.
[67] Rory O'Dwyer, "1966 Celebration Was Not an 'Orgy of the Cult of the Rising'," *Irish Examiner*, March 21, 2016, https://www.irishexaminer.com/business/arid-20388524.html.
[68] Higgins et al., "1966 and All That," 33-34.
[69] O' Dwyer, "1966 Celebration". Teilifís Éireann was later rebranded as Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) and played an even more active role in the Ireland 2016 commemorative programme.

catalyst for Ireland's independence and was thus the progenitor of the Republic itself.[70] Its more implicit goal was to revive the patriotic "spirit" of 1916, especially in younger generations, and to use it as a springboard from which to launch its new domestic and global ambitions.[71]

In both later historiography and some contemporary analysis, the Jubilee programme was branded as "triumphalist" and "provocative."[72] One criticism levelled against it was that it failed to include any perspective other than the State's own: critics pointed out that the programme's organizing committee was not politically diverse, and therefore the commemoration plans themselves were not properly "representative of cross-party opinion."[73] The Republic also used the programme to consolidate its Catholic credentials: heavy emphasis was placed on the spirituality of many of the Rising's leaders as a virtue which the country should emulate, alienating other denominational or atheist groups.[74] For others, of more concern was the State's appropriation of the memory of the Rising and its self-styling as the rightful successor of the rebels' revolutionary project.[75] Contemporary republican and left-wing circles refuted the implication that the State had fulfilled many of the goals of the Rising: the signing of a Free Trade Agreement between Ireland and Britain in

[70] Róisín Higgins, "The 'Incorruptible Inheritors of 1916': The Battle for Ownership of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Easter Rising," *Saothar* 41, 1916 Eagrán Speisialta (2016): 35. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45283315.
[71] Róisín Higgins, Carole Holohan, and Catherine O'Donnell, "1966 and All That,": The 50th Anniversary Commemorations", *History Ireland* 14, no. 2 (2004): 34. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27725425.
[72] Ó Tuathaigh, "Commemoration, Public History and the Professional Historian," 141.
[73] Roisin Higgins et al., "1966 and All That," 32. Its members had been handpicked by Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Lemass, leading to accusations that those of other political backgrounds were being intentionally excluded so that public memory of the Rising would be solely associated with the ruling Fianna Fáil party. There are anecdotes which suggest that this "exclusionism" might have also occurred in a more literal sense: contemporary national press reported that representatives of certain political and religious groups were occasionally not invited to the formal commemorative events (an error blamed on "bureaucratic bungling") or were, apparently inadvertently, barred from entering. See Hugh Linehan, "Remembering the Rising: How They Did it in 1966," *The Irish Times*, March 26, 2016, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/remembering-the-rising-how-they-did-it-in-1966-1.2587249?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fculture%2Fheritage%2Fremembering-the-rising-how-they-did-it-in-1966-1.2587249.
[74] Heather Jones, "Commemorating the Rising: History, Democracy and Violence in Ireland," *Juncture* 22, no. 4 (2016): 259. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2050-5876.2016.00871.x. This emphasis on the Catholicism of the rebel leaders also ignored the fact that James Connelly, among the most enduringly popular and respected of the rebel leaders, was a socialist who had had a complicated relationship with religious belief.
[75] Higgins, "The 'Incorrigible Inheritors of 1916'", 33.

January 1966 was, they argued, clear evidence that Ireland's economic fortunes were still dependent on those of Britain, and so the commemoration merely "repudiate(d) the policy of 1916, while honouring it as a sentimental memory."[76] Beyond Ireland's economic conditions, they pointed to other aspects of the Irish State which they believed invalidated its claims to embody the Rising's vision: its tolerance of the continued partition of the island, the consistently high rate of emigration, and the State's failure to work towards the revival of the Irish language.[77] To add to this lukewarm response domestically, the reception of the Jubilee programme abroad did not prove as enthusiastic nor as straightforward as had been hoped: the still prevailing attitude in some parts of Europe and the United States was that the Rising had been a self-serving and dangerous attack on wartime Britain that could have critically weakened Allied forces.[78] Despite protests from Irish officials that it was not unreasonable for Ireland to commemorate the first step towards its independence, they were forced to find a balance between potraying the Rising as a positive development in Irish history and avoiding the appearance of anti-Britishness in the process, resulting in a display of diplomatic "cringe" that did not seem to match the confident image to which the new State aspired.[79]

The Jubilee Easter Rising commemoration programme came at a critical moment in the Irish State's early history, when projecting a hopeful, positive vision of Ireland's future was the driving force behind its approach. The State's self-portrayal as the Rising's natural successor was not particularly well-received. The content of the State's programme itself was also critiqued for being "simplistically triumphalist" in its treatment of the rebellion and its leaders and for engaging in an ingenuine "scramble for the bones of the patriot dead" - to the

[76] Ibid, 34.
[77] Higgins, "Projections and Reflection," 12.
[78] Ibid, 14.
[79] Ibid, 34.

memory of which many believed the State had no ideological claim.[80] However, in spite of this criticism, contemporary newspaper reporting suggests that the programme was not entirely a public failure: many in fact approved of its showcasing of the State's achievements since 1916 in a way that was designed to attract wider global notice.[81] The programme was overwhelmingly focused on Ireland's present and future, using commemoration of the Rising as a platform (or launchpad) for its own socio-political ambitions. The next major milestone in the Rising's commemorative schedule, the 75th anniversary programme in 1991, was equally a product of its time, in which the State would adopt a position that was by necessity very different.

1.2 1991: "Walking Ghosts"

The 75th anniversary of the Easter Rising, like the semicentennial, arrived at a delicate moment in Irish history; however, the particular circumstances now facing the Irish State were so different as to precipitate a "sea change" in its commemorative approach.[82] At the end of the 1960s, the ethno-nationalist conflict known as the Troubles had erupted on the island, with the majority of the violence flowing from and inflicted in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland, a creation of the partition of Ireland in 1921, had been "born in violence"; it was (and to a great degree remains) a site of deeply-entrenched socio-political tensions.[83] Over the course of the last three decades of the 20th century, these tensions propelled armed

[80] Diarmaid Ferriter, "1916 in 2016: Personal Reflections of an Irish Historian," *Irish Historical Studies* 42, no. 161 (2018): 164. https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2018.11.
[81] Brendan O'Donoghue, "Remembering the Rising: Irish Newspaper Coverage of the 1966 and 2016 Anniversaries of the 1916 Easter Rising," (MA diss., Griffith College, 2016), 7.
[82] Síghle Bhreathneach-Lynch, "Revisionism, the Rising, and Representation," *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua* 3, no. 1 (1999): 84. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20646283.
[83] David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2002), 4.

paramilitary factions into brutal fighting that triggered the intervention of the British Army and led to thousands of civilian and combatant deaths alike.

Although by the early 1990s Northern Ireland was entering into the "political choreography" that it was hoped would end in a peace deal, the Irish State's official Easter Rising commemorative programme was an extremely quiet affair.[84] In contrast to the vibrant, "triumphalist" atmosphere of the Jubilee programme 25 years before, it passed with hardly any fanfare: the main formal commemorative marking of the event was a reading of the Proclamation outside the GPO, attended by then-President of the Republic of Ireland Mary McAleese.[85] The reserved and rather mute nature of the State's commemorative approach was largely in response to criticism of the Jubilee itself; since 1966, some scholars had begun holding it responsible for contributing to the outbreak of paramilitary violence.[86] This revisionist turn in Irish historiography laid the blame for the conflict firmly at the foot of Irish nationalism in the Republic, which, it was claimed, had inspired a resurgence of popular support for the IRA.[87] For proponents of this argument, 1996 had been

> "a year in which ghosts were bound to walk, both North and South...The general calls for rededication to the ideals of 1916 were bound to suggest to some young men and women not only that these ideals were in practice being abandoned...but that the way to return to them was through the method of 1916: violence, applied by a determined minority."[88]

As a consequence, the State now lacked the confidence to "publicly own" the message of the Rising; the rebellion's meaning in contemporary Ireland had changed (or so the State believed), and thus it shied away from the celebratory tone of previous years lest it be seen as

[84] Mike Cronin, "Repackaging History and Mobilising Easter 1916," in *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies,* eds. Renée Fox, Mike Cronin, and Brian Ó Conchubhair (New York: Routledge, 2021) , 463.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Beiner, "Between Trauma and Triumphalism," 366.
[87] Robert Perry, "Revising Irish History: The Northern Ireland Conflict and the War of Ideas*," Journal of European Studies* 40, no. 4 (2010): 330. DOI: 10.1177/0047244110382170.
[88] Perry, "Revising Irish History," 343.

endorsement.[89] The State's attempts to distance itself from the memory of the rebellion in this way left it in a perculiar existential paradox: although it had long celebrated its origins in the Rising, which had been an unmandated revolutionary action, in its condemnation of the IRA it now denounced that same ideology as illegitimate.[90] This did not escape many members of the public, who pointed out that the ideological violence of 1916 could not be "conjured from existence"; moreover, attempting to do so could do more harm than good.[91] A similarly quiet state commemorative programme in 1976 had seen the organisation of a number of "alternate" commemorations by radical republicans, at which tens of thousands of Provisional IRA members congregated despite prohibitions by the State.[92] Writing in 1996, former Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald pointed out that by relinquishing control of the narrative, the Republic was leaving the task of commemorating the Rising to the IRA and its sympathisers.[93] Many also pointed out that this reluctance to commemorate the rebellion on a state level did not seem to reflect the wishes of the majority of the Irish public: a national newspaper survey reported that most respondents still regarded the Rising with pride and admired the idealism of the rebels who had orchestrated it.[94] Furthermore, some critics rejected the implication that there was no moral or ideological difference between the rebels and modern paramilitary republicans. The former, they argued, did everything possible to avoid civilian casualties, while the same could not be said of the latter – something the public might have understood. In their view, the assumption otherwise on the part of the State was "insulting" to the intelligence of the general population.[95]

[89] Cronin, "Repackaging History," 463.
[90] Perry, "Revising Irish History,"341.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid, 342.
[94] Ibid, 340..
[95] Ibid.

