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COMPLUTENSE**News values and feminisms: a campaign for gender equality in Irish higher education**Elza Aparecida de Oliveira Filha<sup>1</sup>; Lennita Oliveira Ruggi<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract.** Since at least 2014, a feminist campaign is challenging gender inequality in Irish universities. Seven legal complaints initiated by female lecturers against the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) successfully placed the issue in the spotlight and culminated in the transformation of the national higher education policy. This article considers the news value mobilized in reporting the campaign. The aim is to investigate how the stories were picked and framed by newspapers, asking how feminisms are portrayed and potentially co-opted by mainstream media. Data was gathered by searching the name of the litigants in digital archives from the two largest national daily newspapers (the Irish Independent and The Irish Times), as well as a local weekly publication (the Connacht Tribune). A sample of 111 texts is analysed based on Gislaine Silva's news value typology. The results indicate the news value with greater incidence were *conflict*, *collectivity* and *celebrity*, revealing media events as crucial to disrupt the exclusion or dismissal of feminisms from journalistic discourse. The empirical research offers a fertile terrain to reflect on media depictions of contemporary feminisms as well as the politics of memory related to the suffragette movement.

**Keywords:** Gender and Journalism; News values; Feminism memory; Gender equality in higher education; Irish media; NUI Galway.

**[es] Valores, noticias y feminismos: una campaña por igualdad de género en la enseñanza superior irlandesa**

**Resumen.** Desde por lo menos 2014, una campaña feminista está desafiando la desigualdad de género en las universidades irlandesas. Siete demandas judiciales empezadas por profesoras contra la National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) incluyeron, con éxito, el tema en la agenda pública y culminaron en la transformación de las políticas nacionales para la enseñanza superior. Este artículo considera los valores noticia movilizados para relatar la campaña. El objetivo es investigar como las historias fueron seleccionadas y enmarcadas por la media hegemónica. Las noticias fueron recolectadas con palabras clave que eran los nombres de las litigantes en los archivos digitales de los dos más grandes diarios irlandeses (Irish Independent e Irish Times), también de un semanario local (Connacht Tribune). La muestra de 111 publicaciones se analizó con base en la tipología de valores noticia desarrollada por Gislaine Silva. Los resultados indican que los valores noticia con más incidencia fueron conflicto, colectividad y celebridad, desvelando que la realización de eventos mediáticos es crucial para romper la exclusión o condena de la agenda feminista en los discursos periodísticos. La pesquisa empírica ofrece un terreno fértil para reflexionar sobre la representación mediática de los feminismos contemporáneos, además de pensar la política de la memoria relativa al movimiento sufragista.

**Palabras clave:** Género y Periodismo; Valores noticia; Memoria feminista; Igualdad de género en la enseñanza superior; Media irlandesa; NUI Galway.

**[pt] Valores, notícias e feminismos: uma campanha pela igualdade de gênero no ensino superior irlandês**

**Resumo.** Desde pelo menos 2014, uma campanha feminista está desafiando a desigualdade de gênero nas universidades irlandesas. Sete processos judiciais iniciados por professoras contra a National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) incluíram com sucesso o tema na agenda pública e culminaram na transformação das políticas nacionais para o ensino superior. Este artigo considera os valores notícia mobilizados para relatar a campanha. O objetivo é investigar como as histórias foram selecionadas e enquadradas pela mídia hegemônica. As notícias foram coletadas usando como palavras chave os nomes das litigantes nos arquivos digitais dos dois maiores jornais irlandeses (Irish Independent e Irish Times) e de um semanário local (Connacht Tribune). A amostra de 111 publicações é analisada com base na tipologia de valores notícia desenvolvida por Gislaine Silva. Os resultados indicam que os valores notícia com maior incidência foram *conflito*, *coletividade* e *celebridade*, revelando que a realização de eventos midiáticos é crucial para romper com a exclusão ou depreciação da agenda feminista nos discursos jornalísticos. A pesquisa empírica oferece um terreno fértil para refletir sobre a representação midiática dos feminismos contemporâneos, assim como sobre a política da memória relativa ao movimento sufragista.

**Palavras-chave:** Gênero e Jornalismo; Valores notícia; Memória feminista; Igualdade de gênero no ensino superior; Media irlandesa; NUI Galway.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most melodramatic scenes in *Suffragette*<sup>3</sup> re-enacts the death of Emily Davison (1872-1913) in the Epsom Derby, where she was trampled by Anmer, King George V's horse. The film portrays her act as a heroic gesture to attract attention because the original plan to unfurl purple banners in front of the cameras was frustrated by a security cordon surrounding the King. Davison's death finds meaning in the subsequent headlines since the efforts made to achieve mediatic coverage for the suffragette's cause are an essential dimension of the plot. A main undercurrent of the film concerns precisely the dominant news values preventing feminists' claims from entering public debate<sup>4</sup>.

*Suffragette*'s theme is not altogether fictional nor confined to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP, 2015:1) has repeatedly argued that the "world reported in the news is mostly male". Data collected from 114 countries in 2015 demonstrates 'women'<sup>5</sup> are the central focus of only 10% of the stories. Even though comprising one-fourth of all sources cited in the news, women are underrepresented in the most prominent stories related to politics or economics. "In terms of the function which women perform in news as sources and subjects, women are mostly asked to provide popular opinion (41%) or personal experience (38%): women were only quoted as 'experts' in 17% of stories". The GMMP estimates that gender stereotypes were challenged in just 4% of the news analysed.

Parallel to statistic evidence, several qualitative investigations show women are the subject of a smaller share of journalistic output and feminist viewpoints are given marginal coverage in newspapers internationally<sup>6</sup>. Feminist movements themselves are frequently presented in an unflattering light, so much so that Angela McRobbie (2009) devised the term 'post-feminism' to describe the repertoire of tropes circulating in the entertainment industry in England. Post-feminism is the discursive device through which the movement is simultaneously evoked, acknowledged, and vilified. This 'double entanglement' delegitimizes its public puissance and its contemporary relevance (McRobbie, 2009; Dean, 2009:391).

<sup>3</sup> British film directed by Sarah Gavron and released in 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The proposition of a causal relationship between mainstream media and public debates was firstly suggested by Walter Lippmann in the 1920s. The most well-known statement in the so-called 'agenda setting theory' was formulated by Cohen: "The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (quoted by McCombs and Shaw 2000: 49).

<sup>5</sup> The use of inverted commas flags our understanding that the category is a site of relevant political debate (Bacchi, 2017: 20, 4; Butler, 1992: 19). The marks will nonetheless be dropped, and hegemonic gender terms will be employed throughout the text because presumed binarism is one of the founding stones in the debates tackled, both empirically and theoretically.

<sup>6</sup> See Rita Terezhina Schmidt (2006) and Eliane Gonçalves (2011) researching the Brazilian context, Kaitlynn Mendes (2011, 2012) comparing USA and UK, Agaredech Jemaneh (2013) on Ethiopia, Sherwood et al. (2017) on Australia, and Mateo del Cabo et al. (2018) on Spain.

Kaitlynn Mendes (2012) finds a strong post-feminist trend in her study of British and US newspapers. Investigating publications from 2008, she concludes "the prevailing sensibility was that (western) women are now equal, and anyone who argues otherwise is personally responsible for their own failure" (Mendes 2012:565). Social 'progress' and equality legislation guarantee to any (hard-working and resourceful) woman the opportunity to 'reach the top'. Aligned with the neoliberal canon, mainstream journalism's emphasis on individual choice prevails. Feminist engagement is at best depicted as a personal preference or style – emptied of any political potential. Mendes (2012: 555) identifies an obliteration of feminism as a public relevant force coupled with the fact that "discourses of feminism have become both de-politicised and de-radicalized since the 1960s, and can now largely be considered neoliberal in nature – a problematic construction for those seeking collective social change".

