

This Women's Round Table was recorded on the 7th March 2023 - the 100th anniversary of the Ballyseedy atrocity. We remember today the suffering of the women, wives, sisters, and mothers of the young men who lost their lives; and the mothers and wives of the young men who were ordered to do it, and all who had to live with that memory. That human story of tragedy and trauma remains within families and communities: many still carry pain, anger, shame and blame; and not just in north Kerry. As a country, we will remain burdened by our past until we dare to speak of it.

The aim of the Women's Round Table is to bring light to the roles, participation, and significance of women during (and since) the formation of the State and to hear the impact on their families; to also look at their experiences and contributions to the independence movement, to politics, social life, medical care, and how they 'picked up the pieces' afterwards. Many were poorly treated by the new State, particularly in terms of recognition and pensions. The role of women took a backward step in the new Irish State. It was tough for women, and they were largely ignored.

So, the intention of our Women's Round Table is simple: to tell the women's stories that speak to our shared humanity and not our differences; to recollect and reflect on our difficult history so that our people - north, south, east and west - can reconcile, and inspire future generations to do better. One hundred years is surely enough of silence, shame and hurt. We have much to learn from those extraordinary women - who selflessly and silently - gave their yesterdays for our today. Now it is our generation's turn to listen and speak up, to inform memory with truth, and let these women's oral histories resonate for the generations still to come.

The extraordinary contribution of women to the struggle for independence and stoical survival after the Civil War was a male centered narrative which was the culture of the time. While men who died in the conflict were venerated as heroes by one or both sides, most affected women became invisible and had to literally pick up the pieces alone and get on with their lives. They didn't get time to grieve. They had to care for children and parents, and as people described at the time 'put bread on the table'. There was no Welfare State to help them. While some women had their own businesses and their own independent means it was tough for women, and they were largely ignored by society.

Bereavement, poverty, theocracy, and emigration of loved-ones compounded their trauma.

This Round Table explores the family stories of some of those women. Even at the remove of 100 years, it is clear that some wounds remain, and recovery requires that we listen better to our ancestors. Edmund Burke's famous line about "those who fail to learn from the past are destined to repeat it", remains true and prescient in this Ireland of today. Today, in 2023, we remember that women had a unique role in the narrative of nationhood; while many are today unknown or forgotten, some are remembered as active and visible participants in the freedom movement: Dr Ada English, Julia Grenan, Sighle Humphreys, Linda Kearns, Dr Kathleen Lynn, Constance Markievicz, Helena Molony, Madeleine French-Mullen, Elizabeth O'Farrell, Nora O'Keefe, Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington and Margaret Skinnider - just to name a few.

Mná100 seeks to shine a light on those women, both known and unknown, who contributed immeasurably to our independence; and the Treaty Generations Group are in agreement that the commemorations of those women who endured the unimaginable trauma of family division, civil war and pervading silence.

Cathal MacSwiney Brugha

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