The 75th anniversary of the Rising in 1991 was a striking example of the influence of contemporary socio-political conditions on official commemorative approaches to history. The Good Friday Agreement, which formally marked the end of the Troubles, would not be concluded until 1998. The preceding decades had been a time of considerable trauma for the whole island, especially the North; the State was invested in seeking a resolution to the conflict that would promise a more peaceful future for all who lived there. At the same time, it was concerned about the damage it could inflict on its own reputation; in stark contrast to 1966, association with the Rising was now viewed – and treated as - a liability rather than an asset. While the memory of violence was so fresh, formal commemoration of an episode of republican revolutionary violence was no longer an occasion for "triumphalism." The State declined to seek a middle-ground that might have allowed it to mark the event in accordance with public wishes and safeguard other interests, instead opting to retreat from the memory of the rebellion almost entirely.

1.3 2006: "To Speak of 1916 Again"

The occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Easter Rising found the Republic in a climate that was much more stable, positive, and conducive to the exuberant commemorations to which it had previously been accustomed. It was experiencing an unprecedented economic boom, and the peace process in the North had largely held.[96] In an Irish Times article entitled 'Why it is Becoming Acceptable to Speak of 1916 Again', the banishment of the spectre of "death lurking in the hedgrows and back-alleys of the North" was attributed to the success of the Good Friday Agreement, as a consequence of which, the author wrote, it was once more acceptable to commemorate 1916 without the implication of

[96] Cronin, "Repackaging 1916," 464.

glorifying past violence.[97] Accordingly, the 2006 commemorative programme included the first military parade in Dublin in commemoration of the Rising since 1971.[98] It also witnessed the first embracing of the "emergent trend of remembrance by means of social media", when the National Library of Ireland launched a dedicated 1916 website.[99] The return to the "triumphal" tone of pre-Troubles commemorations and a renewed enthusiam for exploring new methods signalled that the history of the Rising had once more resumed the symbolic potency with which the State wished to associate itself; it was also a naked attempt by the ruling party, Fianna Fáil, to secure possession of it for itself. Official commemoration acts as a "window into the power structures and preoccupations of the society in which it takes place": at this point in Ireland, such conditions were on full display.[100] The origins of Fianna Fáil lay in a post-civil war split with Sinn Féin; its founder, Éamon de Valera, was a former leader of Sinn Féin and a leading figure in the Rising itself. Already long dominant on the Irish political scene, Fianna Fáil both prided itself on its republican heritage and abandoned it when the need arose; it had also been in power for the 50th and 75th anniversaries, which saw it swing between the two extreme commemorative approaches outlined earlier.[101] However, its position of power in Irish politics was becoming increasingly threatened by Sinn Féin, the history of which had also been bound to that of the Rising since 1916. Since the IRA ceasefire, Sinn Féin's public credentials had improved; moreoever, its claim to represent the "true spirit" of the Rising in contemporary Irish politics appeared to be beginning to resonate with some sectors of the voting population.[102] By returning to a more triumphant, celebratory commemorative style, Fianna Fáil hoped to reaffirm its own long-held association with the

[97] Ibid, 343-343.
[98] Ibid, 343.
[99] McCarthy, *Ireland's 1916 Rising*, 22.
[100] Higgins, "The 'Incorrigible Inheritors of 1916'", 40.
[101] Timothy J. White and Denis Marnane, "The Politics of Remembrance: Commemorating 1916," *Irish Political Studies* 31, no. 1 (2016): 32. https://doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2015.1126930.
[102] Perry, "Revising Irish History," 344. Sinn Féin had historic links with the original IRA and was long regarded as the political wing of the Provisional IRA, the armed republican group that participated in the Troubles.

legacy of the Rising and shore up its political and ideological position in the eyes of a public that required convincing. In the interests of promoting an atmosphere of reconciliation and "renewal", the State also launched a separate formal commemoration of the Somme for the first time – an appeal to non-nationalist communities that doubled as a long-awaited inclusion of other, equally valid historical narratives.[103] This "updating" and expansion of the State's approach to the Rising, along with the return of a more positive commemorative atmosphere, won public approval; engagement with the programme was high and it was welcomed with general goodwill.[104]

2006 also saw preparations for the centenary in 2016 beginning to get underway; an early indication of the gravity with which all interested parties were approaching what they knew would be an important future moment in the contest for the Rising's legacy.[105] The experience of these previous commemorations had demonstrated to the State the importance of striking the right tone and matching the public's expectations; it was also given a taste of the potential reward that could come with meeting those conditions. *Ireland 2016* would be designed as a response to these lessons and as a bulwark against new challenges facing the State, which would demand a rethinking and "reimaging" of Ireland's identity with, as ever, vivid reference to the past.

[103] Ibid, 345.
[104] McCarthy, *Ireland's 1916 Rising*, 1.
[105] Cronin, "Repackaging History," 464.

2.0 Remembering and Reflecting the Rising in 2016

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter showed the Easter Rising's domineering hold on the State's commemorative imagination and energies. The event is equally "proximate in the Irish (collective) imaginary"[106]: repeated, ritualised remembrance has helped secure its vivid relationship with the public, for whom 1916 has become a fulcrum around which "on-going, multilayered negotiation with the present through the past" turns.[107] It is this factor which, despite the State's chequered relationship with the event itself, has made it an enduring feature of the its own legitimising practices: the Rising consistently offers an abundance of metaphorical representations with which the State can redefine and safeguard its public standing.[108]

The process has not always been straightforward or without risk. Commemorative rituals attached to the Rising have become "historical forces in their own right", with their own historiographical narratives and legacies further adding to and obscuring those of 1916.[109] These forces have favoured and frustrated the State in turn; as a result, and despite the commitment to marking the event (even discretely) which it has by now firmly established, the State viewed the approaching centenary of the Rising with some trepidation:

[106] Cian O'Driscoll, "Knowing and Forgetting the Easter 1916 Rising," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 63, no. 3 (2017): 428. DOI:10.1111/ajph.12371.
[107] Higgins, "'The Irish Republic was Proclaimed by Poster'," 51.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Czar Sepe, "Ireland Re-imagined: Grasping Historical Perceptions for the Decade of Centenaries," *Elements* 17, no. 1 (2021): 12. https://doi.org/10.6017/eurj.v17i1.14895.

it understood very well that the "daunting cultural matrix" the event represented could be a "'memory war' waiting to happen."[110]

As complex a task as marking the centenary would thus have been regardless, circumstances in Ireland changed once more to compound it; these developments fundamentally shaped the way the Rising was "repackaged" for the Ireland of 2016 by the State. The State's desire to retain overall control of the narrative, however, remained; the challenge it faced was to find a compromise that would give others agency in the process without displacing or undermining its own. This chapter will discuss how it pursued the former, while its decisions concerning the latter will be explored in the next and final chapter.

2.2. Socio-Political Conditions in the Lead-Up to the Centenary

One of the developments beginning to emerge at this time was critical discourse on the position of women in contemporary Irish society; this would have profound influence on the State's centenary plans. During the Jubilee commemoration in 1966, scarcely any mention had been made of the contribution of female rebels; an exclusion that, historians have noted, mirrored the struggle of women to gain recognition and equality in "most spheres of Irish life."[111] Since then, decades of corrective research by these historians and public initiatives had begun to fill the gaps, but in the years approaching 2016, other gendered grievances were beginning to come to the fore: gender quotes in employment, inquality in education, and revelations about historical abuse suffered by generations of women in Catholic "mother and

[110] Anthony McIntyre, "Marginalizing Memory: Political Commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising," *Studies in Arts and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2016): 5. DOI 10.18193/sah.v2i1.61.
[111] Mary McAuliffe, Liz Gillis, Éadaoin Ní Chléirigh, and Marja Almqvist, "Forgetting and Remembering – Uncovering Women's Histories at Richmond Barracks: A Public History Project," *Studies in Arts and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2016): 27. DOI:10.18193/sah.v2i1.47.

baby homes."[112] To many scholars, these developments heralded an "opening up of new conceptions of space and identity in early twentieth-century society" that the State, in its upcoming commemoration of the Rising, would be unwise to ignore.[113] Moreover, grassroots public activisim calling for the repeal of the Eighth Amendment of the Irish Constitution (a clause severely restricting access to abortion) was beginning to establish ground: the proximity of the Rising's centenary allowed "clear and explicit interconnections to be made" between the equality espoused by the rebels in the Proclamation and "evidence that the independent Ireland had fallen short of this ideal."[114]

Another development the State would have to take into account was renewed public interest in commemorating the Rising following the success of the 75th anniversary in 2006. A resurgence of revisionist interpretations of the rebellion, prompted by the centenary of the third Home Rule Bill in 2013, initially hinted that this might not remain the case: several prominent figures (including former Taoiseach John Bruton and then-Taoiseach Enda Kenny) revived the argument that Ireland would eventually have won independence through Home Rule (the focus of the Irish nationalist movement prior to the rebellion) and that therefore the Rising had been an unsanctioned and unjustifiable act of revolutionary violence.[115] However, if this appeared to suggest that the Rising was once more losing some of its ideological and symbolic value to the State, this did not accord with prevailing public opinion – a clash of

[112] Hannah Smyth, "Digital Archives and the Irish Commemorative Impulse: Gender, Identity, and Digital Cultural Heritage," (PhD diss., University College London, 2021), 40. The so-called "Magdalene Laundries" were institutions for "fallen women" – generally speaking, unmarried women who became pregnant out of wedlock. Inmates of these homes were forced to work for their upkeep and were subjected to horrendous physical and emotional treatment. Many died; the discovery of mass graves on the sites of former Laundries prompted public outrage and has led to legal actions for survivor compensation being lodged against the State.
[113] Dominic Bryan, Mike Cronin, Tina O'Toole and Catriona Pennell, "Ireland's Decade of Commemoration: A Roundtable," *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua* 17, no. 3 (2013): 65. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24625028.
[114] Laura McAtackney, "Public Memory, Conflict and Women: Commemoration in Contemporary Ireland," in *Making Histories*, eds. Paul Ashton, Tanya Evans, and Paula Hamilton (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Gmbh, 2020), 104.
[115] Ann Averill, "Rising: Reverence, Relevence, Revelry – Commemorations of the 1916 Rising in Dublin, Easter 1916," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 19, no. 2 (2019): 214. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/sena.12301.

perspective that had been at the heart of the 1991 commemorative programme and had resulted in widespread disapproval. A survey carried out in 2010 found that 81% of respondents considered the Rising important to celebrate and, indeed, several voluntary organisations were beginning to hint that they would conduct their own "unofficial" commemorations, regardless of the State's plans.[116] In committing to marking the cententary, therefore, the State was basing its approach on the lessons of previous experience: any political reward it could reap from commemorating this important moment in Irish collective memory would require it to position itself at the helm.

