

Department of Politics

## **DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FORM**

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**Name:**

**E-mail address:**

**MSc or MRes programme:** MRes Social Research and Criminology

**Full-time or part-time?** Part-time

**Title of proposed dissertation** How were feminist identities formed and understood by members of Irish diaspora campaigns to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment?

### **Description of subject area**

Following a vast and effective feminist campaign, in May 2018 Irish citizens voted in a referendum to repeal a constitutional amendment, which paved the way for reform of the country's notoriously prohibitive law on abortion. Although several studies (referenced below) have been published about the campaign, for the most part they focus on mobilisation within Ireland itself. In comparison, the transnational dimension of efforts to repeal the Eighth Amendment has received less scholarly attention. This is despite the fact that contemporary Irish diaspora campaigns received significant attention the time of the referendum and followed long histories of émigré-led activism on abortion access and reproductive justice.

This dissertation aims to fill this gap, through an exploration of what participation in international campaigns to Repeal the Eighth Amendment meant for Irish emigrant organisers. Using a theoretical framework that draws on literature relating both to social movements and diasporas, its goal would be to understand if and how a distinctly feminist diaspora identity was formed among activists based outside of Ireland.

### **What scholarly literature will you be examining?**

There are three areas of scholarly literature that I will draw on: feminist literature on campaigns for reproductive justice, as well as theory on social movements and diaspora formation.

#### *1. Feminist literature on reproductive justice campaigning.*

I would use this literature to situate my research in local and international context. I would draw on overarching texts, such as Janet Hadley's *Abortion: between freedom and necessity* (1996) and *Transcending Borders Abortion in the Past and Present* (2017), as well as literature that specifically addresses both contemporary and historical reproductive justice campaigns in Ireland. This includes: Máiréad Enright and Fiona de Londras's critical thematic overview of recent reforms of Irish abortion law (2018); Clara Fischer's exploration of the use of personal narrative within the repeal campaign (2020); Ruth Fletcher's work with the activist group Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A (2020); Linda Connolly's history on the emergence, consolidation and development of the Irish women's movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (2002); and Dierdre Duffy's analysis of Irish abortion health activism (2020). It would also look to other examples of recent campaigns to liberalise abortion law, notably in Poland (Grober and Struzik, 2018) and Argentina (Buedo, 2020).

#### *2. Social movement theory.*

Social movements are commonly thought of as “collective challenges based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities” (Tarrow, 1998: 4); a description that could be applied to campaigns to repeal the Eighth Amendment. I would draw primarily on the ‘New Social Movements’ approach (influential in Europe and Central and South America)<sup>1</sup>, which looks at the structural causes of social movements, as well as the collective identity expressed through participation in a movement. This would support an understanding of the way Irish diaspora identity was formed and expressed through transnational campaigns to liberalise abortion law.

### 3. *Diaspora formation.*

This dissertation would also use theory on the diaspora, which has been described by Robin Cohen (1996) as involving: dispersal from a ‘homeland’; collective memory of that homeland; idealisation of the homeland; the development of a ‘movement’ espousing return; and the existence of a strong group consciousness. It may also involve discriminatory experiences in the countries a diaspora has emigrated to.

By engaging with relevant literature (for example, Stuart Hall’s 1994 chapter *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*), I would aim to understand how someone’s involvement in repeal campaigns contributed to the development of a new or changed imagination of their diasporic community, even years after migrating.

### **What primary research material might you use?**

I would like to use semi-structured interviews with members of diaspora campaigns to repeal the Eighth Amendment (most likely through the London-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign). This would involve a limited number of open-ended questions to promote discussion, to allow participants to raise and orient to what they considered to be the most salient aspects of their experiences within diaspora campaigning. I would aim to trial questions at one pilot interview (to ensure the questions allow participants to describe their lives in a meaningful way) and then, if necessary, moderate questions. I would then look to interview five to six organisers of Irish diaspora campaigns.

As a former volunteer with the London-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign (and paid staff member of the UK’s member association of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, FPA), I would contact potential interviewees first using my personal connections, while offering resources to support their involvement in snowballing. Following the interviews, I would transcribe recordings and code them based on the theory outlined above. Finally, to ensure validity, I would also aim to triangulate my data against an analysis of relevant campaigning materials (accessed through campaign websites, social media platforms and the National Museum of Ireland’s Contemporary Ireland Collection), as well as media reports.

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<sup>1</sup> This is compared to resource mobilisation, which is interested in questions of individual motivation and strategies of action.

**Have you identified or spoken with a potential supervisor? If so, who?**

Yes, I've spoken to Dr Tanya Serisier (Department of Criminology), who has kindly agreed to supervise my project.