**Press Pass Awards 2015**

**Opinion Category**

**Third Place**

**Same Love?**

**By Siobhan Ní Neachtain, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, An Daingean**

During the 2015 referendum on gay marriage, it was easy to imagine the ‘no’ voters as conservative, narrow-minded nags who didn’t believe in the power of love and had no ability or desire to understand the gay movement.

I would like to say clearly that I myself believe in gay rights, that several of our family friends are openly gay and that I couldn’t be happier about the result of the referendum. But I was saddened by the manner in which the ‘yes’ vote came to be seen as the only decision any decent or open-minded person would make. I know many decent and open-minded people who voted ‘no’. Is this an oxymoron? It seems in the eyes of many of the victorious 62% it is.

Throughout the campaign, and even more-so afterwards, ‘no’ voters have been portrayed not only as “old-fashioned” and “un-progressive” but also as “not scared, but assholes”; this in a viral twitter post. I know they may have been scared but I don’t think crude language alleviates that fear. Of the people I know who were ‘no’ voters, many – although not all – were senior citizens. I think they were afraid of a new future in a dystopian Ireland that they wouldn’t recognize.

My grandparents (who don’t live in Roscommon-South Leitrim) voted no. They listen to Rihanna, they find “Modern Family” hilarious and they are enthusiastically learning to use smartphones. They want to move with the times they are living in. They are in no way the kind of people who would look down on a woman for being pregnant out of wedlock, or judge someone on the colour of their skin and they definitely think Donald Trump is nuts. My grandparents don’t refuse to accept the modern world. They just have their own opinion about matters of modern Ireland which, by rights, should be treated as fairly and equally as the opinions of us ‘yes’ activists.

They believe in love; from what I have seen, this is mostly *because* they have experienced such happiness and fulfilment from traditional heterosexual love and marriage. As a result, they find this new concept so difficult to understand.

To me, they don’t seem like the stereotype of the ‘no’ voter. Nor do many of the people I know who voted ‘no’. Is it fair to generalize about a large proportion of the population in this negative way? Isn’t this part of what the gay marriage referendum was supposed to help eradicate?

Yeats said, “this is no country for old men”. This feels even more relevant today (unless the old men plan to marry each other). The truth is that there is an underlying sadness amongst the older generation of my community. A sadness that their way of life is disappearing before their eyes and they are witness to something they find so fundamentally alien to them. These people are beholding something that their ancestors could never comprehend or imagine, they can barely comprehend or imagine it themselves.

‘No’ voters are not all cynical bigots who reject anything less than the traditional “daddy/mommy/baby” setup. They are not all sour, old cranks that want to dominate people’s lives with their beliefs. They are, for the most part, simply a certain group of Irish people who are doing what they believe to be right, just as the ‘yes’ voters are. As Macklemore’s song “Same Love” tells us, both sides have to show the same understanding and respect for each other if we truly want love and peace in our country. After all, it is equality we want, right?

**Judging Panel Citation**

*The ‘Yes’ vote in the 2015 same-sex marriage referendum was a watershed moment for this country. And while the ‘Yes’ vote won by a considerable margin, it is worth remembering that more than a third of those who cast their ballot - 734,300 people - voted ‘No’.*

*While the young writer who wins third place in this category makes no secret of her own happiness at the final outcome, she felt aggrieved at the way she believes the ‘No’ vote became unfairly demonised. The author had a perception way beyond her years as she attempted to explore with great empathy the rationale behind the ‘No’ camp and made moving references to a decent and caring older generation trying to grapple with huge social and cultural change.*

*So well done to Siobhan Ni Neachtain from Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, An Daingean, for her very thoughtful opinion piece, Same Love.*