Countering mediatic devaluation, McRobbie argues that the radical alternatives offered by feminisms are timely and essential in contemporary 'battles for meaning' because they interpret subordination/exploitation/inequality as a collective rather than individual issue<sup>7</sup>. The circulation and preservation of memories of struggles are precious to contestatory politics. Despite repeated attempts to efface or slander these repertoires, they populate news reports and shape present struggles as well as their accounts. Emily Davison's life, plight, and disputed heritage are not completely alien to entertainment media (Gavron's movie being an example) nor to journalism. On 11 June 1913, *The Times* published "The Suffragist Outrage at the Derby" and quoted the court's verdict to describe Davison's fate after "wilfully rushing on to the racecourse". 'Wilfulness' is a derogatory term repeatedly used against feminists (Ahmed 2017). Its traffic from legal to journalistic to historical texts is an interesting example of media role in sustaining (and shaping) narratives. This is even more significant because the same quote is now incorporated as one of descriptors on Davison's Wikipedia-entry, a source itself to researches like the present one.

Indeed, the basic assumption in the theory of journalism states news' production affects and simultaneously is affected by 'reality' (Traquina 2004). A suffragette killed during a broadcasted horse race is worth the headlines. But how are feminists' actions conveyed? Or, following Jonathan Dean's (2010:392) formulation: "Under what conditions can feminism be affirmed and rendered intelligible within mainstream public discourse[?]"

<sup>7</sup> McRobbie reasserts "(...) the need for new radical imaginaries, so that people, for example subordinated groups, can find the means to imagine a way of moving out of privatised or hopelessly individualised subordination, into a social space which allows them to understand their circumstances as a form of oppression which they share in common with others. These imaginaries are a resource, a source of hope, a space that offers vocabularies, concepts, histories, narratives, and experiences which can illuminate the predicament or powerlessness and help to find ways of overcoming such circumstances" (McRobbie 2009:49).

Researching British newspapers, Dean challenges the theoretical preponderance achieved by post-feminism. He proposes broadening investigational efforts to consider not only how feminism is disavowed, but also how it is confirmed and co-opted by hegemonic media. “[P]erhaps a weakening of the assumption of feminist marginality might serve the dual purpose of enabling a closer and more subtle analysis of the relationship between feminism and mainstream gender discourses, on the one hand, whilst potentially even opening up new political possibilities, on the other” (Dean 2010:402).

Inspired by such debates, this article investigates the news values mobilized in reporting a specific case of activism for gender equality in Ireland. The research brings to the fore tensions within contemporary feminisms: How to acknowledge notable individual action without indulging in heroic-ideology or dismissing collective engagement? How to respect the suffragette legacy without narrowing the ‘stereotypical’ feminist-persona (generally a white, cis, literate, middleclass, European, heterosexual, non-disabled, and morally superior woman)? How to account for societal transformation without subscribing to progressive narratives that both dismiss present-day struggles and blend gender equality and the Western-model of ‘development’?

Settling any of these questions is the work of generations and obviously overflows the scope of this text. They nevertheless frame the analysis of the newspaper coverage of a successful feminist campaign in the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway)<sup>8</sup>. Through media involvement, gender inequality in universities became a major public issue and the increase in momentum resulted in the transformation of the national higher education policy. The aim of the paper is to investigate how the stories were picked and framed by newspapers. Which news values were mobilized in covering the feminist campaign? The guiding questions surfacing from the analysis relate to the ‘Five Ws and How’ of information gathering: Who is portrayed as a feminist? What does she do? Where, when, why, and how does she act? To approach these interrogations, it is useful to set the stage by briefly presenting the facts, characters and events.

### 1.1. Context: the feminist campaign in nui Galway

Feminist presence in NUI Galway predates 2014, but during that year two decisions from the Equality Tribunal<sup>9</sup> ruled against the institution in cases filled by female lecturers. The first decision was issued in June and involved Mary Dempsey, from the Engineering Department, who had been discriminated against on the grounds of gender, family status, and disability.

She not only was summoned to work during pregnancy-related sick leave but was downgraded upon her return and pressured to sign an unfavourable contract. Dempsey was awarded 81,000 euro as compensation and the right to have the title of ‘lecturer’ restored to her contract. NUI Galway appealed the decision, and during the subsequent trial she was not allowed to make public statements.

The second decision came in November, when the botanist Micheline Sheehy Skeffington<sup>10</sup> was awarded 70,000 euro and the right to be retroactively promoted to Senior Lecturer. Her ratings were considered unfair in comparison to the ones received by male candidates in the 2008-9 promotion round, when sixteen men and only one woman were promoted. By the time of the decision, accepted by the university<sup>11</sup>, she had taken early retirement.

Once Sheehy Skeffington’s achievement became public, five other female lecturers filled cases against the university. They had been shortlisted and deemed suitable in the same 2008-9 round but ultimately not promoted. Elizabeth Tilley (from the English department) pursued the issue in the Labour Court whilst Sylvie Lannegrand (French), Róisín Healy (History), Margaret Hodgins (Health Sciences), and Adrienne Gorman (Biochemistry) took their cases to the Higher Court. The two unions in the university IFUT (the Irish Federation of University Teachers) and Siptu (Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union) supported the litigants. Sheehy Skeffington donated her award to help cover the legal expenses and a campaign known as Micheline’s Three Conditions was initiated to pressure the university for gender equality<sup>12</sup>. After years of legal and activist struggle, the cases were am-

8 NUI Galway, in the west of Ireland, is one of the seven public universities in the country. It is composed of more than 18,000 students and approximately 2,500 academic and professional staff.

9 The Equality Tribunal was a ‘quasi-legal’ state forum that operated in Ireland between 1998 and 2005 deciding cases of discrimination under specific legislation (known as the Employment Equality Acts). It was replaced by the Workplace Relations Commission.

<sup>10</sup> Any person familiar with the suffragette movement in ‘Great’ Britain or acquainted with the history of the Irish Easter Rising will recognize the surname Sheehy Skeffington. It was created by the marriage of Hanna Sheehy (1877-1946) and Francis Skeffington (1878-1916), both eminent figures in Irish history: suffragists, pacifists, socialists, and anti-colonialists. NUI Galway has a lecture hall named in honour of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. Micheline is their granddaughter.

<sup>11</sup> In a public speech given during the launch of the Annual Sheehy Skeffington Distinguished Lecture Series held by the University Women’s Network in NUI Galway in March 8<sup>th</sup> 2019, Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington said she publicised the decision before the 28-day moratorium was over (the Equality Tribunal traditionally requires a conventional non-binding time for public relations preparation). Sheehy Skeffington argued doing so was important to gather public support, which may in itself have prevented the university from appealing. It seems that once questioned, the university changed its statement within a couple of hours, first declaring its intention to appeal and afterward accepting the decision ‘unconditionally’. Our data, based in newspaper accounts published mostly in the day after Sheehy Skeffington declaration, does not capture the shifts in the university’s intention. The narrative is nevertheless relevant concerning the ramifications of whistleblowing (Kenny 2019).

