

29/05/2018

**Opening Remarks at Female Lines event, co-hosted with British
Ambassador, Alison Rose and Head of the Office of the Northern
Ireland Executive, Andrew Elliot**

Thank you Andrew and Alison, it is a pleasure to co-host this very special joint event here with you both this evening and thank you for your continuing collaboration and support.

It is also wonderful to see the keen interest in this event and thank you all for coming this evening for what should be a fascinating discussion.

Culture is both a window and a mirror; it helps us to know others and to know ourselves.

When I first encountered this book “Female Lines”, I felt that it would be a perfect prism through which to view the impact of the GFA over the past 20 years - on culture, on society, on how the Agreement has helped us all to expand our mutual understanding and our shared way of living, in peace, on the island of Ireland.

What is particularly special about this anthology is how it focuses on the female voice, the female contribution and the lived experience of

women – something which we know can all too often be lost, both from history and from the literary canon.

But the female narrative, the female story, is part of all of our stories and is part of all of our histories.

No peace process can be fully realised without the engagement of women; indeed, as we are coming to realise, this is often the decisive factor, in both the emergence and the resilience of peace and reconciliation and also in charting a new, progressive and inclusive way forward.

And in Northern Ireland, as in other post-conflict places, a peace process is not always a neat, linear forward-moving pathway. Whilst the GFA was transformative, and the role of women in it was transformative, in itself, yet a stubborn residue of conflict can also mean a continued narrowing of the ground, an over-simplification of who and what we are, which can, at times, blur out the specific and different experiences and contribution of women.

This anthology responds to the earlier collection “The Female Line”, which was ground-breaking in its own day back in the 1980s. There have been many remarkable changes since that time - some of which we might never have believed possible in our lifetimes.

I want to congratulate Dawn and Linda as Co-Editors and all of the contributors to this anthology, who have created this “new edition” for the Ireland of today, and of course to thank Dawn and each of the four contributing writers who have all travelled from various locations to share their stories with us here this evening. (The book is on sale and of course we hope that you will all buy a copy, for yourself and maybe for a friend to enjoy later!)

I look forward very much to hearing both their readings from the book and their personal narratives, about life and their writing lives, in Ireland, North and South, Ireland and Northern Ireland, since the referenda to overwhelmingly endorse the GFA 20 years ago this month, May 1998, which we mark together with all of you this evening.

Thank you for joining us for this special occasion and I hope that you enjoy the evening - I now handover to our Moderator, Ms Annelies Beck, well known for her television role, which she has given up this evening to be with us, we are honoured and delighted to have her and since she is also a renowned author in her own right, as well as being an accomplished journalist and presenter, we could not be in better hands for the panel discussion ahead. Enjoy!