Finally, the State's centenary programme of the Rising would also have to account for increasing interest in public history in Ireland. Although the concept is still a new one on the island and its full potential and meaning are still being explored, recent developments – such as a proliferation of public symposia and the creation of specialised public history university programmes – have helped lodge it in the "public imaginary."[117] Accordingly, there has been a tangible increase increase in forms of performed or participatory history in the country: an "expanding constituency of amateur history enthusiasts, who are beginning to change the way history is produced."[118] The arrival of the digital age and all the new modes of history production and engagement that have come with it have further driven this growing public interest, contributing to a "democraticization of history that truly constitutes a paradigm shift for the profession" – and, in turn, for the State's own interventions in public consumption of the past.[119]

[116] Ibid, 215.
[117] Thomas Cauvin and Ciaran O'Neill, "Negotiating Public History in the Republic of Ireland: Collaborative, Applied and Usable Practices for the Profession," *Historical Research* 90, no. 250 (2017): 815. DOI: 10.1111/1468-2281.12192.
[118] Ibid, 821.
[119] Ibid.

2.3 Planning and Launch of "Ireland 2016"

Another early indication that the State was cognizant of where its previous commemorations of the Rising had failed (and where it therefore needed to adapt its approach) was its incorporation of more diversity in the planning stage itself, an issue for which the Jubilee's organisation had been criticised. Preliminary preparations for the centenary saw the establishment of planning and advisory bodies at various levels, with some even coordinating between Dublin, Belfast and London; a significant departure from previous years, and one that seemed to promise "more pluralistic remembrance."[120] Prior to the eventual launch of the Decade of Centenaries programme, the Irish Government established a body of historians it named the Expert Advisory Group (EAG), which prepared guidelines for the centenary commemorations to follow.[121] The EAG was transparent about its professional and ideological positions, publishing an "initial statement" that outlined its vision for the coming decade. Although it looked to and wrote of the state's future commemorative plans, the statement also made tacit reference to those of the past: it alluded at several points to aspects of the previous Rising commemorations, again suggesting that the established commemorative tradition would continue to influence this latest installment. The statement announced that the centenary commemoration of the Rising should be

> informed by a full acknowledgement of the complexity of historical events and their legacy, of the mutiple readings of history, and of the multiple identities and traditions which are part of the Irish historical experience. There must be full acknowledgement of the multiple identities and traditions which are part of the overall story and of the different ideals and sacrifices associated with them. Official events must within reason be inclusive and non-partisan, but the State should not be expected to be neutral about its own existence. The aim should be to broaden

[120] Grayson and McGarry, "Introduction," 4. This was undoubtedly also a practical concession: as modern states cannot function without delegation, neither can the practice of state-sponsored history. Bevernage and Wouters, "State-Sponsored History After 1945," 2.

[121] As its name suggests, the EAG was intended to provide guidance to the government over the course of the programme; it had no executive or policy-making functions. Ferriter, "1916 in 2016," 162.

> sympathies, without having to abandon loyalties, and in particular recognising the values of ideals and sacrifices, including their cost.[122]

In a later paragraph, it also argued that it was reasonable for the centenary to be used as an occasion for the State to recall its own achievements, but that it should aim to do so "while avoiding any sense of triumphalism."[123] Significantly, in this statement the EAG also asserted its hopes that the commemorative decade would add to popular understanding of the Rising and the other comemmorated events; it should do this, it advised, by highlighting new research on the social, cultural, and labour history of marginalised groups such as women, contextualising Irish history within a more global historical framework, and including events throughout Ireland, Britain, and "at the principal centres of the Irish abroad."[124]

When the *Ireland 2016* programme was formally launched on 31 March 2015, it appeared that the State had elected to take the majority of the EAG's advice on board.[125] Speaking at the programme's launch, Taoiseach Enda Kenny said he hoped the programme would be an opportunity to "celebrate and have pride in Ireland's independence, and to honour those who gave their lives so that the dream of self-determination could become a reality"; patriotic, upbeat language suggesting that the State had decided its current political needs would be better served if the tone of the centenary more closely resembled that of 1966 and 2006, than of 1991.[126] The programme's 64-page booklet announced the programme's

[122] Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations, "Initial Statement by the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations," Decade of Centenaries, accessed June 10, 2022, https://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/wp-content/uploads/publications/Initial/Initial/index.html.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] As the centrepiece of the Decade of Centenaries programme, the State also awarded it an enormous budget of €49 million, far outstripping its expenditure on the Jubilee commemoration. Christopher Cusack, Marguérite Corporaal, and Ruud van den Beuken, "Never Forget? Memory's Role in Irish Culture," The Irish Times, February 10, 2017, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/never-forget-memory-s-role-in-irish-culture-1.2969701.
[126] "Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme Launch," Ireland 2016, accessed June 10, 2022, https://www.ireland2016.gov.ie/news/ireland-2016-centenary-programme-launch.

broad motto – "Remember, Reflect, Reimagine" – and outlined the expansive, "inclusive" narrative the State envisioned:

> Ireland 2016, as a year of reflection and engagement for everyone on this island, goes far beyond the formal marking of a key historical moment. It is a once-in-a-century invitation to people of all ages, at home and overseas, to shape and then to actively engage in a diverse range of historical, cultural and artistic activities, all designed to facilitate reflection, commemoration, celebration, debate and analysis, and an active re-imagining of our future.[127]

The remainder of this chapter will examine the extent to which the 2016 programme adhered to this plan, taking into account the socio-political factors and experience of previous commemorations that informed its approach. It will be argued that in certain respects, the State appeared to recognise and embrace the political value of a "bottom-up" approach, taking its cues from the public and for the most part catering to their demands. The existing format was amended to allow for new narratives that could chime with prevailing social concerns and enabled a more "democraticised" public history. In particular, the programme genuinely addressed issues of women's marginalisation in Irish history and strove to broaden and contextualise popular understanding of the Rising, achieving some success in these areas; it also took critical advantage of the potential of digital commemoration of the past. Although - as in previous state commemorations of the Rising – the 2016 programme failed to achieve universal satisfaction, these amendments to previous formats were met with overall public approval. [128]

[127] Government of Ireland, *Clár Comórtha Céad Bliain/Centenary Programme* (Dublin, 2015). https://www.ireland2016.gov.ie/sites/default/files/final_version_1_5_15.pdf.
[128] Grayson and McGarry, "Introduction," 4.

2.4 "Remembering" the Forgotten: Pluralising the Official Record

Scholars of Irish history have long pointed out that the Easter Rising was part of an "interconnected context that extended within and beyond Ireland", which in 1916 included war, widespread economic and political upheaval, and narratives of gendered struggle and human displacement; however, these themes had largely been "sequestered" in formal commemorations of the event.[129] One of the historical voices crowded out by the monolithic, patriarchal official memory of the event was that of Irish women. Their role in the historical period encompassed by the Decade of Centenaries had been considerable: from the First World War all the way through the revolutionary years, women were involved in the "literary revival, anti-recruitment and anti-conscription campaigns, social reform, socialist movements, nationalist politics and militant separatism, suffragism, the War of Independence and the Civil War."[130] The armed female republican group, Cumann na mBan ('The Women's Council') had directly participated in the Easter Rising, smuggling dispatches and arms around the various rebel strongholds in Dublin city and occasionally engaging in active combat.[131] The Free State established in the wake of the War of Independence a few years later, however, held conservative views of gender roles and social norms; in line with their status in this new Ireland, women's experiences of the Rising were "all but ignored" in

[129] Michelle LeBaron, "Women Awake: Gender and Commemoration in Contemporary Ireland," in *Gender, Transitional Justice and Memorial Arts: Global Perspectives on Commemoration and Mobilisation*, eds. Jelke Boesten and Helen Scanlon (New York: Routledge, 2021), 176.
[130] Hannah Smyth and Diego Ramirez Echavarria, "Twitter and Feminist Commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising," *Journal of Digital History* 1, no. 1 (2021). http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/jdh-2021-1006.
[131] However, this idea did not necessarily sit well with many of their male counterparts. In response to queries as to what their role should be, Patrick Pearse is said to have expressed his reservations about women "drilling and marching in the ordinary way", but considered there to be "no reason why they should not learn how to shoot." McAuliffe et al., "Forgetting and Remembering," 21.

commemoration and the official narrative of the event for the greater part of the 20th century.[132]

