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On August 1st 2014, Dr. Sarah-Anne Buckley joined a panel discussion event taking place at Áras na NGael in Galway, to discuss the artist Marie Brett's artwork - *Anamnesis* - prior to the launch of The Amulet National Exhibition Tour in Galway Arts Centre, that same evening. These are the historian's notes, kindly gifted, so that others might follow her train of thought which informed a lively discussion alongside other speakers from arts, healthcare and folkloric perspectives.

I'm delighted to be here today – I think that this is a fantastic and moving exhibition and I want to congratulate Marie and all involved.

I've been invited here today to provide the broad historical context. I'm not an expert on cillíní but I'm happy to answer any questions I can. There has been fantastic research done by archaeologists such as Toni Maguire and many local histories which I can recommend. The numbers of children placed in cillíní are still not known but, are in the thousands without question. There is a role here for medical historians as well as social historians – a story that needs work from a number of disciplines. But for now I'll talk broadly about 20th century Ireland.

Ireland's social history in the context of women, pregnancy and female sexuality is one full of silences, knowing glances and very personal stories. The emergence of many previously unspoken histories in the public domain over the last 15 years has been particularly cathartic for and for Irish society generally. Secularism and a critique of the Catholic Church has been an understandable response. Women in twentieth century Ireland were treated unfairly – given the mantle of being the 'moral keepers' of Irish society by the Church, the State and their communities. The results have not always made for pretty reading – forced adoptions, high infanticide rates, placement in Magdalene Laundries, the banning of all information on sex and birth control methods, the setting up of

mother and baby homes, ignoring sexual abuse within the family and outside, the removal of children to institutions for being poor, the consistently higher number of women in psychiatric facilities and other institutions, and in the case of this fantastic exhibition, the removal of any space for families and couples to grieve the death of their children, the silences and pain they endured and religious practices that were adhered to and questioned by very few. Dissenting voices were a part of Irish history, but due to censorship and marginalisation, we did not have as many voices and were need to make a substantial impact.

Growing up in a town in Cork I did not know of Irish cillíní, they were not discussed in my house. Yet stories of unmarried mothers, grieving fathers and silent families perpetrate all or many of our homes. Be it an aunt or sister in a mother and baby home, a number of miscarriages and still births, an adopted uncle/aunt, or just the feeling of guilt many men and women experienced – families in Ireland have many untold histories to be explored and wounds to heal as a result. Perhaps the stories of the burial of children and others in cillíní is still emerging and we should embrace the narrative as it may help those we could never speak before.

Women fared quite badly in this society, from churching to other actions that would 'cleanse them' of their sins – in many cases the only sin was being a woman. Men suffered badly also,

men who had to bury their babies in the dead of night and men who were not given space to talk of children or grieve, or to be involved in a holistic way in family life. The history of fatherhood in twentieth century Ireland is one that needs to be better explored – and perhaps will be during this discussion.

So cillini were not discussed in my house until a number of years ago when my cousin organised a family walk in Bere Island so that the sponsorship would pay to put a plaque in the cemetery that recognised the many unbaptised children and others seen unfit to be buried in consecrated ground. Little would we know another cousin would be lost a few years later.

I think we must acknowledge the broader social history here – one which highlighted women's role as mothers in the 1937 constitution, but ostracised a number of categories of mothers and wives. We need only look at the treatment of widows in comparison to unmarried mothers. Or the case of deserted wives who would not receive a welfare payment until 1970. A woman's security and future was so often wrapped up in marriage, which was fine when all went well. When it did not the community was often not as forgiving.

From the foundation of the Irish Free State, a constitution and legislative agenda that was so influenced by morality and religion would not serve everyone well or equally.

Archaeologists and anthropologists have done fantastic work on cillíní, and the role of folklore in this narrative is key. Historians need to be more engaged, need to continue to acknowledge the past wrongs and experiences for grieving parents and families, as well as the lives of vulnerable children today.

There is a very different attitude today to the issue of losing a baby or young child – yet there possibly remains a history of talking less and getting on with matters. I think a younger generation would find the idea of cillini

preposterous, would find that fact that homosexuality was illegal until the 1990s, as was committing suicide inhumane. Would not understand how a society could impose ideas such as churching. Yet we are not unique – in Bali a child will not be placed on the ground until they are 1 year old. The couple will not go to church for 40 days. Ireland's history is not unique – what was interesting was how homogenous Irish society was, how certain practices were universal and accepted without question.

I believe this exhibition will add to the social history and the current narrative and offer a space for past and present to exist in harmony.