<sup>12</sup> The petition publicizing Micheline’s Three Conditions was signed by 4,211 people. The conditions were: “1. That NUI Galway promotes the five other women (...); 2. That NUI Galway admits that the subsequent round of promotions in 2014, for which there have been at least 20 appeals, was also flawed. (...) 3. That the aim of any attempt by NUI Galway to address the issue of gender imbalance in senior posts be to have an equal number of women as men in such posts and that NUI Galway starts to achieve this aim by promoting the same percentage of women from each level as the percentage of women at that level (...)”. For comprehensive information on the campaign, see <https://michelinesthreeconditions.wordpress.com>

icably settled with confidentiality agreements, Tilley's in October 2017 and the other four in July 2018.

Collective mobilization and bad publicity surrounding the cases resulted in the transformation of higher education policies. NUI Galway developed a gender equality action plan<sup>13</sup> and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) included gender in its priority agenda, actively recommending actions to stakeholders, importing the Athena SWAN Award<sup>14</sup> from the UK, monitoring annual statistics, implementing budgetary constraints, and creating new women-targeted professorial positions (HEA 2016, 2018).

Once established, institutional actions have the collateral effect of concealing the conflicts and controversies between alternative proposals to challenge inequality. Moreover, they hide the very 'battles for meaning' (and mediatic space) that made the issue public in the first place. Aware of the medium-term consequences, our aim is to take a step back and question how the debate was framed in public discourse by investigating the news values mobilised to report the campaign. It is important to highlight from the outset that in accessing newspapers' coverage the present research has no intention of passing judgment on the acts of any people involved, be they activists, academics, politicians, or journalists. Its main interest is to identify discursive trends and the underlying journalistic assumptions guiding the reports.

## 1.2. Methodology

To access media accounts of the gender equality campaign in NUI Galway, the investigation focused on the two largest Irish national daily newspapers (the Irish Independent and The Irish Times) and the local weekly journal (the Connacht Tribune). The Irish Independent and The Irish Times are both morning newspapers published in Dublin. They are the main national newspapers in terms of readership, with a daily circulation of 80,008 and 57,937, respectively<sup>15</sup>. The Connacht Tribune is a weekly publication based in Galway city. Although not registered in the Audit Bureau of Circulations, MediaLive website offers 20,702 as its circulation number and the Wikipedia page states that "[a]s [of] January 2007, its weekly readership is over 150,000"<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> The various actions proposed include quotas for promotions; guarantee of replacement for maternity or paternity leave; specific funding to promote the research of carers returning from leave; obligation to hold meetings during core hours; training on unconscious bias for member of recruitment and promotion panels; transparency in the distribution of teaching and pastoring roles; a minimum of 50% female representation in all university commissions and committees; and new administrative structures, such as the Vice-Presidency for Equality and Diversity (NUIG 2016, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> The Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) award, created by the Equality Challenge Unit, nowadays re-branded as AdvanceHE. More information available in <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/>

<sup>15</sup> Audit Bureau of Circulations apud *List of newspapers in the Republic of Ireland*. Wikipedia, 2012

<sup>16</sup> See MediaLive in [http://www.medialive.ie/index.php?option=com\\_sobipro&pid=180&sid=205](http://www.medialive.ie/index.php?option=com_sobipro&pid=180&sid=205): connacht-tribune-city-tribune&Itemid=0> and *Connacht Tribune*. Wikipedia, 2018 (Access January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020).

Data collection used the search engines available in the newspapers' websites bounding the results from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 to March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The keywords employed were the names of the seven lecturers who filled cases against the university. Reports not related to the campaign or featuring namesakes were excluded from the sample. A total of 111 publications was collected, including news, opinion articles, and interviews/personal portraits. To analyse the data on the third section, the article now turns to the synthesis of the literature grounding the theoretical approach.

## 2. Newsworthiness criteria

Newsworthiness refers to the factors sustaining the selection of editorial content. It guides information vehicles' decisions about favoured subjects or framings. The concept of newsworthiness is defined by Nelson Traquina (2002:173) as "a set of criteria and operations that justify a journalistic treatment, that is, to acquire value as news"<sup>17</sup>. In a similar vein, Mauro Wolf (1995: 170) states "newsworthiness corresponds to the set of criteria, operations, and instruments with which the information media faces the task of choosing, every day, from an unpredictable and indefinite number of facts, a finite and tendentially stable amount of news". The newsworthiness criteria, therefore, encompass several ordering factors that determine whether an event should occupy space in the news:

Certain events, ideas, and themes are, in some way, the referents of journalistic discourses. However, the "event" gains in the competition, even more so because the pace of journalistic work makes it difficult to offer a similar emphasis to the invisible and long-lasting social problems and processes. (...) If we think about what unites the various phenomena generically denominated by events, we may find its character of notoriety within a social, historical and cultural context that co-determines this notoriety (Sousa, 2002: 21).

Eni Orlandi (2000) and José Marques de Melo (2003), among others, challenge the existence of neutral or objective texts. The choice of themes, the framing, the sources, the very terms with which the sentences are composed indicate positioning of authorship, permeated with political assumptions<sup>18</sup>.

According to Jorge Pedro Sousa (2002), events are singular, concrete, and observable occurrences, delimited in time and space. Although the 'real' is contin-

<sup>17</sup> All quotations from texts originally published in Portuguese or Spanish are translated by the authors.

<sup>18</sup> It is important to acknowledge the existence of different journalistic genres, even though it will not be feasible to consider the issue in the present investigation. News reporting is limited, as a narrative form, in offering readers a comprehensive framing of an event by either interpreting its causes or discussing its consequences. Journalism directly addressed to the formation of public opinion is carried out in the 'opinion' genres, which includes articles such as commentaries and editorials, but also letters from readers. The distribution of labour within news vehicles limits the topics discussed in the opinion genres in comparison to the number of events described in the news.

uous and all phenomena are intertwined, journalism ‘manipulates’ events to make them communicable. The timeliness of an occurrence is an important fact in journalistic discourses. Viviane Borelli (2005:7) defines journalism as a device for the production of meanings where a ‘menu’ of actualities is constructed and offered: “Every newspaper produces its own event, engendering a particular notion of reality”.

Although news and events are interlinked, most aspects of reality are out of reach of the news media. Nilton Lage (2001) exemplifies this with the image of the mountain slopes and the valleys between them, protected from the view of the pilot. “That is why news does not suffice as knowledge and that another type of investigation is necessary to unravel the relations between the facts (...). What one thinks, or what the people trust, is not news unless it is manifested (made apparent) in a given discourse, in an election” (Lage, 2001:69). Emily Davison’s story is a case in point: the suffragettes’ decades long struggle for the right to vote was not as ‘noticeable’ as a tragic death in the horse track. Moreover, its violent character and the availability of footage and pictures made it especially likely to attract media attention.

News can therefore be understood as the ‘production’ of events, legitimizing their entry into history. Once published, news itself can trigger other events, as argued by Sousa (2002). In the example considered here, the publicization of one legal decision on gender discrimination against a lecturer provoked five other cases, collectivizing an individual event.

## 2.1. News value as editorial decision

For a complete formulation of the concept of news value, it is necessary to relate it to the broader comprehension of news as a social construction, as a cultural product. As Michael Schudson (1995:3) states:

[W]e can understand the news media better if we recognize that what it produces – news – is a form of culture. This is to assert that news is related to, but not the same as, ideology; it is related to, but not the same as, information; and it is potentially, but only indirectly, a social force.