One of the promises of *Ireland 2016* was to fill this void in the Rising's commemorative history; a programme that purported to be "pluralist" and "reconciliatory" could not be considered such if "half the population" were to contine to be treated as a "minority presence."[133] As novelist Evelyn Conlon remarked, there was reason to believe that "this time around, different things (would) be talked about" when it came to the women of 1916[134]: aside from the existence of growing discourse on women's issues in Irish society, the State could also not ignore the recent "global, media-driven" surge in demand to have female experiences heard and acknowledged on a government level.[135] Women also occupied key positions in the hierarchies of the bodies organising the commemorative activities.[136] One of the ways in which *Ireland 2016* therefore fundamentally diverged from its predecessors was its "de-centring of the masculinist narrative" that had characterised official remembrance of the Rising till that point.[137]

The 2016 programme sought to promote increased public recognition of this forgotten history by highlighting innovative scholarship on women's activities during the rebellion and revolutionary period.[138] Much of this research pre-existed the years leading up to the centenary programme; however, the programme acted as a platform to bring it to wider public

[132] Smyth and Echavarria, "Twitter and Feminist Commemoration." Some historians attribute this conservatism to the experience of the Civil War, which "helped to turn Ireland in on itself" and established a "new nationalism" that characterised the nascent State. Smyth, "Digital Archives," 27.
[133] Linda Connolly, "The "Decade of Centenaries": Commemoration, Controversies, Gender and "Trending," *Estudios Irlandeses* 17, (2022): 174. https://doi.org/10.24162/EI2022-10991.
[134] Evelyn Conlon, "1916, you're asking me?," *The Stinging Fly* 2, no. 33 (2016): 192–200. https://stingingfly.org/2016/02/01/1916-youre-asking/.
[135] Oona Frawley, ed., "Introduction: Naming Names; Countering Oblivious Remembering in the Decade of Commemorations," in *Women and the Decade of Commemorations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021), 17.
[136] McAtackney, "Public Memory," 103.
[137] Smyth, "Digital Archives," 42.
[138] Ibid, 175.

notice, where it found new appraisal and new significance.[139] Much of this research was translated into material intended for permanent exhibition: the Women's Histories project in Richmond Barracks – in which hundreds of imprisoned rebels after the Rising, including 77 women, had been processed – refocused the public perspective of the building "from a normative history of the site to one that explicitly engaged with the previously marginalised roles of women."[140]

The programme also sought further diversification within these new narratives, which themselves were already pluralising the established commemorative record; previously, only "heroic" female voices had been considered worthy of remembrance, "part of the mythic terrain" of the Rising's masculinised commemorative tradition that valorised certain roles and characteristics.[141] Accordingly, one of the few female figures to have received any attention in previous years was Countess Markievicz, a member of the Irish Citizen Army and Cumann na mBan who fought in the Stephen's Green rebel garrison during the Rising and later became Minister for Labour in the first Dáil (Irish Parliament). In 2016, nationwide exhibitions such as *Mná 1916 – Women 1916* sought to cast this memorial net wider, using public outreach to collect and display the stories of hundreds of "ordinary" women whose experiences had never been recognised.[142] Other events, such as the *Amongst Young Women* forum, encouraged school students to present their ideas and research on the role of women in Ireland in 1916 and over the subsequent 100 years.[143] This emphasis on public engagement across all age groups and interests embodied the State's aim of harnessing the increasingly popular notion of "public history" to achieve its more inclusive and interactive memorialising

[139] Connolly, "The 'Decade of Centenaries'," 175.
[140] McAtackney, "Public Memory," 104.
[141] LeBaron, "Women Awake," 174.
[142] "Women's Exhibition Tour Extended into 2017," Ireland 2016, accessed May 16, 2022, https://ireland2016.gov.ie/news/womens-exhibition-tour-extended-2017.
[143] "Amongst Young Women: TY Students Discuss 100 Years of Irish Women Role Models," Ireland 2016, accessed May 22, 2022, https://www.ireland2016.gov.ie/news/amongst-young-women-ty-students-discuss-100-years-irish-women-role-models.

vision; it tapped into personal family histories and encouraged people to take part in reconstructing the national narrative with State support. Recalling the success of similar projects during the Jubilee year, *Ireland 2016* also sought to harness the power of visual media to disseminate women's history of the Rising to a wider audience.[144] The result – RTÉ's flagship commemorative series, *Rebellion* – placed fictional female characters at the heart of a dramatised retelling of the days leading up to and of the Rising. To some viewers, this gave "fresh insight" into the familiar story of 1916 and, importantly, placed women "centre stage when they have usually been ushered into the wings."[145]

However, it was criticised by others as "a poor man's attempt at female empowerment."[146] Indeed, while *Ireland 2016*'s efforts to incorporate women into the Rising's official commemorative record were recognised and applauded by many (public reactions online were "overwhelmingly positive"[147]), others were more critical. Some of these critiques were made by feminist scholars and historians; while they conceded that female narratives were now being included in the broader commemorative story, they pointed out that not enough contemporary female experts were being asked to contribute their analysis in on public panels and other platforms, suggesting a form of remembrance that "lacks awareness of or dismisses the systemic biases present in its institutional and/or official approaches to the task."[148] Other criticisms were voiced by members of the public, and critiqued the State's attempts to include women's perspectives along other lines: to some, the

[144] For the Jubilee programme, a reportage-style documentary on the Rising entitled *Insurrection* was shot and distributed globally, proving a general hit among domestic and international audiences alike. See Brian Lynch, "TV Eye: Through the Eyes of 1916," *History Ireland* 14, no. 2 (2006). https://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/tv-eye-through-the-eyes-of-1916/.
[145] Kirsty Blake Nox, "Rebellion Review: Women central to drama that makes history feel new," *Independent*, January 5, 2016, https://www.independent.ie/entertainment/television/tv-reviews/rebellion-review-women-central-to-drama-that-makes-history-feel-new-34335928.html.
[146] As critics pointed out, these central female characters were often motivated to take part in the Rising largely by their interpersonal relationships with men. Niamh Horan, "Brave rebels turned into doe-eyed girls fighting over men," *Independent*, January 10, 2016, https://www.independent.ie/opinion/brave-rebels-turned-into-doe-eyed-girls-fighting-over-men-34349609.html.
[147] Smyth, "Digital Archive," 291.
[148] Frawley, "Introduction," 3.

programme had "reimagined" the Rising through a contrived feminist lens merely because that was the "current vogue"[149]; to others, women's history had been subordinated to the traditionally patriarchal memory of the Rising, leaving the overall commemoration of the event still "very male dominated."[150]

Regardless, this "opening up" of the State's usual approach to commemorating the Rising appeared to serve both didactic and more political purposes: official remembrance was now more representative of women than before, casting light on stories and memories that increased public engagement with history and understanding of the rebellion. In so doing, it deepened previously shallow understanding of women's history in early 20th century Ireland; many members of the public realised the level of "ignorance and neglect" to which this subject had long been consigned, and felt driven to "reclaim" it as an important element of their own identities and heritage.[151] At the same time, the State had made use of the "safe space" of commemoration "not only to authorise and justify" its aims and actions, but to "mobilise" support in "public affirmations of solidarity" at a time when it was coming under pressure to let women – both past and present – speak.[152]

[149] (@PogoSkyBlues42). "Heritage? Cultural is constantly being reconstituted to reflect societal norms & wider contemporary zeitgeist." Twitter, February 20, 2020. https://twitter.com/PogoSkyBlues42/status/1230253978119700481?t=nBKdTQ0DPyKufHY9Eqt17g&s=03.

[150] Alannah (@Amorrow_History). "@theplathdiaries particularly the media's reluctance to discuss womens role in the 1916 rising." Twitter, January 11, 2016. https://twitter.com/AMorrow_History/status/686301544204087298?t=cCwZI8TFQKqLQlu6MzEv6w&s=03. As Smyth argues, "the boundaries between historical, factual and commemorative statements are also fuzzy, and there is a rich crossover between such statements and a more critical remembrance discourse." Smyth, "Digital Archives," 256.

[151] McAuliffe et al., "Forgetting and Remembering," 28.

[152] Smyth, "Digital Archives," 41.

2.5 "Reflecting" the Rising: New Contexts and Digitisation

For the greater part of the State's history, the Easter Rising had been the foundational historical event to which it traced its origins; a viewpoint expressed and consolidated repeatedly in official commemorative practice. As the domestic Irish political landscape began to take shape in the early years of independence, the country shifted from a post-imperial "transitional moment" to one dominated by a nationalist climate that privileged the memory of fallen Irish nationalists above all others.[153] Thus it was, as David Fitzpatrick writes, that republicans and those who were believed to have sacrificed themselves for Ireland alone "cornered the historical and commemorative market" in the Republic, despite the fact that proportionally, members of the contemporary population were more likely to have served in the Great War than in the War of Independence.[154] As a result of this domineering focus on an Irish nationalist perspective of history and the neglect of other historical contexts, for a period of time the Rising was recalled in formal commemoration as an event somehow insulated from the wider historical narrative of which it had in reality been part. This dehistoricised representation was addressed by the EAG in its initial statement on the Decade of Centenaries; it advised that, in order to be comprehensive, the state commemoration programme should "not only address the key events in Ireland but also enhance understanding of the wider United Kingdom, European and world context in which they took place."[155] In its official 2016 Centenary Programme booklet, the State reiterated this position, acknowledging for the first time that "there was hardly a family in Ireland in 1916 that was not affected by

[153] Shannon Monaghan, "Whose Country, Whose Soldiers, Whose Responsibility? First World War Ex-Servicemen and the Development of the Irish Free State, 1923-1939", *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 1 (2014): 84. doi:10.1017/S0960777313000520.
[154] David Fitzpatrick, review of *Heroes or Traitors? Experiences of Southern Irish Soldiers Returning from the Great War 1919-1939*, by Paul Taylor, *The Irish Times*, October 17, 2015, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/heroes-or-traitors-experiences-of-southern-irish-soldiers-returning-from-the-great-war-1.2394449.
[155] EAG, "Initial Statement."

