Appendix: socio-economic realities in contemporary Irish society

It is difficult to overestimate the extent of the recent changes in Irish society. At an economic level, the country has moved from being one of the most economically successful in the world to economic collapse. Although the current crisis is the most severe, recessions which have been characterized by high levels of unemployment have occurred regularly in Ireland. Thus in 1985 unemployment reached 17 per cent (CSO, 2011a). Government debt has also been a problem in the past, being 94 per cent of GDP in 1990 (CSO, 2011a). Ireland has suffered high levels of emigration since the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, despite consistently high birth rates, the total number at work was only 1.1 million in 1985. Dramatic increases in women's participation in paid employment, as well as high levels of inward migration during the Celtic Tiger (1997–2007), increased the labour force to an unprecedented 2.1 million in 2007 (CSO, 2011a). Ireland became a model to be emulated internationally, with economic growth rates (1994–2000) in excess of 9 per cent per annum. Gross domestic product (GDP) per head was fourth highest in the world. However, GDP overestimates Irish economic well-being because Ireland is unusually dependent on multinational corporations. Gross national income (GNI: the income which remains with Irish residents after repatriation of the multinationals' corporate profits) is a more accurate reflection of economic well-being and is 81 per cent of GDP (as compared with an EU average of 100 per cent: CSO, 2012a). Nevertheless, during the Celtic Tiger era, living standards rose dramatically, as did government expenditure (particularly in male dominated employment areas related to construction).

Ireland lost its economic sovereignty in November 2010 with the arrival of the 'troika' of representatives of the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission. General government debt as a percentage of GDP increased from 25 per cent in 2007 to 108 per cent in 2012 (as compared with an EU average of roughly 83 per cent: CSO 2012a). This level is similar to Portugal, although better than Greece. The increase in

the ratio of government debt to GNI in Ireland has been even steeper, rising from 29 per cent of GNI in 2007 to 135 per cent in 2011 (CSO, 2012a).

The factors seen as contributing to the Irish economic collapse include a reckless construction sector (with fifty people accounting for debts of 40–50 billion: Kirby, 2010); ineffective regulation and collusive relationships between the political system, the construction industry and the banking system. At a more fundamental level it can be seen as reflecting a croneystic, male dominated culture, where diversity and dissent were not tolerated (Clancy *et al.*, 2010; Murphy, 2012). Public anger resulted in a resounding defeat for the majority and minority partners in government in 2011 (Fianna Fáil and the Greens, respectively). Since then, hostility, particularly in the media, has been mainly directed towards the public sector (Lynch *et al.*, 2012).

The size of the Irish government debt (estimated at €174 billion) partly reflects the state's action in 2008 in guaranteeing all bank debts, however reckless and unsecured. These debts thus became sovereign debts (estimated at €64 billion). It also reflects imbalances between state expenditure and income in a context where economic growth is poor and the international context is unstable (Durkan *et al.*, 2011). Attempts by the government, since the economic collapse, to reduce public expenditure, by cutting salaries and reducing numbers in the public sector, have exacerbated unemployment levels (which rose from 4.5 per cent in 2007 to almost 14 per cent in 2013). Thus Ireland's total sovereign indebtedness of €174 billion falls to a (declining) working population of 1.8 million to discharge. Nevertheless, Ireland is ranked 27 out of 144 countries on a global competitiveness index (Schwab and Sala-i-Martin, 2012). Productivity per person in Ireland was nearly 40 per cent higher than the EU average in 2011. Furthermore, although Ireland's GNI per capita has fallen dramatically since 2007, it is still marginally above the EU average, and higher than Greece or Portugal (CSO, 2012a).