In practice, news values operate in a complementary way. “In the selection of events to be transformed into news, relevance criteria work together ‘in packages’: it is the different relationships and combinations established between different news values, that ‘recommend’ the selection of a fact” (Wolf, 1995: 175). Moreover, news values work throughout the journalistic production process, operating not only at the moment of news selection, but also in subsequent activities. They comprise a set of rules used by professional journalists to systematize and routinize their practices. Recognising this selection widens the significance of the gendered picture of contemporary journalism revealed by the GMMP (2015).

Wolf (1995) argues that news values, while revealing a strong homogeneity within the professional

culture, change over time, incorporating novel components as part of the evaluation process. Societal transformations are the primary cause of these changes, and gender issues are an obvious example. According to Wolf, “news-values derive from implicit assumptions or considerations relating: a) to the substantive characteristics of news; to its *content*; b) to the availability of the material and the criteria for the information *product*; c) to the *public*; and d) to *competition*” (Wolf, 1995: 179, italics in the original).

This article adopts the typology of news values developed by Gislene Silva (2005). She proposes differentiated sets of noticeability criteria – related to the *origin*, to the *treatment* and to the *framing* of the facts – that work concomitantly. The primary selection made by journalists operates at the *origin* of the facts. It is based on the professionally recognized news values and considered as the fact’s own attributes or typical characteristics. The *treatment* of facts includes criteria centred on

(...) the hierarchical selection of facts and taking into account, beyond the news values of the chosen facts, also organizational aspects, such as the product format, the quality of the journalistic material ascertained (both text and image), the deadline, the infrastructure, the technology available, etc., as well as extra-organizational factors directly and intrinsically linked to the exercise of journalistic activity, such as the reporter’s relations with the sources and the public (Silva 2005: 2).

Finally, the third set of noticeability criteria is the *framing* of the facts: “based on the ethical, philosophical and epistemological foundations of journalism, comprising concepts of truth, objectivity, public interest, impartiality, which guide the actions and intentions of the previous axes” (Silva 2005:2).

Separating the news values into three main axes highlights that the noticeability decisions continue throughout the journalistic production process and have multiple influences. The primary selection, according to Silva, operates in the initial stage, which involves choosing particular events, among thousands of others, to appear in the news.

But it is not enough for news selectors to choose between an event that will be published and another that will be left out. Among those selected, it will be necessary to choose again which ones deserve to be in the advertisements or which ones will get the first pages of the printed ones, or even which will occupy more space in the internal pages. The selection, therefore, extends to writing, editing, and publishing, when it is necessary not only to choose but to hierarchize (Silva 2005:5).

Silva proposes to consider, firstly, attributes that function as macro news values, or prerequisites for any journalistic selection, in the absence of which none of the other attributes – defined by her as micro news values – will be taken into account. The proposition entails the creation of a double-layered typology. Table 1 presents the news values proposed by Silva to operationalize analysis of news events, which will be used to evaluate the coverage of the Irish newspapers:

Table 1. News values typology

MACRO NEWS VALUE		
Actuality (novelty)	Importance / Interest	Repercussion
Negativity / Positivity	Unpredictability / predictability	Collectivity / Individuality
MICRO NEWS VALUE		
<i>Impact</i> N° of people involved (in the fact) / affected (by the fact) Large sums (money)	<i>Prominence</i> Notoriety / Celebrity Hierarchic position Elite (person, institution, country) Success / Hero(ine)	<i>Proximity</i> Geographic Cultural
<i>Surprise</i> Unexpected	<i>Polemic</i> Controversial Scandal	<i>Conflict</i> War / Fight Rivalry / Dispute Strike / Claim
<i>Tragedy / Drama</i> Catastrophe / Accident / Crime Risk of death and Death Violence / Suspense / Emotion Human interest	<i>Government / Justice</i> Judgement / Complaint Investigation / Search and seizure Judiciary decision / Crime	<i>Government</i> National interest Election Arbitration / Report Launch / Trip Pronouncement
<i>Rarity</i> Uncommon Original Unusual	<i>Entertainment / Curiosity</i> Adventure Amusement Sport Celebration	<i>Knowledge / Culture</i> Discoveries / Inventions Researches / Progress Activities / Cultural values Religion

Source: Adapted from Silva 2005.

No event has one single uncontroversial news value. In fact, Silva argues that news values superimpose themselves and the same event may carry contradictory attributes. So it is that “[a]n event whose dominant news value is *tragedy* or *prominence* may be the result of a combination of the negative-collective-unforeseen or positive-individual-predicated macro-attributes, or the result of all possible variations therein, including macro values *important (public interest)* and/or *interesting (interested public)*” (Silva 2005:12, italics in the original).

Silva’s typology is useful to categorise news values operating in specific news’ reports. It offers a relevant framework to develop Dean’s question about what renders feminisms noticeable and intelligible. As argued in the introduction, noticeability criteria have traditionally prevented feminist demands to occupy media space. This is not surprising since journalism as a public institution has always been deeply interwoven with misogynous (as well as racist, classist, ableist and colonial) power structures, reinforcing

gender boundaries and relegating ‘the feminine’ to the realm of the private. But which news values are mobilised when a feminist campaign does reach the headlines? The next section addresses this issue by analysing the empirical case.

### 3. News values in a feminist campaign

#### 3.1. Results and analysis

This section will initially present the quantified data relevant to draw a broad picture of the sample and then analyse the incidence of news values in different moments of the campaign. Chart 1 shows the volume of entries in each newspaper by year. The Irish Times has the largest number of publications related to the cases (68), followed by the Independent (31), and by the weekly Connacht Tribune (16). The coverage oscillates in time but is sustained throughout more than five years, the peak moments being 2015 and 2016.

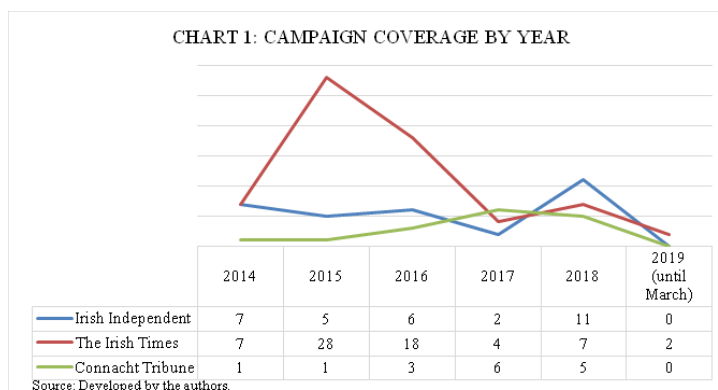


Chart 2 displays the percentages of authorship by gender. To classify authorship, the first name presented in the publications was categorised according to traditional gender assignments. Validating Anne O’Brien’s (2017) insight into the importance of fe-

male journalists in thematising gender issues, 58% items in the sample were written by women. It is worth comparing this with GMMP’s 2015 figures, according to which women were responsible for reporting 37% of stories (GMMP 2015:1).