the First World War", and that "influences from abroad" had also informed the revolutionary agenda of the rebels, which in turn had had wider global repercussions than sometimes imagined.[156]

The *Ireland 2016* programme sought to achieve a more contextualised understanding of the events of 1916 in a number of its commemorative events and projects. In collaboration with the National Library of Ireland and the British Embassy, an exhibition entitled *World War Ireland* reflected on the events both in Dublin during the Rising and at the Somme; it highlighted how events in Europe at the time impacted the Rising itself, and the implications both the Rising and the War had for Ireland's future.[157] A conference organised by University College Dublin under the auspices of the programme sought to expand this contextualisation even further: *Globalising the Rising: 1916 in Context* gathered together scholars from multiple disciplinary and national backgrounds to publicly reflect on the Rising's historical position as more than an "isolated" event in Irish politics, but rather one that was "shaped by transnational forces, including the end of empire, the growth of nationalism, and the First World War" and "watched closely by radicals and aspirant revolutionaries as far away as India and Russia."[158] New publications expounded on this theme by considering the Rising "on an international canvas" as one of several anti-imperial revolts in 1916, drawing attention to how "transnational perspectives" could enhance the historiography of the Irish revolutionary period.[159]

One of the aspects of the 2016 programme that contributed to enabling this greater contextualisation of the Rising for popular audiences was increased access to archival material. This was achieved, in large part, by digitisation; a manifestation of the State's

[156] Government of Ireland, *Centenary Programme*.
[157] "WW1 Ireland", National Library of Ireland, accessed June 8, 2022, https://www.nli.ie/WWI/.
[158] Conor Mulvagh, "Globalising the Rising: 1916 in Context," History Hub, accessed June 8, 2022, http://historyhub.ie/globalising-the-rising-1916-in-context.
[159] Enrico dal Lago, Róisín Healy and Gearóid Barry, eds., "Globalising the Easter Rising: 1916 and the Challenge to Empires," in 1916 in Global Context: An Anti-Imperial Moment (New York: Routledge, 2017) , 4.

framing of the commemoration as a "national identity project predicated on a modernising agenda, just as the fiftieth anniversary of 1966." [160] The 2006 Rising commemorations had seen "digital history" beginning to emerge on the State's commemorative horizons; during the Decade of Centenaries as a whole and in *Ireland 2016* particularly, digital archives and other digital history projects became "part of the public experience of commemoration in a way they never were before." Digital repositories opened for public access and consumption included the archive of court martial papers: transcripts from the trials held in secret after the Rising at which the leaders were sentenced to death. Under the auspices of *Ireland 2016*, these documents were acquired from the UK Government and published online by the National Library of Ireland. Speaking at the launch of the initiative, President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins remarked that the papers

> "provide moving and valuable insights into the proceedings; imparting a human dimension that can so often be missed from conventional factual historical accounts...Thomas MacDonagh's statement that he fully co-operated with British soldiers after the surrender, or the image of Seán McDiarmada unable to walk after surrender because of polio contracted five years before, indicate a dignified sadness that echoes across the years...they, and the many other images captured in these records, remind us that the leaders of 1916 were human and wounded agents of our freedom, not abstract or mythical characters; and they enable us to have a profound appreciation of the real and human sacrifices that they and their families made in order that future generations might inhabit a free and independent state."[161]

One commentator even argued that the "democratisation" of the past in this way was one of the critical factors leading to the overall public success of the centenary programme.[162] The 2016 programme's focus on the digital demonstrated the State's awareness of and accounting for the particular temporal moment in which it found itself, which had always been a crucial part of its tradition of commemorating the Rising.

[160] Smyth, "Digital Archives," 68.
[161] "Court Martial Records of 1916 Leaders," Universities Ireland, accessed June 9, 2022, https://universitiesireland.ie/easter-rising-courts-martial-records-of-1916-leaders-online/.
[162] Smyth, "Digital Archives," 67. Smyth points out that, of course, digitisation does not easily or even necessarily corralate with democratisation; however, in her view the 2016 programme was generally successful in this regard.

Mike Cronin writes that

> the state, and in particular the body formed to oversee the major period of commemoration, Ireland 2016, understood that historical commemorative practices were ripe for a digital approach.This view has been informed by the government's promotion of a knowledge economy in recent years, but also by the high concentration of major global technology brands within the Irish state. It was also a recognition that the millennial generation consisted of digital natives. If those millennials were to be engaged with the past, and with the men, women, and ideals of 1916, then a digital delivery of that history had to sit alongside more traditional approaches taken by museums, galleries, schools, and media outlets which would also tell the story of Ireland a century ago.[163]

The National Library also began digitising many of its own documents and archival material relating to the Rising, becoming "one of the most actively digital of the national cultural institutions" involved in the 2016 commemoration and in the Decade of Centenaries as a whole.[164]

The digital projects that emerged under *Ireland 2016* were designed to be "digitally engaging", and granted public access to material that had previously been confined to fixed physical locations.[165] Statistics reported by the websites upon which they were hosted seemed to suggest that they did succeed in increasing public engagement with this material: the sites noted that "demand for online access" to their platforms had "grown significantly."[166] Digitisation therefore appeared to fulfill many of the State's purported goals: it responded to and delivered upon an "apparent demand for public history", sought to "democratise access" to the history of the Rising, and pursued a commemorative mandate that emphasised both inclusivity and modernity.[167]

[163] Mike Cronin, "Irish History Online and in Real Time: Century Ireland and the Decade of Centenaries," *Éire-Ireland* 52, no. 1-2 (2017): 272. https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2017.0012.
[164] Smyth, "Digital Archives," 178.
[165] Ibid, 276.
[166] Ibid, 236.
[167] Ibid, 89. Inevitably, social media was also a major element of the 2016 commemoration. Utilised by the programme itself in various forms, these media also provided windows into public reactions in real time: Twitter saw a "steep increase" of activity directly referring to and engaging with the 2016 programme (Smyth, 63). These digital fora provided space for broader public discourse about the Rising and about the commemoration

The creation of *Inspiring Ireland*, a collaborative, interactive website displaying a curated exhibition of "Ireland's cultural assests" alongside "public memorabilia" of the Rising, signified another crucial purpose for the digitisation of the State's commemorative programme: it enabled the participation of national audiences but also international ones, including, importantly, the diaspora.[168]

2.6 Conclusion

Hannah Smyth writes that "in times of upheaval the national past is often looked to in order to challenge present inequalities, but equally to bolster the sovereignty, solidarity, and ideals of the nation."[169] The Irish State's commemoration of the Easter Rising has always invested heavily in the latter; as the previous chapter demonstrated, memory of the rebellion had long served as a means by which the State could seek to buttress its own authority, meet present political needs, and retain control over the national narrative. As this chapter has shown, *Ireland 2016* constituted a slight relinquishing of the State's iron grip on this official memory, giving space to other histories and voices and introducing digital access for the first time as a means by which the public could engage with them.

These amendments to the State's established commemorative practice were also a reaction to domestic socio-political factors; a self-serving measure that is a hallmark of state commemoration. The next chapter will discuss the other, more direct ways in which the State used the 2016 commemoration programme to pursue its own interests and will offer an exploration of the socio-political factors that shaped them.

itself; an example of public interaction with history intersecting with state commemorative practice, which has implications for how "official" narratives may be debated, deconstructed, and reformulated in the future.

[168] Government of Ireland, *Centenary Programme.*

[169] Smyth, "Ditigal Archives," 40-41.

3.0 Reimagining the Future – Ireland and "Irishness" in 2016

3.1 Introduction

By the time the centenary of the Easter Rising approached, it had become "burdened by the weight of its own myth" to a degree unmatched by any other event in Irish history.[170] Collective memory of the rebellion, as it evolved, increasingly lost its grounding in historical reality; scholars began to stress a need to distinguish between the Rising of 1916 and the Rising of later reconstruction, mythologisation, and revision.[171] The State's part in this transformation of history into memory had been considerable; Róisín Higgins writes that the Rising's "complex meaning in Irish society" owes "as much to how it was commemorated as to the original event."[172] In fact, the Rising commemorative tradition has had such profound impact that it too has "acquired its own history", further complicating contemporary understanding of the history of the event.[173] One of the effects of this mythologisation through commemoration has been a certain malleability that has allowed the State to reframe each anniversary of the rebellion to address the socio-political circumstances of the day. The Rising itself enabled this by having been somewhat theatrical and strikingly symbolic; it was understood by its perpetrators as "most effective as an idea rather than reality", and its eventual sucess lay not in its "certainties but in its adapability in the nation's memory."[174]

In the years preceding the centary of the Rising, the Irish State was faced with fresh domestic and external challenges that would inevitably impact the commemoration itself. Commemoration is always a form of "stock-taking", for the public but also, importantly, for

[170] McGarry, "1916 and Irish Republicanism," 46.
[171] Grayson and McGarry, "Introduction" in *Remembering 1916,* 1.
[172] Higgins, "'The Irish Public was Proclaimed by Poster'," 1.
[173] Leary, "Negotiating Ireland's 'Decade of Centenaries'," 297.
[174] Higgins, "'The Irish Public was Proclaimed by Poster',"19.

states themselves: it is an opportunity to serve their political needs by generating a "unifying narrative" that can encourage social cohesion.[175] *Ireland 2016*, for all its genuine credentials as a public history project, was also designed to fulfill these more political, legitimising purposes; many aspects were dictated by the State's need to cross shifting ground in such a way that it could emerge on the other side unscathed.[176] The symbolic and ideological potency of the rebellion was viewed as a promising vehicle in which to do this: Higgins writes

> Launching a programme of events for the centenary the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, described Easter 1916 as 'one of those seminal weeks when the fault lines of history shifted'. This too has echoes of the early propaganda of the rebels which declared that a break with the past had occurred at exactly 12 noon on 24 April 1916...the moment when Pearse read the Proclamation aloud has been imbued, in retrospect, with the power to change what was thought possible. The Easter Rising in Irish life, therefore, carries the weight of great hope and extreme disillusionment. [177]

The remainder of this chapter will explore particular socio-political concerns facing the State in the lead-up to the Rising's centenary which, as with those detailed in the previous chapter, had a profound effect on the official programme; these, however, necessitated a more obviously political response, especially evidenced in the State's Global and Diaspora Programme created to incorporate the diaspora in the commemoration. The State's shaping of the programme to meet these needs will be examined, showing how - as a history initiative guided by a State authority – *Ireland 2016* followed a "familiar pattern of ad hoc commemoration funding and opportunistic photo-bombing"; a paradigm that has typified

[175] Róisín Higgins, "Commemoration," in *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, eds. Donal O'Drisceoil, John Crowley, Mike Murphy, and John Borganovo (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), 5. https://research.tees.ac.uk/ws/files/4045627/621106.pdf.
[176] Leary, "Negotiating Ireland's 'Decade of Centenaries'," 295.
[177] Higgins, "'The Easter Rising was Proclaimed by Poster'," 19.

