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## IN THE SHADOW OF THE EIGHTH: MY FORTY YEARS WORKING FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH IN IRELAND

Peter Boylan  
Milton Keynes: Penguin Ireland, 2019

and

## IT'S A YES! HOW TOGETHER FOR YES REPEALED THE EIGHTH AND TRANSFORMED IRISH SOCIETY

Gráinne Griffin, Orla O'Connor and Ailbhe Smyth with Alison O'Connor  
Dublin: Orpen Press, 2019

REVIEWED BY KATHERINE  
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The most significant landmark to date in the thirty-four-year struggle to end the Republic of Ireland's constitutional and legal restrictions on abortion is addressed in two important books. *It's a Yes!* details the mechanics of the Together for Yes (repeal) campaign and its victory (66.4% support) in Ireland's 2018 public referendum on abortion rights. *In the Shadow of the Eighth* offers the perspective of a physician committed to reform and someone whose assistance was, later, sought by the (then) coalition government. His assistance was sought by a government that assumed "doctors should provide leadership" in the referendum campaign and grossly underestimated the reach and influence of a citizen-led, grassroots movement for repeal (Boylan 199). *It's a Yes!* is an accessibly written, and photographically illustrated, primer on contemporary Irish citizen mobilization and engagement. Collectively authored with *Irish Examiner* columnist, Alison O'Connor, it was published eleven months after the new law and clinical guidance came into effect. It sets out the establishment of the coalition and its strategies and decision-making. It demonstrates the commitment, courage, and humility of the Together for Yes campaign's co-directors: Gráinne Griffin, founding member of the Abortion Rights Campaign; Orla O'Connor, director of the National Women's Council of Ireland; and Ailbhe Smyth, convenor of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment and marriage equality activist. *Time* magazine's 2019 list of "most influential people" recognized all three as "icons." The energy and creativity of organizers, campaigners, and artists are recorded here. Activists are likely to gravitate to details about engaging with politicians and political processes (here, the Citizen's Assembly and Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment) and

campaign tactics. Researchers will likely be drawn to the story about how public uses of shame were reshaped by storytellers into understandings about health and humanity.

The relatively short time-to-publication may account for certain silences, about which the co-authors and campaign co-directors are probably already aware. Fractures between local groups and the national Together for Yes campaign could be analyzed more closely. What might be lost in the Together for Yes campaign decision to present "a united front" (Griffin, O'Connor, and Smyth 117)? How might the authors respond to criticisms that the campaign's central principles—care, compassion, and change—are inadequate to instigate significant human rights reform? Upon reflection, what might they say about the exclusion of migrant and marginalized groups and voices from among the coalition's leadership? And how might they rethink marginality in their written account?

As a medical doctor, former Master of the National Maternity Hospital, and chair of the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Ireland, Dr. Peter Boylan's voice was heard often in campaigning. Together for Yes executive member, Sinéad Kennedy notes that, in the female-led campaign for repeal, the voices of male physicians were prioritized by government and media (Griffin, O'Connor, and Smyth 162). Boylan has certainly endured his own professional "collision course with the Catholic Church" (Boylan 43). His account of working "in the shadow of the eighth" is valuable for the exposure of anti-choice physicians within the Irish medical profession, and for questions he asks about the current political arrangements to relocate Dublin's National Maternity Hospital to land administered by the Catholic Church's Sisters of Mercy (176, 263). In the post-referendum

period, where abortion is legal but limited, this relocation requires the exercise of canon law and the National Maternity Hospital's strict adherence to a Catholic ethos. It is important to acknowledge allyship in Boylan's account, but also to recognize where it undermines autonomous decision-making, including Boylan's insistence that self-managed

medication abortion requires "proper medical consultation" (117).

Both books fit into a body of published and forthcoming, first-hand, post-referendum accounts in print (*In Her Shoes: Women of the Eighth*, New Island Books, 2020) and in film (*The 8th*, Persister Films, 2020, and *When Women Won*, Irish Film Institute, 2020). They are important

reminders that hard-won victories are not necessarily secure victories. These first-hand accounts are crucial for fully understanding health in contemporary Ireland, and their significance should not be underestimated in light of the 2020 review, by a newly elected centrist coalition government, of the law and clinical guidance governing legal abortion access.