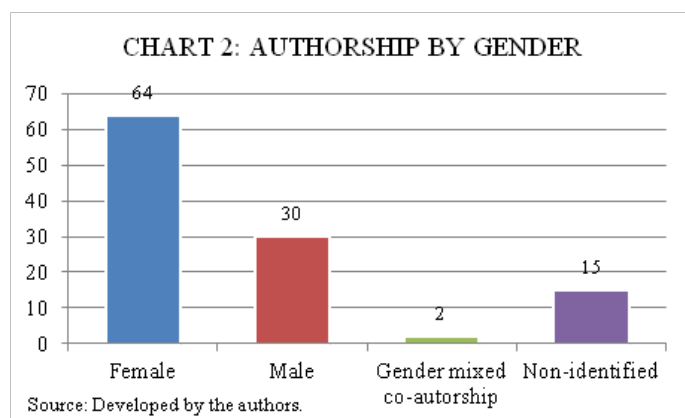
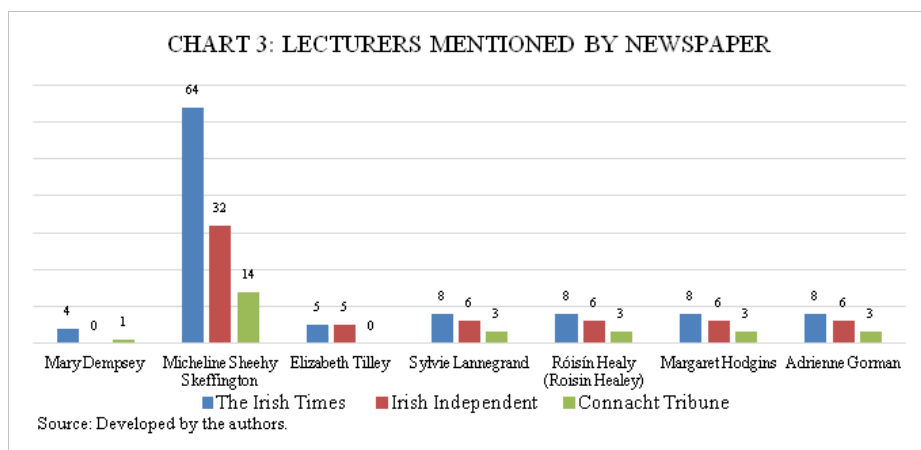


Chart 3 presents the number of publications mentioning each litigants’ name in the different newspapers. As can be seen at first glance, Sheehy Skeffington’s presence is substantially greater. Two facts are relevant to account for this disparity: all other lecturers were bound by juridical secrecy and were still working in NUI Galway during the analysed period. Although both reasons are important, they are only a partial explanation. Sheehy Skeff-

ington’s became a ‘landmark case’. As a rule, her name was alluded whenever the other complaints were mentioned<sup>19</sup> and the decision in her favour featured in other texts dealing with gender equality more broadly. Sheehy Skeffington was catapulted to the position of public personality and came to embody feminist legacy itself as an effect of activism and media coverage. She was not prominent in the beginning of the events



When first reporting the decisions in favour of Mary Dempsey and Micheline Sheehy Skeffington, newspapers did not include litigants’ names in the titles, offering precedence to the university instead, e.g.: “Equality Tribunal upholds complaint against NUI Galway” (Connacht 16/06/14), and “Galway University ordered to pay female lecturer 70k and promote her” (Independent 17/11/14). At least three news values are operationalized in this instance: the *novelty/actuality*; the *impact* related to the amount of money involved; and the

micro-value *government* related to the legal decision. Mary Dempsey’s story (16/06/14) was not covered by national newspapers, highlighting also geographic *proximity* as noticeability criteria in the case of Connacht Tribune. Conversely, the Connacht Tribune did not report on Sheehy Skeffington’s decision in November 2014 when it was covered by other media.

The first accounts published are based on the legal decisions and no comment is attributed to either lecturer, but differences are already apparent in the size of texts: Dempsey receives 15 lines<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Only two news reports mention the other lecturers without referencing Micheline, both published by the Connacht (16/06/14 and 22/06/17).

<sup>20</sup> Lines have approximately 100 characters without spaces.

in the Connacht Tribune and her case is not immediately reported by national newspapers, in comparison with approximately 32 lines dedicated to Micheline in each the Independent and the Times. Whilst Mary Dempsey is described as “a lecturer in the Engineering Department”, Sheehy Skeffington gets more attention. Newspapers report she had been working at NUI Galway since 1990 and had applied for promotion to Senior Lecturer four previous times, always being deferred, even after internal appeals. The Times cites the description of her being ‘highly inspiring for students’ as testified in the Equality Tribunal. Pictures are included<sup>21</sup>. The Independent mentions her grandmother, the suffragette Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. Both publications print excerpts from the court decision with statistical data on gender inequality at the university and an official note by NUI Galway ‘unreservedly’ accepting the decision.

Two weeks later, Sheehy Skeffington figures again in the newspapers, this time with her name as an active subject in the titles: “Sheehy Skeffington to use equality award to help colleagues” (Times 5/12/14). Pictures of her and the five other litigants in the Quadrangle, an iconic building in NUI Galway, indicate they had scheduled a first collective mediatic event. The news values activated are *unpredictability* and *rarity*, as well as *prominence*, for Sheehy Skeffington starts to be constructed as a heroine. The fact that new cases were brought against the University after the ruling in favour of Sheehy Skeffington was reported corroborates the idea that the media participates in shaping ‘reality’. At this point in the coverage, sources become more varied, including not only the Equality Tribunal decision, but statements by Róisín Healy (sometimes spelled Roisin Healey), Sheehy Skeffington, the university president, and documents from the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

The inclusion of other sources and the expansion of institutions concerned is evidence of the transition from a specific event to a public issue. Róisín Healy declares: “(...) we were very surprised to read then in the report that there was discrimination against women and against people with any caring responsibilities which in this case was all women” (Independent 4/12/14). The Times quotes ‘the academics’ saying: “It was on reading the tribunal findings that we all realized that we had experienced discrimination” (5/12/14). The statements express the ‘discovery’ of gender inequality in Irish higher education institutions, shared by the lecturers, the newspapers and probably the readers. The deepening of the public understanding of personal discrimination as an expression of structural inequality is part of the feminist repertoire as envisioned by McRobbie (2009). The statements and the journalistic framing testify to the transformation of an individual epi-

sode into a shared problem, creating a foundation for contesting academic inequality. Sheehy Skeffington herself describes her reasons as collective: “I took my action to help other women and not just for myself” (Independent 4/12/14). Another news value can, therefore, be identified: *collectivity*.

It is worth stressing, however, that some cases are more “collectivize-able” than others. Mary Dempsey’s decision is mentioned by journalist Lorna Siggins, who wrote about NUI Galway’s appeal when reporting on the five new cases for the Times (17/12/14, 8/01/15, 20/01/15, and 5/05/15). The Independent does not report on Dempsey’s case, and the Connacht Tribune does not mention Mary Dempsey after June 2014, failing to report even NUI Galway’s appeal. No statement by her is published at any moment in the campaign and no newspaper alludes trying to contact her. The references to Elizabeth Tilley, Sylvie Lannegrand, Róisín Healy, Margaret Hodgins, and Adrienne Gorman are strictly related to the legal episodes. Firstly, in the event of Micheline’s donation, secondly when they file the cases, thirdly when their hearings are adjourned, and finally in the settling of their disputes through mediation. The news values activated are *actuality*, *justice*, *repercussion*, *polemic* and *conflict*.

A different picture emerges from the descriptions of a suffragette’s granddaughter. A longer article entitled “Micheline Sheehy Skeffington: ‘I’m from a family of feminists. I took this case to honour them’” portrays her as a dedicated advocate against injustice (Times 6/12/14). The seventy-line report, signed by journalist Rosita Boland, quotes her saying: “I believe I was representing discrimination against women in general. I have it in the genes”. The Connacht Tribune also stresses the genealogical connection when it states: “Fighting for justice is in Micheline’s bloodlines” (21/05/16). She is quoted as declaring not to have a ‘lavish lifestyle’. Anchored in the reputation of her grandparents and a disturbingly biologized discourse, newspapers use her persona and her case as reference points, founding and grounding debates. Sheehy Skeffington’s depiction by newspapers seems to fit the trend identified by Kate Kenny’s (2019: 2) to simplify and glorify individuals who speaks up about perceived wrongdoing in an organisation<sup>22</sup>.