Irish state commemorative practice and is in keeping with state commemoration everywhere.[178]

3.2 Austerity Ireland

One development with particular relevance for the State's planning of the centenary programme was the global financial crash, which deeply affected Irish society and put immense strain on the public's relationship with the State. The years that followed the crash saw the abrupt unmasking of Ireland's economic boom (the so-called "Celtic Tiger") as a period of economic dysfunction resting on a "mirage of wealth" and unconscionable banking practices, with devastating social consequences.[179] When the Irish government was forced to seek an economic bailout in late 2010, the implications for the State's commemorative plans were made clear: on the morning of the bailout, an article published in the *Irish Times*, the country's major broadsheet newspaper, wrote:

> It may seem strange to some that the Irish Times would ask whether this is what the men of 1916 died for: a bailout from the German chancellor with a few shillings of sympathy from the British chancellor on the side. There is the shame of it all. Having obtained our political independence from Britain to be masters of our own affairs, we have now surrendered our sovereignty to the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.[180]

In a mass demonstration held in Dublin city centre, 100,000 people gathered in front of the GPO to listen to speeches that made further explicit reference to the Rising and the Proclamation; this marked the beginning of regular protests over the following years, during which socio-economic class disparity was "thrown into relief" and public lack of faith in the

[178] Cauvin and O'Neill, "Negotiating Public History in the Republic of Ireland," 817.
[179] Renée Fox, Mike Cronin, and Brian Ó Conchubhair, eds., "Introduction: Irish Studies from Austerity to Pandemic," in *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 4.
[180] Ibid, 4-5.

government became increasingly vocal.[181] The approach of its centennial year appeared to give the Rising greater immediacy in public memory; the State, alert to the need to re-engage their sympathy, was quick to invoke the Rising itself and reassert "ownership" of its legacy. Dominic Bryan writes that

> of all our potential groups, perhaps the most powerful are the imagined communities of ethnicity and nationhood. In creating these imagined communities of ethnic group and nation it is crucial that a link is made with the past, that there is a historical narrative about who we are and why. Politically, to glue these social groups together, the most powerful claim is that our 'forefathers', and note here 'forefathers', sacrificed themselves in the name of the group and that they need to be honoured and respected...thus the sacrifice of the past should remind us how to behave in the present or the future. It invokes a debt to be paid. And what could be more powerful than the debt to those that gave up their lives?[182]

As the country struggled through the immediate fallout of the crash, then-Taoiseach Brian Cowen fell back on the tried-and-tested technique of rallying the public to the national cause through the Rising's symbolism; this time, he drew parallels between the rebels of 1916 and the beleagured modern public, positing the former as a generation from which the latter, in this time of distress, could draw inspiration. In a speech in February 2010, he acknowledged that significant economic sacrifice would have to be made by the Irish people in order to see a "return to progress" by the Rising's centenary; however, he argued, this would be a fitting tribute to the memory of the rebels: "we can say in 2016 when we get to O'Connell Street and look up at those men and women of idealism that gave us the chance to be the country we are, that: "yes, we did not fail our children, but we did not fail our country either.""[183]

Ireland 2016, when it launched, promoted itself as an "update" on previous commemorations of the Rising. In some ways (discussed in Chapter 2), it achieved this; however, many scholars agree that the core narrative had differed very little: it still focused

[181]Smyth, "Digital Archives," 40-41.
[182] Bryan, "Ritual, Identity and Nation," : 33.
[183] Jody Corcoran and Maeve Sheehan, "Poll: It's No Country for Young Men or Women," *independent.ie*, February 7, 2010, https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/poll-its-no-country-for-young-men-or-women-26630198.html.

largely on the traditional themes of heroism, self-sacrifice, and triumph in adversity. The implication of there being parallels between the Rising and mid-austerity Ireland were recycled as Ireland emerged, from 2014-on, into a post-austerity world. Mike Cronin writes

> In the same way that the men and women of 1916 had heroically battled for their freedom, the commemorations in 2016 played on the idea that contemporary Irish men and women had also collectively sacrificed to deliver themselves from the scourge of downturn and austerity. The people in 2016 could congratulate themselves for their achievements in the wake of economic collapse and compare themselves heroically to those who had marched out towards potential death on Easter Monday 1916. The Proclamation of the Irish Republic opened with a call to "Irish men and Irish women in the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood." The men and women of 1916 were, by 2016, part of the dead generations, and it was now for the men and women of the contemporary era to be rallied to the ideal of nationhood, and to reassess, in the context of the twenty-first century, the dreams of the Proclamation.[184]

Moreover, this evocative narrative allowed the State to "reroot itself" in the founding principles of the Rising, thereby becoming a "shared national rallying point" for the future and diverting attention away from the part it had played in sustaining the Celtic Tiger and in its subsequent collapse.[185]

3.3 Relations with Britain

After the peace deal in Northern Ireland, commemoration of shared history between Ireland and Britian had begun to adopt a friendlier overall air. In March 2012, Prime Minister David Cameron and Taoiseach Enda Kenny issued a joint political statement claiming that the relationship between the two countries had "never been stronger or more settled, as complex or as important, as it is today"; this confident pronouncement came on the eve of a spate of commemorations of the First World War, which had been "consciously repackaged as a 'site'

[184] Cronin, "Repackaging History," 466.
[185] Ibid, 462-466.

of shared memory to serve as ballast" to continued peace.[186] There followed a joint visit to Flanders by the two leaders the following year, marking the first time the heads of government of both nations had come together to remember the Irish and British soldiers killed alongside each other in the First World War.[187] Even before this period of apparent harmonised commemoration of shared Irish/British historical memory, state commemoration in the Republic appeared to suggest a similar tone would now be possible at specifically "Irish" sites of memory: the 75th anniversary commemoration of the rebellion in 2006 had been attended by the British ambassador.[188] In 2011, the first official visit of a British monarch to Dublin in a century saw Queen Elizabeth II laying a wreath in the republican Garden of Remembrance; a recognition of the memory of those who had dedicated their lives to actively fighting the British Empire.[189]

Proceeding in this vein, the official *Ireland 2016* commemorative programme included a specific reference to the "shared heritage of Great Britain and Ireland" as a theme the programme would seek to expound both domestically and abroad.[190] Aside from organising a series of commemorative events across Britain, the Government also offered funding to local diaspora community groups hosting their own. However, as cooperative and amicable as the relationship now appeared, the spectre of the Brexit referendum – announced in 2015, the year before the Rising centenary was to be launched – brought renewed uncertainty about future relations between the two islands.[191]

[186] Peter Leary, "Negotiating Ireland's 'Decade of Centenaries' in the New Age of Brexit," *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018): 298. doi:10.1093/hwj/dbx059.
[187] Ferriter, "1916 in 2016," 166.
[188] Kevin Bean, "New Roads to the Rising: The Irish Politics of Commemoration Since 1996," in *Remembering 1916*, 233.
[189] Leary, "Negotiating Ireland's 'Decade of Centenaries'," 298-299.
[190] Government of Ireland, *Centenary Programme*.
[191] The date announced for the referendum – June 23, 2016 – was in fact already a date of some significance in Irish memory. Exactly 100 years before, on June 23, 1916, the proposal to keep six counties in Ulster temporarily excluded (for no longer than 5 or 6 years) from the rest of Ireland under the relative independence of Home Rule was voted through by representatives at the Ulster Nationalist Convention in Belfast. As it transpired, Home Rule was never implemented in southern Ireland, which became embroiled in the War of Independence

Within this geopolitical context, the reconfiguring and disseminating of Irish national identity – an exercise in "temporal self-definition" that had always been at the heart of state commemorations of the Rising – found itself on unstable ground. Its relationship with Britain had nominally improved, and uncertainty lay ahead as to if and how this would continue. In *Ireland 2016*, the State's approach to this challenge was to focus its energies on creating a more "inclusive, shared" narrative and commit to avoiding a rehashing of old historiographical debates; however, some scholars argue that this resulted in the State occasionally seeming to abandon any position on them whatsoever.[192] As Peter Leary notes, "what is publicly recalled, brushed over or forgotten is inevitably a choice and, in Ireland as elsewhere, to memorialize the past is to act politically in the present"[193]; to maintain the reconciliatory approach it had elected to inform its commemoration programme, the State had to silence the expression of certain memories which might undermine it.