Like the other OECD countries, Ireland's main source of employment is services (70 per cent: OECD, 2012c). Women in Ireland are more likely than their male counterparts to be found in this sector (89 per cent versus 61 per cent), and are less likely to be in industry (9 per cent versus 30 per cent). These patterns are broadly similar to the OECD. This gender differentiated pattern has been reflected in and reinforced by unconscious institutional privileging of areas of predominantly male rather than predominantly female employment. In Ireland, women's average annual earnings are 72 per cent of men's (CSO, 2011a). On average women employees are paid 13 per cent less than their male counterparts per hour (the average EU27 difference is 16 per cent: CSO, 2012a). This gender pay gap is much higher among part-time than full-time employees (37 per cent versus 10 per cent). Such part-time employment is predominantly undertaken by women and reflects the cost of child care (with limited state facilities), and both limits economic growth and is part of the economic penalties for motherhood in Ireland.

The extent of the change in women's participation in paid employment must be located in the context of a marriage bar which existed up to 1973, which prohibited women from continuing in employment after marriage in a range of occupations (O'Connor, 1998). Irish women's employment rate exceeded the 2010 EU target for women by 2007 (CSO, 2011b), although both it, and men's employment rate, have fallen since then, and are both now below the EU27 employment rates (CSO, 2012a). However, whereas in 1980 the gap between men and women's labour force participation rates was 51 per cent, by 2010, it had fallen to 15 per cent (OECD, 2012c). Much of this participation is part-time. Furthermore, more than three fifths of women not in the labour force described their principal economic status as full-time 'home duties', compared with less than 2 per cent of men (CSO, 2011b), reflecting the gendered nature of such 'duties'. The recentness of much social change in Ireland is evidenced by the fact that divorce has only been available since 1996 and abortion is still in a legal quagmire.

In Ireland, as elsewhere, the labour market is highly gender differentiated, and women with higher education are most likely to be in paid employment (OECD, 2012c). Roughly half of the women, aged 20–44, with children aged 3 years old or younger are in paid employment (CSO, 2011b) but these women are three times more likely than their male counterparts to work fewer than 30 hours per week. The level of such female part-time employment is considerably above the OECD average (2012c). Currently, only just over a quarter of couples, with children aged less than 14, are both in full-time employment. If women's participation in such paid employment fully converged with men's by 2030, the net effect would be an increase in 12 per cent of GDP over a twenty year period.

Ireland is ranked 29 out of 138 countries on the Gender Equality Index (GEI: UNDP, 2010) which includes economic activity (measured by women's participation in the labour market); empowerment (measured by share of parliamentary seats and second level education) and reproductive health (measured by maternal mortality and adolescent fertility rates). The difference in the ranking of Ireland on the Human Development Index (HDI: 5) and the GEI (29) exceeds most other highly developed countries and is a continuation of earlier Irish patterns (O'Connor, 1998; UNDP, 1995, 2005). Many aspects of the gender order in Ireland have changed, and this is reflected in the fact that its score on the most recent Gender Equality Index (EIGE, 2013) is very similar to the overall EU27. However, its score in the area of economic power is below the EU average (23 versus 29, respectively), and is very much less than, for example, Sweden where the score in this area is over 60. On the economic participation and opportunity sub-index of the Global Gender Gap Index (Hausmann *et al.*, 2011), which includes labour force participation, wage equality for similar work, earned income, access to management and legislative

positions and professional employment) Ireland is ranked 30 (i.e. between the Russian Federation and Namibia). This ranking is virtually identical to the GEI ranking (at 29).

In summary, Ireland is currently in a very difficult economic situation. Although women make up half of those in the professions and one third of those in management and administrative positions, their participation in paid employment is much more likely than in other OECD countries to be on a part-time basis. The relationship between gender equality and economic growth (OECD, 2012c) has been ignored by the Irish state. Thus it has seen gender equality as a rather trivial feminist issue rather than a fundamentally important way of improving the economic and social well-being of the country. Even where the state has given this rhetorical support, it has failed to put in place effective mechanisms to facilitate its implementation (OECD, 2012c). The economic crisis in Ireland is a challenge to masculinist ideologies and male dominated power structures. It will be interesting to see to what extent such structures are able or willing to respond to this challenge.