Once the heroic character seems to be consolidated, newspapers publicise activist initiatives placing her as the main character. These are mostly ‘media events’, conceived to gather press attention and designed to become news, as described by Sousa (2002). Thus, between the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2016, newspapers print, for example: “Former lecturer who won €70k gender discrimination case urges college staff to join her in protest” (Independent 12/8/14); “Sheehy Skeffington petition

<sup>21</sup> A striking feature of Irish newspapers is the repetition of images (there are photos of Micheline Sheehy Skeffington republished five or even ten times in the sample).

<sup>22</sup> “The familiar narrative of the whistleblower as a good and heroic individual who does the right thing and speaks up to challenge a clear wrong emerges in academic accounts as well as in popular culture, but amounts to a reduction of a complex process” (Kenny 2019: 8)



demands better equality at NUIG” (Times 8/12/14)<sup>23</sup>. The news values *conflict* (claim) and *prominence* are dominant in these accounts.

Statements given by Jim Browne, NUI Galway President during the period, generalise the problem. He affirms: “the Irish sector as a whole, has had a poor record on the promotion of women into senior roles” (Times 5/15/14). The strategy, employed repeatedly during the coverage, can be understood as a manoeuvre to control the damage in the public image of the university. But it also functions to politicise gender equity in higher education as a public concern. Jim Browne announced the creation of a Gender Equality Task Force to review NUI Galway’s internal practices, and the appointment of members became a contentious point. Sheehy Skeffington’s name was initially considered, and this is the context in which the “Three Conditions” campaign was created<sup>24</sup>. The news value *conflict* (claim / dispute) is relevant and will remain present throughout the following months, while the media follow the cases unfolding.

Several social movements played a role in keeping gender equality as a trending topic, including the two labour unions active in the university (Siptu and IFUT), the Student’s Union (SU), NUI Galway’s students’ societies, and several feminist groups. The demands reported in newspapers included greater autonomy and independence for the Gender Equality Task Force, and an external audit of the promotion processes. Social movements exposed disagreements and kept the agenda active through the perpetuation of *conflict* (the dominant news value): “NUIG Siptu members to vote on equality audit of posts” (Times 11/12/14); “Siptu calls for external audit of equality at NUI Galway” (Times 8/01/15); “NUIG societies back campaign for equality for women lecturers” (Times 20/01/15); “Siptu members told to boycott NUIG gender equality taskforce” (Times 24/03/15); “Unions back female NUIG lecturers in court actions over promotions” (Times 30/04/15).

The journalistic coverage of NUI Galway’s Task Force – which extends throughout the first half of 2015 and continues to a lesser extent into the following year – highlights the activation of the news value *repercussion*, as newspapers follow the events in search of their outcomes and/or consequences. The public *interest* is also a relevant news value as the cases have become part of a broader public agenda dedicated to gender and education. Some examples are the Times’ articles “Gender imbalance in the classroom – and all the way up” (20/01/15), “The great divide: why are there so few senior female ac-

ademics” (27/7/26), or the Independent’s account of new government initiatives as in “Review of gender equality on colleges” (Independent 29/05/15). Newspapers also note the presence of national and international authorities, indicating the news values *prominence* and *government*: “Minister [of Education Jan O’Sullivan] urges NUI Galway to ensure ‘proper consultation’ over gender equality” (Times 9/04/15); “Geoghegan-Quinn [former EU Commissioner] to head third-level gender equality review” (Times 20/07/15).

The initial Task Force report is depicted by newspapers through news values *innovation* and *positivity* for its recommendations in the field of Irish higher education: “NUIG president says university is committed to gender equality” (Times 5/05/15); “NUI Galway’s Governing Authority ‘fully accepts’ recommendations by Gender Equality task force” (Independent 23/6/15). Constantly present throughout the coverage is the news value *novelty*, because in every legal, academic or activist event the newspapers re-address the subject, and the news value *proximity*, since the emphasis given is proportional to the *interest* of the readership.

Soon after the initial report is issued, newspapers publicise activist’s discontent, once more indicating *conflict* as an important news value: “Unions slam NUIG gender equality report” (Connacht 24/05/16). Disputes escalate as the university threatens legal action demanding the withdrawal of information considered defamatory from the blog *MichelinesThreeConditions*. This move is questioned by the local newspaper and a remark by the journalist Dara Bradley testifies the damage to the university’s image caused by the cases: “As if NUI Galway hasn’t enough bad publicity on its plate” (Connacht 3/06/2016). Asked to comment, although not involved in running the site, Sheehy Skeffington states she is “horrified” by initiatives to shut down the campaign (Times 31/05/16).

The final report of the Gender Equality Task Force is released in May 2016. Among the 24 recommendations, ‘fully accepted’ by NUI Galway, the most controversial for the press was the establishment of gender quotas for promotion. The news value *polemic* guided different publications such as “Former academic welcomes gender quota proposal for NUI Galway” (Times 15/04/16) and “Forget tokenistic gender quotas – let’s aim for real equality” (Independent 16/04/16).

Along with the implementation of the Task Force recommendations, for the remaining months of 2016 (and to a lesser extent in 2017) newspapers started reporting on national developments connecting it to Micheline Sheehy Skeffington’s landmark case. New initiatives by the Higher Education Authority publicised included the conditionality of research subsidy to Athena SWAN accreditation: “Third-level funding to be linked to female promotions” (Independent 28/6/16). News values such as *dispute*, *impact*, *controversy*, and *government* are apparent in the texts.

<sup>23</sup> Another potential example of media event is the Micheline Sheehy Skeffington’s naval trip to the US recreating Hanna’s 1917 tour (Irish Independent 10/08/17). Since this initiative had broader dimensions as part of a shooting for a documentary, and because it did not address higher education directly, it will not be analysed in the current text, even though its reports are included in the sample.

<sup>24</sup> As already mentioned, it became the slogan of a broader campaign that publicised information through a weblog and social media, circulated a petition, and promoted political events. Since the present article focuses on mainstream newspapers, activist publications will not be considered here.

In the second half of 2017 and the beginning of 2018, Sheehy Skeffington is mentioned by newspapers in accounts that extend beyond NUI Galway. Either her case once again features as background information, or she is asked to comment on gender inequality in other fields, such as electoral politics and artistic production. After the gender equality campaign, her fame might be equal or even have surpassed that of her ancestors, as the inversion in names indicates: “Micheline Sheehy Skeffington’s grandmother, Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, was a feminist and suffragette” (Independent 20/06/18).

Another telling example is the first-person account written by Seán Bailey, an Irish descendent born and raised in the USA, who describes the process of his citizenship: “Having never lived in the Republic, I make no claim to being Irish. My attempts at learning the language are sad and funny at the same time. But I am immersed in Irish history and current events. I read. I listen. (...) I’ve shaken hands with the Irish consul Robert O’Driscoll; I’ve heard the Mayor of Galway speak; I’ve been to a lecture by Dr Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington” (Times 11/06/18). News values involved include not only *celebrity*, but *cultural values* and *cultural proximity*.