As such, one of the "marginalised voices" that the State did not make a particular effort to include was that of more radical national republicans. This was heavily criticised by those who identified thus: in their view, this meant that *Ireland 2016* actively excluded the people who "in attitude, ideology, analysis and methodology" most resembled the rebels whom the State was professing to venerate.[194] They condemned the State's insistence on acknowledging a "shared history" of the Rising and the revolutionary period of Irish history:

> the Irish government appears determined to pursue this bogus and inappropriate course. What other explanation is there for its decision to hold a state ceremony at Grangegorman military cemetery in May 2016 to exclusively honour the British soldiers who died during the Rising, this at a time when most Irish people will be marking with dignity and respect the execution of the leaders of the Rising in Kilmainham Jail? There can

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and Civil War from which it eventually emerged as its own State. Likewise, the "temporary" retention of the six counties under British rule resulted in the permanent creation of Northern Ireland that has remained to this day. Johanne Devlin Trew, "Diaspora Engagement in Ireland, North and South, in the Shadow of Brexit," in Rethinking the Gathering, 15.

[192] Brian Hanley, "'Moderates and Peacemakers': Irish Historians and the Revolutionary Centenary," *Irish Economic and Social History* 43, no. 1 (2016): 117. DOI: 10.1177/0332489316663943.

[193] Leary, "Negotiating Ireland's 'Decade of Centenaries'," , 295.

[194] McIntyre, "Marginalizing Memory," 6.

be no equivalence between those who died in the struggle to create an Irish Republic and those who perished in crushing that very republic...self-confident nations do not engage in such nonsense, such national self-abasement.[195]

This conscious excusion of more militant republican voices (and their criticisms) from the official commemorative programme was, according to this perspective, an attempt to quash the public airing of a different memory of the Rising than that sanctioned by the State, despite the fact that these memories of the Rising were "no less genuine" for their existing largely on the margins of public discourse.[196] In response to what they considered a lacklustre and ambivalent State effort, some republican activists took the step - as "reluctant, but nonetheless concerned citizens" – of creating an alternative programme called *Reclaim the Vision of 1916*, in which they criticised the failure of the modern Irish State to fulfill the socialist, egalitarian vision of Ireland for which they believed the rebels had fought and died.[197] Such instances of "unofficial" commemoration were also organized to mark the Rising's centenary in Northern Ireland, which came to be a means by which "marginalised republican factions" there could "publicly perform their history" in the absence of interfering political authorities.[198]

This unwillingness of the State to allow interpretations of the Rising's meaning for contemporary Ireland other than those it could endorse echoed the 75th anniversary commemoration of 1991. Although socio-political tensions on the island had improved significantly since then, re-emerging revisionist readings of the Rising as "unjustified" revolutionary violence – as voiced by high profile political figures in the years before the programme was announced - made it clear that the issue was far from achieving consensus among Ireland's disparate social groups. Moreover, trying to incorporate the North more

[195]Robert Ballagh, "Who Fears to Speak of the Republic?," *Études Irlandaises* 41, no. 2 (2016): 65. http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/4979.
[196] McIntyre, "Marginalizing Memory," 12.
[197] Robert Ballagh, "Reclaim the Vision of 1916: Uncomfortable Conversations," *An Phoblacht*, April 1, 2015, https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/24869.
[198] Brendan Ciarán Browne, "Choreographed Segregation: Irish Republican Commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising in 'Post-Conflict' Belfast", *Irish Political Studies* 31, no. 1 (2016), 118. https://doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2015.1126924.

concretely into the State's official commemorative programme (events did take place there, but on nowhere near the same scale as those in the Republic) did not yet appear feasible, despite the progress of recent decades: Arlene Foster, First Minister of Northern Ireland in 2016, declined an invitation to attend the major commemorative parade on Easter Sunday and described the Rising as "an attack on democracy" unworthy of solemn remembrance.[199]

These entrenched divisions among Irish collective groups about the meaning of the Rising were obstacles which in 2016, as in previous years, the State failed to confront in a new or constructive way. For all the centenary programme's ambition, it proved unable to use commemoration as a "bridge" between different memory traditions, because it was insufficiently accommodating of those differences.[200] As a result, there were certain self-imposed limitations on *Ireland 2016*'s "inclusive vision" of the centenary which, although far less restrictive than those of 1991, nevertheless served to compromise its legitimacy as a commemorative project in the eyes of some of the public; a far cry from it "belonging to everyone", as the State had hoped.

3.4 Reconfiguring "Irishness": the Diaspora

Each of the Irish State's commemorations of the Easter Rising have represented a "border crossing" of spatial and temporal identity; on these occasions, "Irishness" has been renewed and reconfigured between the triangulating points of past, present, and future, and

[199] Ferriter, "1916 in 2016," 164. In fact, police officials in the North felt it necessary to raise the terror threat level there to the "upper end of severe" in March 2016, after a police officer was injuried in a car bomb explosion. Police authorities blamed dissident republicans seeking to mark the centenary of the Rising. "PSNI warns NI threat level at 'upper end of severe' as prison officer injured in explosion," RTÉ, accessed June 5, 2022, https://www.rte.ie/news/2016/0304/772513-bomb-car-belfast/.
[200] Beiner, "Between Trauma and Triumphalism," 389.

with reference to prevailing domestic and foreign affairs.[201] The last has been particularly influential; so much so that, as Róisín Higgins writes, "Irish history from 1916 was in many ways the history of Irish foreign policy."[202] The Jubilee commemoration of the Rising was a striking example of the diplomatic dimensions of state commemorative practice in Ireland; although it invoked the past, it did so largely to allow the State to highlight what it had achieved in the interim and assert its newfound sovereignty to a global audience. Moreover, pressure to avoid appearing "anti-British" limited how much of the historical complexity of the Rising the State felt the Jubilee could convey; in lieu of attempting an "apolitical commemoration" of this highly political moment, it refashioned the occasion to be a vehicle through which post-independence Ireland could be commercially "marketed" abroad.[203] Instructions the State issued to its embassies overseas stressed that they should avail themselves "to the greatest extent possible, of the opportunity offered by the commemoration . . . for gaining favourable publicity for Ireland abroad and for encouraging persons of Irish birth and descent to visit Ireland", thereby "redrawing" the international image of Ireland in a way the State hoped would benefit its economic and political prospects.[204]

It was not surprising that the key group targeted by this "marketing" was the Irish diaspora. Emigration from Ireland had left indelible marks on its national identity, creating a long-standing cultural preoccupation with themes of displacement and loss that formed "the staple of much literature and drama from and about Ireland."[205] Over time, it became the nexus for a sense of connection through "Irishness" that purported to bridge temporal and

[201] Lauren A. Scanlon and M. Satish Kumar, "Ireland and Irishness: The Contextuality of Postcolonial Identity," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 109, no. 1 (2019): 214. https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2018.1507812.
[202] Higgins, "Projections and Reflections," 19.
[203] Ibid, 32-34. Higgins notes that "advertisements for Cork Dry Gin, Erin Foods, and Aer Lingus sat alongside extensive essays on the 1916 leaders in brochures, pamphlets, and programs—all amounting to one extended advertisement for the Republic of Ireland."
[204] Ibid.
[205] Salis, "Whose Homelands?," 32.

spatial distances; this connection became "central to the life, the politics, and the economy" of Ireland and was equally important in "shaping new notions of identity and of belonging" among those of Irish descent elsewhere.[206] It has been frequently invoked throughout modern Irish history, even explicitly during the Rising itself; the Proclamation read by Pearse at the onset of the rebellion acknowledged the support of Ireland's "exiled children in America" in its struggle for independence.[207] The particular relationship between Ireland and the US featured more prominently in recent political developments, when the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 marking an official end to the Troubles was largely effected by a "complex pattern of cooperation between Irish nationalist politicians, the Irish-American diaspora, Irish-American politicians and the US government."[208] In 1996, in the midst of fresh optimism about the future, then-President of Ireland Mary McAleese called for a reimagining of the Irish diaspora as a "resource" that Ireland should now embrace; a symbol of past misfortune transformed into something positive that could inform a "modern sense of Irishness" befitting of a new Ireland.[209]

Accordingly, in the years after the peace deal and leading up to the 2016 centenary, the State began enacting a more substantive diaspora policy. Scholars have theorised that this developed partly as an existential response to increasing globalisation:

> As Ireland is more integrated into an economic and cultural western hegemony, the lifestyle of which is increasingly defined by transnational companies, it becomes less easy to identify 'the way we do things here.'An anxiety about the loss of traditional values associated with forms of rural life is partly compensated for by the development of heritage tourism, but also through invocations of cultural maintenance in the diaspora...as the Irish 'at home' embrace global modernity, notions of cultural stasis are identified with ethnic enclaves in the

[206] Ibid, 29.
[207] Some Irish Americans provided financial assistance to the Rising in a minor capacity, solicited by "confidential emissaries" working in secret. However, while the objective of Irish independence was one broadly supported within the US, many favoured its attainment through Home Rule or other parliamentary means. Robert Schmuhl, *Ireland's Exiled Children: America and the Easter Rising* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 4.
[208] Salis, "Whose Homelands?," 37.
[209] Ibid, 31. Salis points out the irony of this positive appraisal of Ireland's past as "functional to the country's booming economy of the Celtic Tiger years", given its dramatic implosion not long thereafter.

diaspora. Yet, even if seen as anachronistic in relation to contemporary Ireland, the preservation of collective memory and culture in the diaspora is reassuring when speed and change become the dominant motifs of Irish society.[210]

Commemoration – and, specifically, the upcoming centenary of the Rising - would offer an important platform upon which this "cultural continuity" sought and cultivated in Ireland's relationship with its diaspora could be staged:

> The act of commemoration can, by juxtaposing 'us' and 'them', channel the present through the past to produce a strength in continuity and a confidence in change as a modern and progressive 'new, Irish diaspora' is asserted. Because no culture can create itself anew all the time, modernity relies on the past and elements of tradition that 'acquire new meanings in new temporal frames"...the hybrid temporality of global modernity necessarily involves affiliations to tradition and the past which are re-articulated and re-imagined in the present.

