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Editorial Introduction

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The island of Ireland has reached a unique temporal juncture. The series of centenary commemorations of events which have profoundly shaped the political, socio-economic and landscapes of Ireland and Britain offers an opportunity not only to look back and reflect on a century of conflict and transition, but simultaneously to test the 'health' of interactions and relationships across and between communities, organizations and governments on the island. 2016 itself marks the centenary of the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme: memories and narratives so powerful that they have become an integral part of the hagiography of multiple identities across Ireland (and beyond). These events, like many others, have been used to mobilize and politicize generations; they have come to define political and cultural identities and have provided political and symbolic validity for violent campaigns and the prevalence of blood sacrifice.

Understandably, anxieties have been high in the years predating the beginning of the 'Decade of Commemorations'. Remembrance in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic for the most part has been and continues to be, highly complex and deeply contested. It has been used to demarcate space and exercise territoriality, employed in the battle of hegemonic victimhood, used to contest the narratives of the 'other', to politically socialize communities and to galvanize support for political agendas. In Northern Ireland, commemoration has profound implications for political transition. Violence associated with commemorative events and displays of cultural identity have important ramifications for political stability, economic development and the exacerbation of already volatile and strained community relationships. The British, Irish and Northern Ireland governments have understandably approached the Decade with apprehension and caution.

While Ireland provides much of the focus of the Special Issue, the themes contained within are global and resonate strongly within most societies. How, why and where we remember are often at the crux of our identity. What is remembered

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and what is forgotten can shape societies. The practices and processes of memory and commemoration can define us as individuals, as well as reframing communities as nations. The past, as Lowenthal infamously notes, ‘is not a foreign country’. It lives with us in the present; the past imbues our everyday experiences. We use it to serve our political, economic, social and cultural needs: we resist, silence, contest and elide it; we protect, nurture and transfer it.

We are immensely pleased and privileged to have Eamon Gilmore TD contribute the foreword to this Special Issue. A former Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Leader of the Irish Labour Party, Deputy Gilmore was also the first Irish Government Minister to take part in the annual Remembrance Sunday ceremony in Belfast when he laid a laurel wreath at the Cenotaph at City Hall in 2012 to honor those who had died in the First and Second World Wars. First elected to the Dáil in 1989, he announced in 2015 that he would retire from politics at the next Irish general election. He was recently appointed EU Envoy to the Columbian Peace Process.

With an eye to the challenges of commemoration that extend beyond this island, Barkan draws out experiences from Ireland, Northern Ireland and Columbia to assess why memory of violent pasts serves to promote reconciliation or further contribute to the deepening of division, conflict and tension between different communities. He posits that historical memory has served to advance improved communal and intra-state relations but in many cases, this has fallen short where the social framing of historical truth remains a catalyst for violence. Through the lens of micro and macro histories, Barkan’s piece outlines the practical and conceptual problems of working with such histories and defines the contours of considerations for political engagement with historical truth through lesson sharing, in this case, from Columbia.

White and Marnane provide an important contribution to the commemoration of 1916 and outline the complex and challenging intersection of history, memory and remembrance. In their piece, they heed a warning about what aspects and interpretations of history are remembered and commemorated, not least by whom. In unpacking the agendas and engagements of key political parties towards the commemoration of the Easter Rising, White and Marnane speculate on the salience of commemoration in contemporary political life. Brown and Grant adopt a different methodological approach in their broad survey of commemoration and commemorative practices in Northern Ireland. By focusing on actor, frequency and location as the lens of analysis and understanding, they drawn conclusions about how ‘Troubles’ memory has developed within different constituencies and the types of commemoration present. Elsewhere in the Special Issue, Dybris-McQuade expands this theme by examining the contestations emerging from contemporary practice in community based organizations. Through the lens of Kurasawa’s approach to story-telling, she advances debates on memory and relates them to the challenges of managing public sector responses to memory through funding opportunities. Crooke’s contribution refines this further. *In Their Footsteps* appraises the artifacts of commemoration and sets them in place with a surrounding narrative and a socio-political context. Viewing commemoration as a performative act at the heart of social processes around

history, she develops a critical debate and insight about how memories are made and engaged with.

The role of performance in commemoration provides critical insights not only to the nature of relationships between contested communities, but also within these communities. McAuley explores how commemoration shapes and reflects contemporary loyalist and unionist identity. In his contribution he assesses the relationship between contemporary narratives in loyalism and unionism with a look to how memory of historic events helps to solidify collective identities and memories. Browne's piece delves into an often-overlooked aspect of commemoration—orchestration and planning between competing schisms within Republican Belfast. Taking up a related theme, Hopkins examines the changing 'symbolic capital' of hunger strikers within republicanism and traces how commemoration has become one of the key dimensions of the fragmented republican family, at this pivotal moment in the Republican commemorative calendar.

This Special Issue reflects upon the evolving narratives, meanings and debates surrounding commemorative events in Ireland and beyond. It is dedicated to appraising contemporary approaches of engaging with the past and investigating both the resilience of memory and the contentions of history. In its exploration of some of the most pivotal events in contemporary Irish and British history, there are opportunities to consider the ways in which the past is remembered, observed and connected to wider appreciations of history, memory and politics. As the past remains ever present in contemporary cultural, political and social life, we anticipate that the Special Issue will offer insights into the ways in which significant historical events have been subject to changing ideological and political interpretations and how the interchangeable discourse of sacrifice and resistance continues to evolve.