The public presence of both Micheline and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington is enhanced by the celebrations of the centenary of women’s suffrage in Ireland and the UK. In February 2018, Micheline re-enacted a protest that resulted in the detention of her grandmother for two months in 1912. Wearing antique clothes and assisted by supporting characters, she broke the windows of Dublin Castle (the former headquarters of the British Empire in Ireland) and was pretendedly arrested by the police. Micheline made an address standing on a soap box and launched a celebratory plaque in Hanna’s honour. The report by the Independent uses the occasion to draw parallels between past and present: “Smashing the windows 100 years on... but the glass ceiling remains far too resistant” (7/2/18). Accounts and images of the event gained a lot of space in the media, triggering the news values *celebration*, *violence*, *notoriety*, and (ironically) *originality*.

A week after the re-enactment, the Independent issued a 52-line publication. Its title reads: “A smashing time in Rathmines: inside the bright period property that has a suffragette past”. Rathmines is the neighbourhood in Dublin where Hanna Sheehy Skeffington used to live with her family. Referencing selected anecdotes of the illustrious former neighbours, the text describes the renovations undertaken in the property, presents four pictures of the colourful interior décor, and concludes by announcing the sale price: € 850,000. The dominant news values are *notoriety*, *celebration* and, in the case of Rathmines, *geographic proximity*. The article now turns to the discussion of the results considering previous research on Irish newspapers and inspired by critical feminist theory.

### 3.2. Discussion

Although the scope of this article prevents an in-depth mapping of Irish journalism, it is pertinent to consider historical research about the publications, most notably the work of Aoife Uí Fhaoláin (2014) on the Irish Independent, Alfred Markey (2014) on The Irish Times, and Anne O’Brien (2017) on the influx of feminists into newspapers in the 1960s/70s. Unfortunately, no similar account of the Connacht Tribune, created in 1909, was found.

The Irish Independent was founded in 1891 but gained commercial success and outperformed other newspapers following an editorial reform in 1905 (Uí Fhaoláin, 2014: 64). The promotion of independence was a feature that the Irish Independent shared with other periodicals of the early 20th century. Historical and mythological materials, as well as accounts of Irish martyrs, were central to the creation of nationalist identity. Aoife Uí Fhaoláin (2014) argues that the Irish Independent maintained a hybrid identity, simultaneously criticizing colonialism and sustaining links with the British Empire. It regularly published a column in Gaelic, promoting its use in the public sphere and reporting on the Irish cultural and linguistic movement, whilst also accepting advertisements inconsistent with the nationalist agenda.

In terms of gender, “[t]he central role of Irish women within the household was emphasised repeatedly in the Irish Independent, which also published a regular women’s page” (Uí Fhaoláin, 2014:67). Concurrently, from the beginning, several women held relevant positions in the hierarchy of the Gaelic League – among them Hanna Sheehy Skeffington – and they were not ignored by the Independent.

Founded in 1859 as a Protestant nationalist newspaper, The Irish Times consolidated itself as Ireland’s ‘highest quality newspaper’ in the mid-1960s through a ‘radical reinvention’ during which “it both benefited greatly and to a large extent led to the progressive shift in Irish society” (Markey, 2014: 59). According to Alfred Markey, the Times began to attract more affluent readers, increased advertising revenue, and became a forum for a secular and liberal middle class “who longed for the opportunity to re-examine and reshape the ideological parameters of Irish society, but in a way that was clearly thirsty for intellectual debate” (Markey, 2014: 61).

Questioning the hegemonic narratives since independence, the Times provided space to transformative social movements, notably the women’s movement (Markey, 2014: 62). In fact, Anne O’Brien maps how a group of feminists came to occupy the female editorials of the Times and other national newspapers in the late 1960s.

[F]or the first time in Irish print media women journalists covered controversial issues such as unmarried mothers, deserted wives, equal pay and contraception, from an explicitly feminist viewpoint. Predictably, the letters of complaint flooded their desks throughout the decade. Nonetheless, the work of these jour-

nalists meant that Irish women were given the forum and words with which to begin debates about the nature and extent of their oppression in Irish society. As these women journalists changed the language of social experience in Ireland, so too they changed understandings of the working world of women in Irish newsrooms (O'Brien 2017:42).

Although they were not able to change the power structures within journalistic institutions, whose senior positions continued to be occupied by men, the pioneering female journalists of the 1960s-70s developed feminist media tactics and “used their own and other’s personal stories not as an end in themselves but as a mechanism to connect social problems to specific gendered social systems that needed to change” (O'Brien 2017:51). This feminist legacy seems to correspond to McRobbie’s agenda on the importance of sustaining collective repertoires and it may have influenced the contemporary accounts on the contemporary gender equality campaign in higher education.

It is important nonetheless to highlight Irish journalism is not an oasis in terms of gender equality. Analysing the front page of the Irish Independent and the Irish Times from January to October 2019, Tom Felle, Amy Blaney, Katherine Condon, and Eimer McAuley (2019) reveal similar figures to those collected by the GMMP. Not only women are underrepresented in preeminent stories, they are also minority in reporting news related to politics and economy. In the Irish Independent, the front-page authorship is 66% male, 24% female, and 10% mixed, whilst in the Irish Times the data reveals bylines are 75% male, 17% female, and 8% mixed (Felle et al. 2019).

Qualitative research on the gendered dimension of Irish media also demonstrate the difficulty of feminist framing to be included in journalistic discourse. A telling example is offered by Jean Clarke’s and Catherine S O’Neill’s (2001) investigation of news, comments, and letters published by The Irish Times during the nurses’ and midwives’ national industrial strike in 1999. The coverage reinforced an underling hierarchy of caring practices (with an emphasis on technical skills over the emotional and personal dimensions of care) and of suffering (with children and cancer patients portrayed as the most vulnerable). According to the authors, “[i]t is regrettable that the occasion of the strike did not generate a clear debate on the nature of nursing as both expressive and technical caring. The occasion of the strike did, however, raise some familiar dinosaurs: power and patriarchy in health care” (Clarke and O’Neill 2001:357).

As the literature demonstrates, news values are suffused with power struggles. Reflecting and recreating the political interests which help shape them, news values have a decisive function in preventing certain agendas from participating in the public debate. This gatekeeping has historically prevented feminists’ claims to occupy the headlines, so much so that one of the recommendations proposed by the GMMP is to: “[r]edefine what and who counts as news. The so-

called ‘news values’ which determines newsworthiness needs to be re-evaluated and made fit for purpose for the 2010s” (2015:19). Likewise, Agaredech Jemaneh (2013: 311) argues that “newspapers, in order to enhance change in gender and gender relations, must look for the positive values that can be implemented to ensure equality of gender and gender relations. The grassroots have to be addressed. Women themselves have to be able to speak their views”.

Based on findings from the current case, it is fair to argue the claim for gender equality in higher education in Ireland managed to infiltrate newsworthiness criteria. The campaign had a consistent and long-term presence in national newspapers, totalling more than one hundred publications related to NUI Galway’s litigants from 2014 to 2019. In many texts, feminists’ claims were portrayed as legitimate, timely, and necessary. Feminists themselves were generally depicted in a positive light. The legacy of Irish female journalists from the 1960s-70s, investigated by O’Brian (2017), might have had an influence in framing the coverage. The environment found was not thus one of blatant ‘post-feminism’ as described by McRobbie (2009) and Mendes (2012).