Given Ireland's position as a "paragon of global capitalism", there has often also been an element of profit-seeking in this projection of Irish history and heritage to global audiences.[211] This was exemplified by a 2013 government-led tourism initiative known as "The Gathering": conceived as an opportunity to "harness the cultural to the economic", the initiative was denounced for its excessive mercantilism, which appeared to prey on the genuine and profound emotional connection with Ireland many in the diaspora professed to feel.[212] Regardless of these criticisms, however, the initiative did succeed in attracting foreign investment and tourism revenue that bolstered the Irish economy, which was at the time still recovering from the catastrophic effects of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger. Mike Cronin argues that the State's efforts to appeal to the diaspora were therefore largely responsible for

[210] Gray, "The Irish Diaspora," 130.
[211] Fox et al., "Introduction," in *Routledge Handbook of Irish Studies*, 8.
[212] Trew and Pierse, *Rethinking the Irish Diaspora*, 2. Parallels between The Gathering and the State's early plans for the Rising's centenary programme were immediately and scornfully drawn in late 2014 when a promotional video produced by the Government featured Bob Geldof, U2, and Irish film and sports stars, but made no mention of any of the Rising's principle figures; it also referred to Facebook and LinkedIn, both of which had established operational headquarters in Dublin. The video was quickly withdrawn and the Government retreated to revise its plans with closer consultation with the EAG.

"restarting" Ireland's fiscal prosperity – a fact upon which the State was certainly reflecting as it began preparing to commemorate the Rising on a grander scale than ever before.[213] The diaspora had proven its worth as a resource, in both political and economic terms; the occasion of the centennial presented an opportunity to mine it once more so as to multiply its international influence and open "channels of communication and economic contracts not available to other small states."[214]

Collective memory of the Rising has been hugely influenced by the event's prolonged cultural commodification: immortalised in music and other artistic productions, it has also spawned "ephemeral symbols of nationhood, relics, souvenirs and mass-produced images" that have been consumed by generations of the Irish public and those of Irish heritage abroad.[215] When the Global and Diaspora Programme was launched in June 2015, this cultural memory was firmly at its core; in fact, while it promised a wide range of events focusing specifically on the history of the Rising and of the history of Irish diaspora relations, it also openly branded itself as a celebration of Irish culture. At its launch, Aodhán Ó Ríordáin (a government minister involved in its creation) noted that "the ideals of 1916 were born out of a movement that was as much cultural as it was political."[216] The events organised under the programme – most concentrated in the US - reflected this by focusing largely on the history of Irish traditional and modern arts rather than on any great historical nuance; "operating at a remove from some of the tensions and animosities of Irish history, and from many of the myths and prejudices surrounding the Rising...addressing an American or Irish

[213] Mike Cronin, "Connections and Capital: The Diaspora and Ireland's Global Networks," in *Routledge Handbook of Irish Studies*, 134. Ironically, this rebuilding of the economy did not put an end to emigration from the Republic (mostly by young people), which remains high even today.
[214] Gray, "The Irish Diaspora," 127.
[215] Alison O'Malley-Younger, "A Terrible Beauty is Bought: 1916, Commemoration and Commodification," *Irish Studies Review* 24, no. 4 (2016): 456. https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2016.1226675.
[216] "Launch of the Ireland 2016 Global and Diaspora Programme," Department of Foreign Affairs, accessed June 15, 2022, https://www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/press-releases/press-release-archive/2015/june/launch-of-the-2016-global-and-diaspora-programme/. This observation was quite correct; for further discussion of the relationship between Irish political and cultural nationalism, see O'Driscoll, "Knowing and Forgetting."

American audience far less steeped in national memory."[217] The largest of these events in the States, a three-week long festival held in Washington, D.C. was entitled *Celebrating a Century of Irish Arts and Culture* and billed itself as showcasing "a spectrum of the cultural heritage of the island of Ireland, including some of the best of Irish contemporary musicians, dancers and theatre companies."[218] As Brenda Gray writes, "cultural icons conjure up the experience of belonging without the discomfort of long-term commitment or of being bound, producing a mobile and detached mode of identification"[219]; this emphasis on Irish culture fed consciously on the sense of interconnection between Ireland and its diaspora which the State has, since the 1990s, carefully fostered. Amid increasing globalisation, and in the context of a post-austerity, pre-Brexit need to redefine its position in the world, the 2016 Global and Diaspora Programme thus enabled the Irish State to reinforce the imaginary of an "interactive global network" of Irishness with itself - as ever - as the "central player."[220]

3.5 Conclusion

Dominic Bryan writes that "commemorations are a way of capturing the sacrifices of the past to be used in the legitimation of the political present and the imagined political future."[221] *Ireland 2016* promised an "updating" of the Irish State's traditional format of Rising commemoration. To a degree, as the previous chaper discussed, it delivered on this promise; however, its genuine commitment to a more inclusive, contextualised remembrance, addressed to and accessible for both domestic and diasporic publics alike, did not mean that

[217] Patrick Bixby, "Dublin, 1916...Phoenix, 2016," *Estudios Irlandeses* 12 (2017): 175. DOI:10.24162/EI2017-6984.
[218] "Ireland 2016: Global Programme," Ireland 2016, accessed June 15, 2022, https://www.ireland2016.gov.ie/events/ireland-2016-global-programme.
[219] Gray, "The Irish Diaspora," 128.
[220] Salis, "Whose Homelands?," 32.
[221] Bryan, "Ritual, Identity and Nation," 2.

the State's centenary programme was any less representative of state commemoration in general. It, like its precedessors, was shaped by the State's need to manage certain socio-political and economic conditions. As Kevin Bean argues, these developments have had

> a profoundly disorienting impact on Ireland's sense of nationhood. Consequently, for the Irish State, the current politics of commemoration appear to be less about remembrance or even the fighting of old wars than attempts to resolve more immediate problems surrounding political authority, ideological legitimacy and citizen alienation, which will determine the future of Ireland as a nation.[222]

4.0 Conclusion

Kevin Bean writes of commemorations of the Rising that each has "held up a mirror to its own time and preoccupations, and every decade has had the 1916 commemoration it deserves."[223] The centenary programme, no less than its predecessors, was a mirror of the particular social and political anxieties afflicting Ireland in 2016. It found success when it could assimilate existing social issues into its approach, responding to increased demand for better representation of women in "official" memory and growing public interest in actively consuming history.

In many respects, therefore, it represented a shift in the state commemorative tradition; an "update" on previous commemorations that had presented a thoroughly monolithic narrative of the Rising and treated public engagement with its history as an afterthought. Under *Ireland 2016*, both national commemorative events and community-focused local initiatives challenged this approach, resulting in "unprecedented public participation...in

[222] Kevin Bean, "New Roads to the Rising," 226.
[223] Bean, "New Roads to the Rising," 225.

shared reflections on identity, culture and citizenship that combined history with arts, heritage and language."[224] Digitisation of archival material "invigorate(d) collective memory of the revolution through mnemonic and affective resonance."[225]

However, in other ways the programme was very much a typical instance of state-sponsored history. In Irish collective memory the Rising inhabits a quasi-mythic position, rich with powerful imagery and symbolism that, over time, became embedded in the popular imagination. For most social groups on the island, it represents a defining national moment that signified triumph over prolongued adversity and offered an idealised vision of how Ireland could achieve "exhalation among the nations" as a sovereign, independent state.[226] In the wake of the long years of austerity and in the face of improved - though uncertain - relations with Britain, the State sought invoke this collective memory once more. It called for a "reimagining" Irish identity by renewing the old ideals of the sacrifice and heroism of the rebels, by enforcing new concepts of "shared history", and by articulating a sense of global "Irishness" that centred on the transmission of Irish culture. In so doing, it reproduced a narrative that gave little quarter to those it deemed hostile or incompatible with its own; a claiming of ultimate authority over national memory that typifies state commemoration in general.

As Ann Averill notes, a "top-down approach to public ritual by itself is not effective unless it is complemented by a bottom-up emotional engagement."[227] Given the bitter divides that exist on the island and abroad over Irish history, it would have been impossible for the State's commemorative programme to appease everyone. Immediate reactions from the crowd of an estimated quarter of a million people who came to see the programme's centrepiece parade in Dublin city centre on Easter Sunday 2016 seemed to suggest that the

[224] Smyth, "Digital Archives," 22.
[225] Ibid, 89.
[226] Provisional Government of the Irish Republic, Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916.
[227] Averill, "Reverence, Relevance, Revelry," 222-223.

State did succeed in tapping into – or inciting – a strong sense of national identity rooted in the Rising. A number of Averill's interviewees said that they found the event very moving, inducing a physical emotional response as they watched.[228] One responded that it made them "proud to be Irish"; for another, a sense of the occasion's gravitas drove their interest, and they believed it was important that they could one day look back on it and say that they were there.[229]

Public responses to the programme online, meanwhile, were also generally positive; however, some made cutting comparisons between the ideals of the Rising which have so predominated collective memory of the event and the current state of modern Ireland, where critical failures to address high costs of living, social inequalities, and the burdens of excessive capitalism have resulted in ongoing crises experienced by many of the population. One Facebook user remarked that although he was "Irish and proud", he was "embarrassed" to see the treatment of the homeless living on the streets: "the men and women who fought for our independence deserve better."[230]

The introduction of this thesis included a quote by Tom Clarke, one of the rebel leaders stationed in the GPO during the rebellion and later executed: "You must have something striking in order to appeal to the imagination of the world." The long, storied chronicle of the Rising's afterlife in collective memory and state commemoration proves that if nothing else, it captured - and continues to capture - the imagination of Ireland.

[228] Ibid, 222.
[229] Ibid, 221.
[230] Joey O'Brien, Facebook, March 27, 2016.

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