The idea of a mediatic affirmation and co-optation of feminism, as proposed by Dean (2010), seems to be a more fruitful approach to analyse the data. Advancing the concept of ‘domestication’, Dean identifies media condemnation of radicalized feminism (characteristic of the 1970s) as a trend that assures space to a ‘moderate’ or ‘less excessive’ version of contemporary feminism, while simultaneously deploring feminism from its threatening dimensions, hence, limiting its potentialities (Dean, 2010: 393). Paradoxically, the analysis of the news values identified in the coverage indicates that the creation, preservation and deepening of *conflict* and *polemic* is one of the main resources of feminist practice<sup>25</sup>. In sustaining a critique of institutional initiatives, interpolating state entities, protesting, and performing media events, the campaign was able to mobilize news values such as *novelty/actuality*, *repercussion*, and *interest*. Those initiatives were key in transforming singular cases into public problems, therefore accessing another news value, *collectivity*.

Coupled with *conflict* and *collectivity*, the other prevalent news value identified was *prominence*. Drawing on her family reputation, media transformed Micheline Sheehy Skeffington into a feminist heroine who received considerably more space than any of the other litigants. The omnipresent image of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington as Micheline’s ancestor was key to produce her own celebrity. This in turn was mobilised to enhance suffragette history, as in the Dublin Castle window-breaking performance. The relevance of such an event to the politics of the memory can-

<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the study corroborates previous researches on the importance of social movements promoting disruption, transgression, and conflict to guarantee media coverage to their demands (cf. Oliveira Filha, 2002 on MST, the Brazilian Landless’ Workers Movement).

not be underrated. However, it is also reflective of a certain spectacularisation of feminisms that draws on and reproduces stereotypical and romanticised ideas about the suffragette movement.

How to make sense of feminist alliances with the state in promoting performative vandalism and scenographic arrests to honour the suffragettes by guaranteeing media attention? Can this be considered a contemporary development of Davison's suicide to secure a headline to the cause? If so, should we read it as a progress or a setback? A sedimented and aestheticized version of feminisms seems to be more palatable to journalism, but it is also more easily deployed by the advertising industry as demonstrated by the Rathmines' piece.

Alfred Markey's (2014: 65) critique of the Times' current editorial line could be applied to the Independent's opportunistic stance in using suffrage celebrations as a lead to a real state advertisement. He deplores "the degree to which the whole heritage of Ireland, its diaspora and the whole complex of ideas with its competing elements, diverse symbolism and heightened languages, all of which have formed the national imagination and marked its history, are being brutally reduced to the prosaic terms of the bookkeeper". That the Sheehy Skeffingtons' fame have served as news value for the sale of a property is illustrative of the potential co-optation to which a transformative project is subjected in a consumer culture that aestheticises politics, as opposed to politicising aesthetics (Benjamin, 1994).

What is more, the memorialising of the suffragette movement risks entanglement with a progress narrative that, by glorifying historical transformation, conceals contemporary inequalities. By stabilizing an image of the feminine heroine as a direct heiress of the suffragettes whose genealogy can be mapped since before the founding of the Irish state, the journalistic discourse shares a highly contestable and politically dangerous imaginary of an 'aristocratic' lineage, (re)producing a prototype of 'the feminist' as a white, zealous, and highly educated woman. This stereotype sidesteps the intersectional drive stirring feminist theory and practice for at least forty years. As Kaitlynn Mendes (2012: 565) argues, "black women, older women, lesbian or bisexual women, women of colour and women with disabilities were almost universally ignored by the mainstream press. Feminism therefore is, *in absentia*, constructed as not being of any relevance to them, when in fact it is these women who are the most structurally marginalized".

Academia is indeed a prestigious social space and that is certainly one of the reasons justifying media attention, due to news values' traditional focus on the elite. Within academia, hierarchisation of posts, grades, and disciplines further stratify notoriety and visibility. Despite newspaper coverage usually referring to university as a homogeneous institution, different groups endorse different and sometimes conflicting priorities to promote gender equality. In highlighting Sheehy Skeffington's case, the press

helped narrowing the issue to the access of women to senior positions. This claim was placed before other equally legitimate and urgent matters with gender dimensions, such as the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities, disabled or sexually non-confirming people among staff; the lack of promotion opportunities for non-academic staff; precarious work conditions for PhD candidates and post-doctoral researchers, and specific demands from international staff. It remains to be seen whether those claims will be valued enough to reach the news.

#### 4. Conclusions

You have to help me as a journalist to help you tell your story which is not a political story.

Rafeef Ziadah, *We teach life, sir*, 2011.

Dominant news values are not especially conducive to feminists' agendas. Both quantitative and qualitative pieces of research have demonstrated the marginal or dismissive presence of gender equality claims in journalism (Clarke and O'Neill 2001, Schmidt 2006, Gonçalves 2011, Mendes 2011 and 2012, Jemanah 2013, GMMP 2015, O'Brian 2017, Sherwood et al. 2017, Mateo del Cabo et al. 2018, Felle et al. 2019).

McRobbie's concept of 'post-feminism' has been employed to explain the double entanglement feminisms are subjected to when represented by mainstream media: often relegated to the past and devoid of contemporary political relevance. But post-feminism itself may have impacted journalistic relationships with feminisms, being engulfed and transformed in the ever-dynamic cultural debates.

This article has followed Dean's (2010) proposal to ask which conditions affirm and legitimise feminisms in informative media. To approach this question, the research focused on a campaign that challenged gender inequality in NUI Galway. The two main Irish papers and a local publication were surveyed, resulting in a sample of 111 news that was analysed using Silva's (2005) news values' typology. Results have demonstrated the campaign was able to infiltrate noticeability criteria.

News values' occurrence fluctuated during the data collection period (January 2014 to March 2019). In the beginning, *novelty* and *government* were more pronounced in reporting the legal decisions related to gender discrimination against female lecturers at NUI Galway. The coverage was subsequently maintained by the news values' *repercussion*, *unexpected* and *conflict* when solidarity and broader mobilisation resulted in the *collectivisation* of an individual incident. Media events were crucial to guarantee coverage and reached different groups, including the student's societies and unions.

Journalistic accounts were favoured and enhanced by the existence of a genealogy connecting

one of the litigants and her suffragette ancestor. The name Sheehy Skeffington resulted in *notoriety* as a crucial news value, a trend deepened in the later period of the campaign. The family's *celebrity* was operationalised in news about different subjects, such as debates on gender inequality in other fields. Noticeability by fame produces, however, a couple of worrisome side effects. It participates in the solidification of a feminist stereotype, narrowing a given profile in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, class status, sexuality, and moral stance – something already flagged by Mendes (2012). What is more, the use of *celebrity* as a news value may increase the manipulability of a romanticised memory of the suffragettes by marketing interests.

Awareness about the potential reinstalment of elitists framings is important because they relate to contemporary politics within feminisms and the contentious relations defining priorities and urgencies. It also alerts to the need to sustain and cultivate autonomous feminists' discourses and practices that are not totally engulfed by media-logics, just as reasoned by Léa Tosold (2018) in terms of social movements' relationship with the state.

The public-private segregation is at the core of the principles that 'value' some events as 'news' compared to the ordinary day-to-day recurrent and banalized inequalities. This fake dichotomy between the political and a 'human story' is one of the facets of the violence perpetrated by journalism, something Rafeef Ziadah conveys and criticises in her poetry. Demands for 'sound-bites and word limits filled enough with statistics' stereotype accents, massacre experience and disrespect Palestinian lives are sustained by the media machinery. Questioning the segregation of what is personal and political is one of the most widespread feminists' axioms and it is necessary to dismantle the power logics within noticeability criteria.

Emily Davison's heroic act should not only be honoured, but most especially mourned. If telling past stories is crucial to sustaining and shaping present imaginations (McRobbie 2009), academic production is just as active a participant in debates as newspapers. It is our hope that documenting and analysing the campaign for gender equality in NUI Galway may support and inspire transformation.

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